

# Education Behind Bars: Program Effectiveness and Rehabilitation Outcomes in Two Indian Prisons

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## ABSTRACT

The present paper aims to dissect the impacts of the correctional educational programs, including learning outcomes, psychological well being, and rehabilitation throughout the Adult Literacy, IGNOU/NIOS, and Library Programs conducted by India Vision Foundation, and to compare the results based on the demographic factors including region and gender. A mixed-method cross-sectional design was employed with 140 respondents, collected from two North Indian prisons – which will be referred to throughout the paper as Prison A and Prison B for confidentiality – being selected through purposive sampling. 128 responses were used in the quantitative analysis, while 127 responses were considered in the qualitative analysis. Descriptive statistics, Cronbach's Alpha, and the Mann-Whitney U Test were used to analyze quantitative data whereas thematic analysis methods were used to analyze qualitative responses. The results have shown that the participants reported a great improvement in literacy, access to education, psychological well being, vocational and skills development, and personal development as a whole. There were notable regional differences in some of the learning outcomes of some of the programs: those of Prison B stated higher learning outcomes in Adult Literacy and IGNOU/NIOS Programs and those of Prison A reported higher learning effects in Library Use Programs. Qualitative data also show the themes of emotional recovery, institutional support, and identity transformation, and participants repeatedly recounted experiences of greater self-confidence, resilience, optimism, and future planning. These results suggest that guided educational programs that are structured and supported by adequate material resources are a valuable source of rehabilitation and personal development, and correctional education in prison is paramount.

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## **1. Introduction**

Education is universally understood to be a necessity in almost any environment, developing not only knowledge but also critical thought and immensely important life skills (*Importance of Education*, n.d.). Moreover, educational impacts go beyond their economic value and into prison reform: education has a positive influence on the confidence of the inmates, accumulates their social responsibility, and sharpens their street smarts. Additionally, in the case of communities that are living in poverty, education provides a means of overcoming the cycle of poverty (Admin, 2026).

In prisons, education is even more significant. A significant number of incarcerated individuals come from conditions of low or possibly even no access to quality education or economic opportunities, and thus, were lowly literate, numerate, and employable. Correctional education assists in filling these gaps by providing the prisoners with these abilities and offering them structure, meaning, and life skills that will enable them to improve themselves and more easily re-integrate into society (Opesanwo & Awofeso, 2024).

Although the advantages of correctional education in prisons are widely recognized, there are numerous gaps in its research and implementation. Education and information-access programs and interventions have not been implemented across the board, particularly in India (Singh & Geeta, 2022). Studies and research have shown that prison education lowers recidivism, enhances employability and mental wellness, and provides prisoners with more basic life skills. Meanwhile, libraries in prisons are considered secure areas of literacy building, recreation, and other activities. This notwithstanding, library services and prison education are usually under-invested and under-studied, with little resources and focus directed to learning about their impact and applying it in an effective manner (Singh & Geeta, 2022).

Moreover, various studies find that an inmate's gender significantly impacts their experience in prison for a number of reasons. For one, female inmates, especially in India, often face far greater levels of psychological stress, social stigma, and institutional neglect, because the majority of prisons are designed to cater to the needs of male inmates (Kamthan, 2018; Mohanty, 2013). Additionally, female inmates tend to respond positively to educational or rehabilitative programs that provide emotional support and vocational purpose (TISS, 2023).

The educational interventions in this study, namely, the Adult Literacy, IGNOU/NIOS, and Library programs, are all executed under the broader framework of India Vision Foundation (IVF). These programs all fall under IVF's SHIKSHA program, which constitutes a central component of its 4S model (*Shiksha - education, Sanskar - values, Skills, Swasth - health*). The SHIKSHA program is specifically concerned with accessing basic education to incarcerated persons as a form of rehabilitation and reintegration in facilitating literacy and functional skills (reading, writing, and arithmetic) as methods to assist inmates integrate into society. By combating educational deprivation in inmates, the program not only helps to support academic growth but also leads to psychological adjustment, gleaning of skills, and ultimate behavioral change. In this way, the programmes considered in this paper cannot be seen as independent interventions, but rather, as components of a comprehensive, holistic rehabilitative model, which aims to minimise the chances of reoffending, as well as assist in the personal growth of the inmate within the prison.

### **1.1 Recidivism**

Recidivism is an important concept in the criminal justice framework, where it is defined as a tendency of a convicted criminal to repeat offending: many studies have applied the concept of recidivism as an indicator of the effectiveness of a specific prison program or initiative,

which as such, leads to the modification of the parole policy and probation (*Recidivism | National Institute of Justice*, n.d.). The studies of correctional education consistently highlight its advantages, especially as a way of minimizing recidivism.

A meta-analysis by Bozick et al. (2018) examines whether correctional education has a positive influence on post-release outcomes in the United States. They examined 57 recidivism and 21 employment studies that were conducted between 1980 and 2017 and found out that involvement in prison education has a strong influence to reduce the chances of returning to crime. Throughout all studies, the probability of recidivism among the prisoners who participated in programs provided in the correctional facilities was reduced by 32%. The rate of reduction of recidivism was still high in heavily rigorous studies, at approximately 28%. These advantages were maintained in the different kinds of schooling programs, including adult basic training, postsecondary courses, and vocational training. Less was found to support any meaningful employment benefits: research did not find a causal effect of participation, but post-release employment was 12 percent more likely with participation. This research can therefore be concluded to have demonstrated that correctional education is a reliable means of curbing recidivism.

Moreover, the meta-analyses conducted in the US (covering more than thirty years of studies on correctional education) indicate that the odds of recidivism among inmates who attended a higher education program were significantly lower. They also discovered that one dollar on prison education would create four to five dollars on reincarceration expenses, demonstrating the cost-effectiveness of such expenditure (Davis, 2019). All these study findings are clear demonstrations of the ways in which correctional education is not only practical in extending rehabilitation initiatives but it is also cost-effective.

## **1.2 Well-Being & Behavioral Outcomes of Education**

A case study of IGNOU prison programs in Haryana discovered that education helped over 4,000 prisoners who joined between 2011 and 2017 by making their lives less routine, enhancing their behavior, and teaching prisoners livelihood skills, implying that education opportunities in prison settings extend beyond classroom training, creating impact on daily lives and discipline (Jain & Tripathi, 2018).

The importance of the implementation of educational facilities within prisons is further supported through international studies: beyond behavioral and economic studies, education also heavily contributes to inmates' psychological well-being. A study of 301 inmates in New York demonstrated how participation in college strengthened inmates' self-esteem and social competence, although not their self-efficacy: education supports better reintegration by strengthening self-concept (Parker, 1990).

An integrative review of 83 global studies concluded that libraries provide inmates with basic services, including but not limited to literacy improvement, personal development, time-management skills, and preparing inmates for release (Opesanwo & Awofeso, 2024). Furthermore, programs like family literacy ones connect inmates to their children, families, and communities through education and books. However, the lack of empirical studies regarding prison libraries and education is highlighted in this study as a major limitation (Opesanwo & Awofeso, 2024).

Additionally, a research project by Dr. Erin Condirston at Royal Holloway, University of London, finds that education boosts mental health and coping ability, but only under certain conditions, especially within prison. Several contextual factors, such as the physical environment where programs are being held, the level of institutional support, how committed

the educators are, etc., heavily influence prisoners' well-being; in fact, negative consequences can even emerge if prison education is not provided properly (Condirston, 2023).

### **1.3 Regions (India vs US vs International)**

The importance of inclusivity in these interventions has also been recognized. As early as the 19th century, reformers such as Mary Carpenter emphasized how prisons in India required not only more humane discipline but also greater investments in education, specifically for female inmates (Carpenter, 1867). Because the education of (female) inmates and humane prison practices are paramount, Reform heavily requires partnership between the government and an enlightened Indian society.

Although findings from international studies taking place in the US or global studies can be generalized to Indian prisons, due to overcrowding and underfunding of research and work within prisons, there is a clear lack of inclusivity and research regarding Indian prisoners and the impact that education has on their well-being and self-esteem. Therefore, although global studies provide useful frameworks and general ideas that can be applied in various other settings, the lack of specialized, region-specific analysis leaves a major gap in the understanding of how educational interventions have the potential to impact Indian prisoners, specifically their self-esteem. Building on transformative learning (Mezirow, 1991) and distance frameworks (Maruna, 2001), the present study attends to both regional and gender-specific outcomes among Indian incarcerated learners. In particular, India-specific evidence on women's prisons and prison libraries remains thin and is identified as a priority for future scholarship; the present review draws on the published literature available, recognising the continued reliance on a small number of non-peer-reviewed sources.

## **2. Methodology**

### **2.1 Aim of the Study**

The primary aim of this research paper was to investigate the effectiveness of prison-based educational program implementations, such as Adult Literacy, IGNOU/NIOS, and Library programs supported by India Vision Foundation, in selected prisons. The study aims to examine how participation in these programs contributed to inmates' literacy development, educational engagement and attitude, psychological well-being and mental health, and overall rehabilitation and future preparation, while also taking differences in region and gender into account.

### **2.2 Objectives of the Study**

The primary objectives of this study include to:

1. Evaluate the overall effectiveness of each program in terms of key outcome dimensions, such as Learning and Support, Change and Confidence, and Access and Use.
2. Compare and examine the effectiveness of these programs across various demographic groups, such as gender and region.
3. Analyze participants' personal experiences and reflections on their lived experiences with these programs.
4. Identify key areas of impact, including literacy development, access to education, and psychological well-being.

5. Understand gaps and rooms for improvement within the implementations of these programs.

### **2.3 Research Design**

The research paper focuses primarily on a cross-sectional, quantitative survey design. However, within the survey all respondents were also asked about how India Vision Foundation has helped improve their life. Responses to this question were interpreted using thematic analysis techniques, which gives the study partially qualitative elements.

### **2.4 Participants**

Participants of this study were chosen through purposive sampling. Prisoners from a pool of prison inmates from two North Indian prisons were contacted to be a part of the study via India Vision Foundation. A total of 140 participants were recruited across the three program groups: Adult Literacy (n = 62), IGNOU/NIOS (n = 38), and Library (n = 40), reflecting participants' differing levels of literacy and development. Following data screening, a final quantitative sample of 128 participants was retained after excluding 7 Adult Literacy, 2 IGNOU/NIOS, and 3 Library participants due to incomplete responses. For the qualitative analysis, a final sample of 127 participants was used, with 5 Adult Literacy participants excluded – 3 for not completing the form entirely and 2 for leaving more than 2 statements blank – alongside 1 IGNOU/NIOS and 7 Library participants excluded on similar grounds. Due to privacy concerns for the prisons and their inmates, the prisons are consistently referred to as Prison A and Prison B throughout the course of this paper. Program dosage, time-in-program, and prison-level contextual factors (staffing, library size, instructor availability) were not systematically captured, and may underlie some of the observed regional differences.

### **2.5 Instrumentation**

To account for the differences in learning stages of the participants, three different surveys were created for the Adult Literacy, IGNOU/NIOS, and Library programs respectively. Adult Literacy participants are mostly illiterate and learning from scratch, as the course teaches basic literacy skills. IGNOU/NIOS participants are slightly more advanced, reading books and improving their control of language. Finally, Library users are the most advanced, frequently visiting the library and even reading educational books for the purpose of further studies. These surveys were created with the help of an expert from India Vision Foundation to ensure that outcomes could be accurately reported across the vastly differing literacy levels of the participants. Items were developed in consultation with an India Vision Foundation expert and reviewed for content validity prior to administration; further work should examine factor structure and validity evidence beyond Cronbach's  $\alpha$ . Items were pilot-tested with a small subset of participants before full administration; formal factor analysis and construct-validity evidence were not established and are noted as a limitation.

### **2.6 Data Analysis**

Quantitative data was analyzed in two phases. First, internal consistency reliability was determined using Cronbach's Alpha for all three program scales. Next, descriptive statistics were calculated to analyze outcome patterns of demographics. Finally, the Mann-Whitney U Test was used to determine any statistically significant differences in learning outcomes between the Prison A and Prison B participants. Qualitative data from open-ended survey responses was analyzed using thematic analysis, systematically identifying key codes and

overarching themes. Codes were developed iteratively from the data through repeated reading; formal intercoder reliability was not established and is acknowledged as a limitation, and theme salience is reported as code counts rather than triangulated by region or gender.

## **2.7 Data Collection Procedure**

Physical copies of each of the three different surveys were delivered to India Vision Foundation, who administered them in the prison using internal processes, with the aid of trained guidance counselors. Because literacy varied significantly across the three program groups, different data collection procedures were used in order to promote equitable participation. Because of their relative literacy, participants in the IGNOU/NIOS and Library programs were able to read and respond to the surveys themselves, with the counselors available to provide clarifications if required.

As many of the Adult Literacy participants had not had any formal education, the decision was made to administer those particular surveys with the assistance of a counselor. It was decided that having the counselor read the question items to the participants and record their answers was an appropriate and ethically defensible accommodation and would allow for a more equal level of participation from inmates of all literacy levels. Counselors read the question items neutrally, without leading or suggesting answers, in order to avoid introducing response bias. All completed surveys were collected and digitized, then analyzed. Despite these precautions, counselor administration of the Adult Literacy surveys may have introduced social-desirability and demand-characteristics bias, a limitation revisited in the Discussion.

## **2.8 Ethical Considerations**

Data collection was conducted through India Vision Foundation, the partner NGO, which had obtained prior informed consent from participants under its established research and programme protocols. Considering that prison research requires ethical sensitivity, this study was carried out with regard to several ethical principles. To start, all participants gave informed consent and were aware of the purpose of the responses and how they would be used. All respondents had the right to remain anonymous, and the personal data of the respondents, such as their names, ages, or crimes, were not published or disclosed. Finally, all the inmates who filled out the survey were voluntary respondents, and therefore have the right to retract their responses at any time if they change their minds and are simply no longer willing to participate.

## **3. Findings of the Study**

Table 1 summarizes the internal consistency reliability estimates for the scales assessing outcomes across the Adult Literacy, IGNOU/NIOS, and Library programs. Overall, the scales demonstrated strong internal consistency, indicating that the items reliably measure prisoners' perceptions of educational program experiences. For the Adult Literacy program, reliability coefficients were particularly high, with Cronbach's alpha values of  $\alpha = .96$  for the Learning and Support subscale,  $\alpha = .94$  for the Change and Confidence subscale, and  $\alpha = .96$  for the overall program scale. These values indicate excellent internal consistency, suggesting that the items within each subscale consistently capture related aspects of literacy learning, instructional support, and perceived personal development. The IGNOU/NIOS program scales also demonstrated good reliability, with  $\alpha = .84$  for the Access and Learning Support subscale,  $\alpha = .85$  for the Learning Outcomes and Confidence subscale, and  $\alpha = .88$  for the total program scale.

*Table 1. Internal Consistency Reliability of Program Scales*

<b>Program</b>	<b>Subscale</b>	<b>Items</b>	<b>Cronbach's <math>\alpha</math></b>
Adult Literacy	Learning & Support	9	.96
Adult Literacy	Change & Confidence	8	.94
Adult Literacy	Total Scale	17	.96
IGNOU/NIOS	Access & Learning Support	4	.84
IGNOU/NIOS	Learning Outcomes & Confidence	11	.85
IGNOU/NIOS	Total Scale	15	.88
Library Program	Access & Use	6	.77
Library Program	Learning & Impact	3	.86
Library Program	Confidence & Change	7	.84
Library Program	Total Scale	16	.91

These coefficients indicate that the items adequately reflect participants' perceptions of educational access, academic progress, and confidence gained through distance learning programs in prison. Similarly, the Library program scales showed acceptable to excellent reliability. Cronbach's alpha values were  $\alpha = .77$  for the Access and Use subscale,  $\alpha = .86$  for the Learning and Impact subscale, and  $\alpha = .84$  for the Confidence and Change subscale, while the total program scale demonstrated excellent reliability ( $\alpha = .91$ ). These findings suggest that the library-related items coherently measure participants' experiences of resource accessibility, learning engagement, and perceived personal growth associated with library participation. Taken together, the reliability estimates across all three programs indicate that the measurement instruments used in this study possess satisfactory to excellent internal consistency, supporting their suitability for evaluating educational and developmental outcomes among incarcerated learners.

*Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for Program Outcomes by Gender*

<b>Program</b>	<b>Subscale</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b><i>n</i></b>	<b><i>Mean</i></b>	<b><i>SD</i></b>
Adult Literacy	Learning & Support	Male	41	39.93	9.53
		Female	16	31.25	10.28
Adult Literacy	Change & Confidence	Male	41	35.44	7.91
		Female	16	31.06	6.56
Adult Literacy	Total Program Score	Male	41	75.37	16.05
		Female	16	62.31	15.64
IGNOU/NIOS	Access & Learning Support	Male	23	17.65	2.95
		Female	13	16.77	2.45
IGNOU/NIOS	Learning Outcomes & Confidence	Male	23	47.87	7.08
		Female	13	45.46	3.07

Program	Subscale	Gender	n	Mean	SD
IGNOU/NIOS	Total Program Score	Male	23	65.52	9.20
		Female	13	62.23	4.97

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for program outcomes across the Adult Literacy and IGNOU/NIOS programs, disaggregated by gender. Overall, male participants reported higher mean scores than female participants across all measured subscales and total program scores. Within the Adult Literacy program, male participants (n = 41) demonstrated higher mean scores than female participants (n = 16) on the Learning and Support subscale (M = 39.93, SD = 9.53 vs. M = 31.25, SD = 10.28) and the Change and Confidence subscale (M = 35.44, SD = 7.91 vs. M = 31.06, SD = 6.56). A similar pattern was observed for the Total Program Score, with males reporting a higher mean score (M = 75.37, SD = 16.05) compared to females (M = 62.31, SD = 15.64). These results suggest that male participants tended to report greater perceived learning support and personal development outcomes associated with the literacy program.

A comparable trend was observed in the IGNOU/NIOS program, where male participants (n = 23) reported slightly higher mean scores than female participants (n = 13) on the Access and Learning Support subscale (M = 17.65, SD = 2.95 vs. M = 16.77, SD = 2.45) and the Learning Outcomes and Confidence subscale (M = 47.87, SD = 7.08 vs. M = 45.46, SD = 3.07). The Total Program Score also followed this pattern, with male participants reporting a higher mean (M = 65.52, SD = 9.20) relative to female participants (M = 62.23, SD = 4.97). Gender-based descriptive statistics were not reported for the Library program, as all participants enrolled in this program were male (n = 37). Consequently, gender comparisons could not be conducted for this program. Overall, the descriptive statistics indicate a consistent pattern in which male participants reported somewhat higher perceived benefits across program components. However, these findings should be interpreted cautiously, as the female sample sizes were smaller, particularly in the Adult Literacy program, and the results reflect descriptive patterns rather than statistically tested gender differences. These gendered patterns warrant cautious interpretation in light of the limited Indian literature on female incarcerated learners.

Table 3. Regional Differences in Adult Literacy Outcomes

Subscale	Region	n	M	SD	U	z	p	r
Learning & Support	Prison A	27	35.00	9.29	233.00	-2.85	.004	.38
	Prison B	30	39.73	11.02				
Change & Confidence	Prison A	27	33.89	6.56	332.50	-1.19	.236	.16
	Prison B	30	34.50	8.80				
Total Program Score	Prison A	27	68.89	14.98	270.00	-2.18	.029	.29
	Prison B	30	74.23	18.28				

\*Note. M = mean; SD = standard deviation; U = Mann-Whitney U statistic; z = standardized test statistic; r = effect size. p < .05 indicates statistical significance.

Because multiple subscale comparisons were conducted per program, p-values should be interpreted with caution regarding family-wise error; effect sizes (r) are reported using the conventional thresholds (small ≈ .1, moderate ≈ .3, large ≈ .5). Where regional differences are interpreted, effect sizes (and the direction of the observed gap) are emphasised over unadjusted

p-values; confidence intervals were not computed and are noted as a limitation. Table 3 presents the results of the Mann–Whitney U tests examining regional differences in Adult Literacy program outcomes between participants from Prison A and Prison B prisons. For the Learning and Support subscale, a statistically significant difference was observed between the two regions ( $U = 233.00, z = -2.85, p = .004, r = .38$ ). Participants from Prison B reported higher mean scores ( $M = 39.73, SD = 11.02$ ) compared to those from Prison A ( $M = 35.00, SD = 9.29$ ), indicating that prisoners in Prison B perceived greater learning support and instructional assistance within the Adult Literacy program. The effect size ( $r = .38$ ) suggests a moderate magnitude of difference between the two groups. In contrast, the Change and Confidence subscale did not show a statistically significant regional difference ( $U = 332.50, z = -1.19, p = .236, r = .16$ ).

Although participants from Prison B reported slightly higher mean scores ( $M = 34.50, SD = 8.80$ ) than those from Prison A ( $M = 33.89, SD = 6.56$ ), the difference was small and not statistically meaningful. This suggests that the program may foster similar levels of personal development and confidence among participants across both prisons. For the Total Program Score, a statistically significant difference was found ( $U = 270.00, z = -2.18, p = .029, r = .29$ ). Participants from Prison B reported a higher overall mean score ( $M = 74.23, SD = 18.28$ ) compared to those from Prison A ( $M = 68.89, SD = 14.98$ ). However, the effect size ( $r = .29$ ) indicates a small-to-moderate difference between the groups. Participants from Prison B reported significantly higher scores on the Learning and Support subscale, suggesting stronger perceived instructional support in that setting. Moreover, participants from Prison B reported a higher overall program score, indicating that the overall evaluation of the Adult Literacy program was more favorable and effective among Prison B prisoners than Prison A prisoners.

Table 4. Regional Differences in IGNOU/NIOS Outcomes

Subscale	Region	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>U</i>	<i>z</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>r</i>
Access and Learning Support	Prison A	23	16.87	2.72	107.00	-1.43	.153	.24
	Prison B	13	18.15	2.79				
Learning Outcomes and Confidence	Prison A	23	45.43	6.41	87.50	-2.05	.041	.34
	Prison B	13	49.77	4.13				
Total Program Score	Prison A	23	62.30	8.62	91.50	-1.92	.055	.32
	Prison B	13	67.92	5.42				

\*Note. *M* = mean; *SD* = standard deviation; *U* = Mann–Whitney U statistic; *z* = standardized test statistic; *r* = effect size.  $p < .05$  indicates statistical significance.

Table 4 presents the results of the Mann–Whitney U tests examining regional differences in outcomes of the IGNOU/NIOS program between participants from Prison A and Prison B prisons. For the Access and Learning Support subscale, the difference between the two regions was not statistically significant ( $U = 107.00, z = -1.43, p = .153, r = .24$ ). Although participants from Prison B reported a slightly higher mean score ( $M = 18.15, SD = 2.79$ ) compared to those from Prison A ( $M = 16.87, SD = 2.72$ ), the difference was small and not statistically meaningful. This suggests that participants in both prisons experienced comparable levels of access to educational resources and learning support within the IGNOU/NIOS program. In contrast, a statistically significant regional difference was observed for the Learning Outcomes and Confidence subscale ( $U = 87.50, z = -2.05, p = .041, r = .34$ ). Participants from Prison B reported higher mean scores ( $M = 49.77, SD = 4.13$ ) than those from

Prison A ( $M = 45.43, SD = 6.41$ ). The effect size ( $r = .34$ ) indicates a moderate magnitude of difference, suggesting that participants in Prison B perceived stronger academic progress and greater confidence associated with their participation in the program.

For the Total Program Score, the difference between the two regions did not reach statistical significance ( $U = 91.50, z = -1.92, p = .055, r = .32$ ), although the result approached the conventional significance threshold. Participants from Prison B reported a higher mean total score ( $M = 67.92, SD = 5.42$ ) compared to participants from Prison A ( $M = 62.30, SD = 8.62$ ). While this pattern suggests a tendency toward more positive overall program perceptions in Prison B, the difference cannot be considered statistically significant. Overall, these findings indicate that while access to educational support appears comparable across the two prisons, participants from Prison B reported significantly stronger learning outcomes and confidence gains from the IGNOU/NIOS program, with a similar but non-significant trend observed for the overall program score.

Table 5. Regional Differences in Library Program Outcomes

Subscale	Region	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>U</i>	<i>z</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>r</i>
Access and Use	Prison A	17	26.06	3.34	147.50	-0.70	.486	.11
	Prison B	20	23.75	6.91				
Learning and Impact	Prison A	17	14.35	1.50	103.50	-2.20	.028	.36
	Prison B	20	12.85	3.17				
Confidence and Change	Prison A	17	32.76	3.99	109.50	-1.91	.056	.31
	Prison B	20	29.85	5.77				
Total Program Score	Prison A	17	73.18	7.10	132.50	-1.15	.251	.19
	Prison B	20	66.45	14.89				

\*Note. *M* = mean; *SD* = standard deviation; *U* = Mann–Whitney U statistic; *z* = standardized test statistic; *r* = effect size.  $p < .05$  indicates statistical significance.

Table 5 presents the results of the Mann–Whitney U tests examining regional differences in outcomes of the Library program between participants from Prison A and Prison B prisons. For the Access and Use subscale, no statistically significant regional difference was observed ( $U = 147.50, z = -0.70, p = .486, r = .11$ ). Participants from Prison A reported a slightly higher mean score ( $M = 26.06, SD = 3.34$ ) compared to those from Prison B ( $M = 23.75, SD = 6.91$ ), although the effect size indicates a small magnitude of difference. A statistically significant difference emerged for the Learning and Impact subscale ( $U = 103.50, z = -2.20, p = .028, r = .36$ ).

Participants from Prison A reported higher mean scores ( $M = 14.35, SD = 1.50$ ) compared to participants from Prison B ( $M = 12.85, SD = 3.17$ ). The effect size ( $r = .36$ ) suggests a moderate difference, indicating that participants from Prison A perceived greater learning benefits and personal impact associated with library use. For the Confidence and Change subscale, the difference between regions approached but did not reach statistical significance ( $U = 109.50, z = -1.91, p = .056, r = .31$ ). Participants from Prison A reported higher mean scores ( $M = 32.76, SD = 3.99$ ) compared to those from Prison B ( $M = 29.85, SD = 5.77$ ), suggesting a moderate but non-significant trend. Finally, the Total Program Score did not differ significantly between the two regions ( $U = 132.50, z = -1.15, p = .251, r = .19$ ), although participants from Prison A reported a somewhat higher mean score ( $M = 73.18, SD = 7.10$ ) compared to those from Prison

B ( $M = 66.45, SD = 14.89$ ). Overall, these findings suggest that while overall perceptions of the Library program were comparable across the two prisons, participants from Prison A reported significantly greater perceived learning impact from library use.

Across the three educational programs examined, the pattern of regional differences between Prison A and Prison B varied by program type. In the Adult Literacy program, participants from Prison B reported significantly higher scores on the Learning and Support subscale, while the Change and Confidence subscale did not differ significantly between regions. In the IGNOU/NIOS program, a significant regional difference was observed for the Learning Outcomes and Confidence subscale, with Prison B participants reporting higher scores, whereas Access and Learning Support and the total program score did not differ significantly. In contrast, within the Library program, a significant difference emerged for the Learning and Impact subscale, with participants from Prison A reporting higher scores. No statistically significant regional differences were observed for Access and Use, Change and Confidence, or the total library program score.

*Table 6. Thematic Analysis of Survey Responses from Participants (n=127)*

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Codes</b>	<b>Description of Theme</b>
<b>Literacy and Basic Educational Development</b>	Literacy education, reading ability, writing skills, word recognition, basic education access, literacy development	Participants reported developing basic literacy skills they had previously lacked, such as the ability to read, write and to understand simple text, indicating the program's success in addressing previous educational deficiencies.
<b>Access to Education and Continued Learning</b>	Education opportunities, continued education, higher education plans, learning environment, educational development, preparation for future	Participants were offered a structured learning environment and support to resume their previously interrupted education. Many participants articulated an intention to undertake further education and achieve long-term educational goals.
<b>Psychological Well-Being and Emotional Recovery</b>	Mental health improvement, positive environment, emotional wellbeing, positive routine, life improvement, positive learning attitude, sense of belonging, community support, emotional support	Participation in the program contributed to improved psychological well-being, including reduced distress, increased emotional stability, and the development of a supportive and structured routine.
<b>Skill Development and Vocational Training</b>	Vocational skills, computer training, software training, skill development, occupational knowledge, dance training, music training	Participants developed practical and vocational skills that can enhance employability and support reintegration into society after release.
<b>Material and Institutional Support</b>	Material support, hygiene support, basic necessities provided, material assistance, institutional support, institutional care, institutional appreciation, program support, educational support, education support, resource improvement suggestions, library resources, educational resources request, study material, free education access	Participants emphasized the role of institutional and material support in their responses, e.g. having hygiene supplies or study materials and having guidance. Some also mentioned the need for more or specialized educational material.

Theme	Codes	Description of Theme
<b>Life Transformation, Rehabilitation, and Soft Skill Development</b>	Transformation, rehabilitation, growth, development, mindset, recovery, confidence, self-worth, resilience, wellbeing, discipline, time-management, patience, courage, self-reliance, independence, preparedness, adaptability, belonging, new life perspective, moral development, discipline development, community, connection, communication, empowerment, perseverance	Participants described significant personal transformation, including improved self-confidence, discipline, resilience, and a shift toward a more positive and goal-oriented mindset, supporting rehabilitation and reintegration.

Table 7. Summary of Themes and Codes Identified Through Thematic Analysis

Theme No.	Theme Name	No. of Codes
1	Literacy and Basic Educational Development	6
2	Access to Education and Continued Learning	6
3	Psychological Well-Being and Emotional Recovery	9
4	Skill Development and Vocational Training	7
5	Material and Institutional Support	15
6	Life Transformation, Rehabilitation, and Soft Skill Development	27
<b>Total</b>	<b>6 Themes</b>	<b>70 Codes</b>

For the first theme titled “Literacy and Basic Educational Development,” 6 codes were generated, namely Literacy education, reading ability, basic writing skills, word recognition, basic education access, and literacy development. In the survey administered to the participants, those enrolled in the three IVF programs emphasized that the program enabled them to develop fundamental reading and writing skills that they had previously lacked or were unable to develop before coming to prison. One respondent stated:

*“Earlier, I couldn’t write my own name, but now, I can write my name and my family’s name.”*

Another respondent wrote:

*“I can now read newspapers and books well. I never thought that in jail, I would be able to learn to read.”*

These responses demonstrate that literacy acquisition was one of the program’s most consistent outcomes, particularly for participants who previously had little to no formal education or access to reading/writing instruction.

Another recurring theme was the access to structured learning and educational opportunities provided by the program. For the second theme, titled “Access to Education and Continued Learning”, 6 codes were generated, namely education opportunities, continued education, higher education plans, learning environment, educational development and preparation for

future. Respondents often described the program as creating an environment and opportunities where education was possible, despite past barriers, with one respondent stating,

*“People who are completely illiterate can also be taught how to read here. I’ve also taken my admission in a BA, fulfilling my dreams”*,

And another writing,

*“After leaving this place, we want to continue our education, and while staying here we will pursue our further studies.”*

As seen from these responses, the program not only delivered basic literacy but also encouraged long-term engagement and academic mobility.

For the third theme, titled “Psychological Well-Being and Emotional Recovery”, 9 codes were generated, namely mental health improvement, positive environment, emotional wellbeing, positive routine, life improvement, positive learning attitude, sense of belonging, community support, and emotional support. Many participants emphasized the significant role of the program in aiding their mental health or psychological well-being, with the program and access to education, facilities, support, and more having a definite positive impact. One respondent states,

*“I was a little bit broken and hopeless... now it is my daily routine and without it, it would have been impossible for me to be okay.”*

Another says,

*“After coming to IVF, I liked it very much. If I had not come to IVF, I would have been very mentally troubled.”*

These programs provide psychological resilience and emotional recovery, especially in restrictive environments such as prison: therefore, these responses indicate that improved mental health, well-being, and sense of community and belonging were a consistent outcome of the implementation of these programs.

For the fourth theme, titled “Skill Development and Vocational Training”, 7 codes were generated, namely vocational skills, computer training, software training, skill development, occupational knowledge, dance training, and music training. Respondents also highlighted the role of the program in developing their own individual practical and vocational skills that could support their future livelihoods or career development. A participant of the program writes,

*“I did not know MS Word, MS Excel, Notepad or Wordpad earlier, but now I have learnt it all.”*,

While another says,

*“I have learned dance here which will change my life.”*

As exemplified by the responses, participants perceived the program as equipping them with marketable skills and constructible activities, which may contribute to rehabilitation and future employment activities.

For the fifth theme, titled “Material and Institutional Support”, 15 codes were generated, namely Material support, hygiene support, basic necessities provided, material assistance, institutional support, institutional care, institutional appreciation, program support, educational support, education support, resource improvement suggestions, library resources, educational resources request, study material, and free education access. Although a majority of the participants expressed their satisfaction with both the material/physical support provided by the jails and IVF (one respondent says:

*“IVF turned our despair into hope. From here we receive sanitary pads for proper hygiene. We also receive undergarments; it helps us a lot.”*),

such as hygiene products, facilities to learn, and study materials, some survey participants also express the want for law-related or specific-fields-of-study-related educational resources, in order for them to continue exploring further education within jail, with one saying *“Please provide us law-related books... and enough tables and chairs for reading.”* Additionally, participants express satisfaction with the institutional support they receive, both from the prison and IVF, indicating that they feel far more at peace and that their overall well-being is improved as a result of such guidance counselors and support systems. One participant reflects,

*“She used to listen to our problem, even understand them, and try to help us.”*

Referring to a counselor by the name of Usha Ma'am who guides the inmates through mental troubles.

For the sixth theme, titled “Life Transformation, Rehabilitation, and Soft Skill Development”, a total of 27 codes were generated, namely transformation, rehabilitation, growth, development, mindset, recovery, confidence, self-worth, resilience, wellbeing, discipline, time-management, patience, courage, self-reliance, independence, preparedness, adaptability, belonging, new life perspective, moral development, discipline development, community, connection, communication, empowerment, and perseverance. Many participants emphasized the transformative impact of the program on their personal identity, their mindset for both learning and challenges, and their overall soft skill development. One participant says,

*“IVF gives me a reason to start a new life... This is not only prison. It's a correction centre, you can realize yourself,”*

While another states,

*“IVF has helped me realize my worth... I know I can become independent.”*

This program enables individuals to shift from a state of hopelessness/stagnation toward one of resilience. In doing so, the program facilitates a rehabilitation process that extends beyond skill acquisition, thus helping inmates positively reconstruct their identities and prepare for reintegration into society with a renewed sense of agency, such as better and improved time management skills, discipline, moral development, and more.

#### **4. Discussion**

Findings from the Adult Literacy program have shown that the program participants exhibited a considerable regional disparity in some aspects of outcomes. In particular, we have found statistically significant differences in the Learning and Support subscale and the total program score, whereby students in Prison B tended to report higher levels of perceived learning support and overall program effectiveness compared with students in Prison A. Conversely, the Change and Confidence subscale did not have a statistically significant difference. These results indicate that although the program seems to have similar rates of personal development and self-confidence in all the regions, there may have been differences in the effectiveness of learning resources and instructional support delivery.

The responses to the questionnaire also show that subjects related the program to enhanced reading and writing skills, better comprehension of written materials, and a better sense that time spent in jail and attending the program was being used in a productive manner. Specifically, the scores of the Prison B are higher, which could indicate that the learners of the region might have found reading more helpful and have improved their literacy skills more,

which, in turn, could allow them to interact with official documents and educational resources more meaningfully. Besides, basic literacy and education are significant to post-release employability, lower recidivism, and reintegration UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (2021). Also, according to a substantial amount of research, prisoners who enhance literacy levels report a higher level of self-worth, problem-solving ability, and a willingness to continue learning or take up jobs after leaving prison (Davis, 2019).

Findings from the IGNOU/NIOS program show a mixed trend of results depending on region. Although no statistically significant differences were reported in the Access and Learning Support subscale or in the overall program score, a significant difference in terms of region was recorded in the Learning Outcomes and Confidence subscale with Prison B participants having higher mean ranks than Prison A. This implies that despite the similarity in the access and institutional support of the students in both regions, there might be differences in the effectiveness of the program into academic development and the confidence of the learners. This finding shows that most participants felt that IGNOU/NIOS involvement enhanced their reading, writing, and examination related abilities besides raising their trust in the utility and value of education in the long term as well as in the future. The increased learning in Prison B indicates that students in this area might have found their education more valuable and were more likely to feel equipped with future educational or employment prospects. This conclusion suggests that in addition to simply having access, the nature of the instructional interaction and student motivation is a critical and important factor in whether distance education programs can help prisoners feel their time has been valuable and lead to life-long learning.

A study carried out regarding the IGNOU program in Haryana shows that prison education programs like IGNOU/NIOS are meant to enable prisoners to spend time in a useful manner, acquire new skills and alter their life paths during their time behind bars (Jain & Tripathi, 2018). Lastly, research carried out regarding IGNOU and NIOS programs in India by Singh (2018) indicates that distance learning, as supported by ODL (Open and Distance Learning) models have been noted in the literature to be one of the most available and adaptable method of providing education in jail facilities, especially where face-to-face education is restricted; distance learning is thought to provide the solution to the barriers of providing a high quality education, regardless of prior schooling or current prison location.

Findings from the present research found that for prisoners making use of the Library program, there was no statistically significant difference between participants from Prison B and Prison A with regard to the access and use, change and confidence and total program score. However, there was a statistically significant difference in learning and impact scores with Prison A respondents having a higher mean rank than Prison B respondents. These findings suggest that when it comes to finding reading useful and with library programs improving the overall reading ability of the prisoners, and making their time feel worthwhile through the aid of books, Prison A performed much better.

However, it needs to be noted that previous literature has also found support for the importance of library programs in prison: a study conducted by Kaimei Han finds that prison libraries provide access to educational, personal development, and reintegration materials that support positive behavioral change and rehabilitation (Han, 2023), while a study regarding bibliotherapy initiatives as a means of creativity in prison also further supports this (Miklosi, 2025). Additionally, a study conducted in Aligarh prison library shows that inmates' educational, legal, and personal needs are substantially met through prison library use, contributing positively to reading behavior and psychological satisfaction and adjustment (Rani & Shokeen, 2022). Finally, research done by Mehtab Alam Ansari suggests that well-

resourced prison libraries positively correlate with positive inmate engagement and contribution to educational goals as part of correctional education ecosystems (Ansari, 2024).

Additionally, qualitative findings indicate that participants frequently described vocational and digital skills, alongside improved confidence and future readiness and perceived employability. However, this partly contrasts with previous studies: previous studies find that despite participation and awareness in correctional settings and education having a significant positive impact on class participation, they do not directly lead to improved self-efficacy or an increased willingness to learn and apply digital skills (Behan, 2021). Moreover, the present findings also reveal that the appreciation and gratitude of the impact of educational support and resources coexist with requests for more resources, such as law-related and future-studies-related textbooks and better reading infrastructures. In fact, this is especially significant, as prior research has highlighted that a primary reason for the failure of proper execution of these prison programs is often not a lack of principle, but rather because of a massive gap between policy aspirations and material realities (Patrie, 2023). In this sense, participants' requests as shown in the current study serve as evidence that learners were effectively and actively engaging educationally and identifying what would make their prison learning experience more effective. The theme of psychological well-being and emotional recovery is especially significant in light of research showing that incarcerated populations often enter prisons with educational disadvantages and therefore experience unequal access to support services during incarceration (Henry & Gray, 2024).

Finally, the theme of future optimism and effectiveness of prison education was also important, as it was frequently mentioned in the present study and as previous studies found that participation in structured and especially employment-focused programs, leads to meaningful post-release benefits, including higher employment rates, increased wages, and reduced reoffending. These programs therefore appear to be highly effective because they provide practical and market-relevant skills and engagement (Mancino, 2025). However, evidence from psychological and treatment-focused research complicates this, suggesting that although correctional education and interventions are associated with greater engagement, such as class participation, they do not directly or consistently impact internal psychological drivers, such as optimism, perseverance, or value commitment, which directly contrasts with the findings of the present study (May, 2023).

A further policy recommendation by the Council of Europe emphasizes the need for correctional education within prison, framing it as helping to "develop the whole person" and "facilitating the return of the prisoner to the community" (Council of Europe, 1990). Future work should employ multivariate models with covariate adjustment, or mixed-effects approaches, to test the robustness of these regional differences. Reliance on cross-sectional self-report data, alongside counselor administration of the Adult Literacy survey, limits causal inference; future studies should incorporate observational or longitudinal designs and independent administration to mitigate these biases. To address the observed regional disparities, practical steps include standardising staffing ratios and instructor training across prisons, regular fidelity monitoring of programme delivery, and equitable allocation of library and study materials, with particular attention to gender-sensitive provision in women's facilities.

## **5. Conclusion**

To conclude, this study illustrates that prison-based education initiatives and interventions, specifically Adult Literacy, IGNOU/NIOS, and Library Programs implemented by India Vision Foundation, exert a notably beneficial influence on the academic and personal

development of incarcerated individuals. However, although quantitative findings reveal that all of these programs are reliable and effective, statistically significant regional differences are also present, revealing room for improvement regarding the consistency of these programs. Moreover, qualitative data demonstrates participants' consistent improvements in literacy, access to education, psychological well-being, vocational skill development, and more. Inmates not only developed foundational literacy skills, but also reported increased self-confidence, emotional resilience, and a renewed sense of purpose.

Limitations of the study should be acknowledged. First, because the surveys were administered and read/translated by different counselors across the two prisons, this may have introduced a degree of subjectivity in how survey questions were read, explained, or translated. Thus, although counselors were instructed to remain neutral, minor differences in administration style may have introduced a degree of response bias and influenced participant responses. Additionally, respondents had varying levels of literacy and educational backgrounds, particularly across Adult Literacy, IGNOU/NIOS, and Library program participants. While accommodations were made to ensure equitable responses, literacy differences still might have affected participants' comprehension of survey items and the consistency of responses. Finally, the study relied upon self-reported perceptions of program effectiveness, which may have been influenced by social or institutional contexts.

Several policy recommendations emerge from the findings of the present study. First, governments must ensure the standardization of correctional education frameworks from prison to prison, providing equal access to trained correctional educators, available course offerings, correctional education libraries and vocational resources, to eliminate disparities found between Prisons A and B and various others in the country. Secondly, there is a need to increase the availability of accredited higher education and digital literacy training, including vocational certification courses, in prisons, since these factors were consistently linked to confidence, employability and rehabilitation for inmates. Third, rehabilitation and educational programs should be designed specifically for women and tailored to their needs and should provide more psychological support, trauma-informed counseling, and educational opportunities that are connected to reintegration and economic self-sufficiency, while taking into account the difference in how women are affected by incarceration.

Thus, these findings elucidate that the implementation of structured educational programs within prisons can significantly and meaningfully contribute to rehabilitation, reintegration, and long-term social outcomes. Both the statistical evidence and qualitative data suggest that access to institutional support and positive learning environments can transform incarceration into a productive and developmental experience, yet the presence of regional disparities highlights the importance of program consistency and quality across prisons. Therefore, these findings reinforce existing research that links prison education with reduced recidivism, improved employability, and improved psychological well-being, reinforcing the need for policy-level prioritization of correctional education programs.

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