

Correctional Education Practice in Africa: Comparative Perspectives on Open and Distance Learning, Gender Inclusion, and Regional Disparities

Modupe Adesina

National Open University of Nigeria

Abstract

Correctional education is widely recognised as an effective strategy for promoting rehabilitation, reducing recidivism, facilitating successful reintegration, and advancing the educational rights of incarcerated persons. This paper presents a comparative review of correctional education practices across Africa, focusing on Open and Distance Learning (ODL), gender inclusion, and regional disparities. Using evidence from policy documents, institutional reports, and relevant literature, the study examines differences in educational provision across North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa, highlighting variations in policy implementation, infrastructure, funding, technological capacity, and institutional partnerships. The review identifies persistent barriers, including overcrowding, inadequate learning facilities, limited digital access, shortages of qualified educators, and unequal educational opportunities for women in custody. The paper further highlights Nigeria's National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) as a leading example of university-based correctional education through its extensive ODL Study Centre network in custodial facilities. This model demonstrates how flexible learning can expand access to accredited higher education despite institutional and geographical constraints. The paper concludes that strengthening correctional education in Africa requires greater investment in digital infrastructure, gender-responsive programmes, regional collaboration, and evidence-based policies to promote inclusive education, rehabilitation, lifelong learning, and sustainable social reintegration.

Keywords: human capital development; incarcerated learners; rehabilitation; reintegration; sustainable development