Adult higher education in a portuguese prison

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Abstract

Over the years, the European Union has strengthened measures that address the need to find answers to the challenges posed by the information society, which in turn underscores the importance of a focus on innovation of adult education, especially for those in conditions of social exclusion. The aim of this paper is to analyse the reality of Higher Education in Distance Learning and e-Learning in a prison context. The results from interviews, interpreted in a context of a non-positivist paradigm, show that students are rather motivated because they foresee a more attractive future if they have an academic diploma. Despite this, however, their expectations are not very high, because they acknowledge that their rehabilitation will be difficult due to the stigma of being an ex-prisoner. The results show, also, that the education process has many weaknesses and limitations mostly due to the lack of facilities, educational and technological resources, and support from teachers.

Keywords: adult education; e-learning; prison education; digital inclusion; lifelong learning

Introduction

Over the past fourteen years the EU has adopted measures to strengthen the role of ICTs, and of e-Learning in particular, to promote lifelong learning. The Europe 2020 Strategy (European Commission [EC], 2010a) aims to prepare the European economy for the coming decade, based on three key growth drivers: smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.

To achieve the aims of the EU 2020 Strategy, the "Council of Ministers Resolution on a renewed agenda for adult learning" (EC, 2010b, p.1) points to the importance of

investing in adult learning – in formal, non-formal and informal learning activities developed after the initial phase of education and training is completed – to respond to the crisis and the challenge of aging populations. To justify this measure, the document states:

> Adult learning provides a means of up-skilling or reskilling those affected by unemployment, restructuring and career transitions, as well as makes an important contribution to social inclusion, active citizenship and personal development (EC, 2010b, p.1).

Some of the main actions planned in the Digital Agenda for Europe are to propose literacy and competences as a priority for the European Social Fund regulation (2014-2020), develop tools to identify and recognize the competences of ICT practitioners and users, linked to the European Qualifications Framework and to Europass, and to develop a European Framework for ICT Professionalism to increase the competences and mobility of ICT practitioners across Europe.

In light of this, the European Union recognizes lifelong learning processes in the wider context of adult learning, since it enables the development of personal and professional skills and, among these, digital literacy skills, that fosters smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. However, Gorard and Selwyn (2005, p. 1215) argue that 'far from being a liberator, ICTs can simply become another barrier reinforcing their exclusion'.

These concerns about adult learning and lifelong learning apply to prison education, since 'Education for prisoners should be like the education provided for similar age-groups in the outside world, and the range of learning opportunities should be as wide as possible' (Council of Europe, 2011, p.1). In fact, according to Biswallo (2011, p. 71) 'prisons play a significant role in contributing to the lifelong learning needs of their inmates who often have limited formal education and skills'. However, the conditions for developing digital competences in European prisons, are, however, not ideal, since the use of ICTs and access to the Internet are still restricted and monitored in most prison facilities:

> Although digital literacy is also becoming more and more essential for work, leisure and personal development, the current lack of access to ICT facilities in European prisons presents a barrier to the teaching of digital literacy skills (Hawley, Murphy & Souto-Otero, 2013, p. 45).

The aim of this study is to analyse the motivations and expectations of prisoners and how they assess and perceive Higher Education in the form of Distance Learning and e-Learning inside a prison in Portugal.

e-Learning and Lifelong Learning in Prison

The need to adapt to the continuing changes in the knowledge society and production methods, to the current labor market characteristics, and the fact that there is a global agenda (Dale, 2001) that points to the need of lifelong learning and of using ICTs promotes the adoption of e-Learning in adult education.

The overall aim of the 2013 EU multiannual (2004-2006) "e-learning programme" was 'to support and develop further the effective use of ICT in European education and training systems, as a contribution to a quality education and an essential element of their adaptation to the needs of the knowledge society in a lifelong learning context'

(European Union [EU], 2003, p. 345/11). So, the EU emphasized education and training as a means of adapting to the demands of the knowledge society and to the European model of social cohesion, clearly singling out the relevance of ICTs. The following stand out among the programme's goals:

- to identify the actors concerned and inform them of ways and means of using e-learning for promoting digital literacy, thereby contributing to the strengthening of social cohesion and personal development, and fostering intercultural dialogue;
- to exploit the potential of e-Learning in the context of innovation in teaching methods, with a view to improving the quality of the learning process and fostering the autonomy of learners.

The Lifelong Learning Programme (EU, 2006) aimed to:

> contribute through lifelong learning to the development of the Community as an advanced knowledge-based society, with sustainable economic development, more and better jobs and greater social cohesion, while ensuring good protection of the environment for future generations. In particular, it aims to foster interchange, cooperation and mobility between education and training systems within the Community so that they become a world quality reference (EU, 2006, L 327/48)

This general aim was implemented through youth-related sub-programmes (Comenius), higher education (Erasmus), vocational training (Leonardo da Vinci) and adult learning (Grundtvig). Today, the EU has incorporated all these sub-programmes into the Erasmus+ programme (EC, 2014). In terms of adult learning, the main aims of this program include the modernisation and improvement of adult learning through cooperation with other sectors, the recognition of non-formal and informal education, and quality assurance. To achieve these aims, the following three key actions were defined: staff mobility; strategic partnership and policy reform. Key activities were also established for each of these major actions, among which:

- Developing, testing and validating new curricula, teaching methods or innovative pedagogical approaches;
- Projects addressing the acquisition of basic skills (literacy, numeracy and ICT) and the provision of second chance opportunities/learning in later life;
- Improving the accessibility of learning opportunities for adults.

In short, the use of technology in an adult learning context can contribute directly or indirectly to achieving the three actions mentioned, given that ICT can facilitate the participation in learning activities for all, lower access barriers, and respect the specificities and different learning paces of students (Becker, Newton & Sawang, 2013; Bear, 2012).

In the view of the current challenges brought about by the knowledge society, Ouane (2011) gives lifelong learning the role of facilitator for social inclusion and sustainable development. These were, overall, the main assumptions that led many European countries to develop e-Learning in prison projects supported by European or national funds. Barros and Monteiro (2015, p. 7057) refer that the results of some European e-Learning in prison projects draw attention to the following aspects:

- this learning approach enables a collaborative learning model, student-centered with resources to different types of images and multimedia tools that provide the right to education / training of inmates ("E-learning in prison" in Italy);
- the need to start the process by educational settings, to consider the context of training, to choose the technology and establish a strategic plan ("Learning Infrastructure for Correctional Services" in Germany, Norway, Austria, Spain, Holland and Hungary).

Indeed, without technology skills, prisoners are significantly disadvantaged professionally and socially when trying to reintegrate into society (Smith, 2012). Access to technology can help prisoners:

- Communicate with and maintain relationships with their family members;
- Access information about benefits, job opportunities, and housing;
- Produce their own resumes;
- Access education;
- Access library eBooks to encourage reading and improve literacy.

e-Learning in prisons can offer more than what is physically provided at each prison in a face-to-face format, it increases the number of prisoners who receive education and training, and can be used to differentiate content and create self-paced learning – to which Lucio-Villegas (2016) refers as being a non-traditional space for adult education. Moreover, digital accounts such as course or degree progress and e-Portfolios can follow prisoners when they are transferred to another prison or are released (Hawley, Murphy & Souto-Otero, 2013).

Besides self-paced learning, the projects also address two other e-Learning models: assisted learning and collaborative training models. As regards the assisted model, the access of the material is mediated by computers and by other persons, like teachers, tutors, etc. In the collaborative model, the importance of interpersonal interactions increases. According to Diana (2011), this model can benefit the prisoners/students at the cognitive and emotional levels, as it enables them to improve their knowledge, skills and attitudes during group interaction. By 'increasing their communication abilities and better performing their responsibilities, they will have improved their personal vocational competences as well' (Hartofylaka, Arachova & Manousou, 2009).

According to Hopkins and Farley (2015, p. 38), 'Education technology interventions which aim to prepare incarcerated students for the digital knowledge economy must also consider the situated context of the postmodern prison and the social, political and cultural practices and problems that emerge around the technology'. In this sense, there are some limitations or barriers for e-Learning in prison that must be taken into account. Adams and Pike (2008, p.7) identified barriers tied with:

> Access (barriers related to security imperatives and a poor regard for education); awareness (within the prison domain there was a low priority given to e-Learning resourcing resulting in many education staff facing a dilemma of how to continue supporting students) and acceptability (there are negative perceptions of information security and control, which were identified as impeding the deployment of e-learning programmes).

In addition to these barriers, Lockitt (2011, p. 8) identified the following problems affecting education and training in prison:

- Ineffective use of new technology
- Fear of technology
- Fear of innovation
- Lack of effective leadership and policy decision making
- The quality and use of teaching and learning support staff
- The way in which teaching and support staff are employed and trained
- Short-term sentences
- Lack of fast-track enrolment for prisoners on short-term sentences
- Continuity of curriculum between prisons/the community
- No common curriculum (within prisons or linked to the community)
- Limited curriculum offer (mainly older/traditional trades)
- Poor learner tracking and e-portfolios (within prisons/release into the community)
- Lack of quality interactive multimedia learning materials
- Restricted access to technology (mainly supervised)
- Staff awareness to the potential of technology
- Lack of interactive/continuous support (SKYPE/MSN etc.)
- Adverse publicity/perception of society toward the use of technology
- Lack of a basic education/training by learners
- Poor motivation/confidence of learners (…)

In short, several projects have been introduced in Europe to achieve a deeper knowledge about the benefits of e-Learning and to prevent the barriers thereof in prisons. However, there is 'no systematic knowledge about the implementation or evaluation of e-Learning' (Arcangeli et al., 2010). In this sense, this study, the process of which we present below, has identified the motivations, expectations and perceptions of actors about the conditions of learning in a prison context in Portugal.

Methodology

Since adult education is a key element for achieving the goals set by the Europe 2020 Strategy (EC, 2010a), and in response to the need for providing a flexible, alternative and broad educational offer inside prison that meets the varying needs of individual inmates, we felt it was important to carry out a qualitative study in which direct speech is used in an interpretative approach to contextualise and explain the views of respondents, aiming to understand the perspectives of inmates regarding their motivations, expectations and learning conditions inside a male prison in Portugal.

To obtain data for the study, semi-directive interviews were conducted, also called clinical or structured interviews. A research technique capable of decoding the semi-free and apparently mixed statements was used to analyse the resulting data: content analysis (Bardin, 1977; Vala, 1986). Ethical issues were considered, namely the formal authorisation of the prison establishment, the signing of informed consent, and the confidentiality in the dissemination of the results. Access to the prison was obtained through a cooperation protocol agreement between the Portuguese Open University and the General Directorate of Prison Services and Social Rehabilitation (DGRSP).

The population consisted of a group of eleven candidates to attend higher education courses and nine students/prisoners of male Porto Prison (EPP) representing all the candidates and the students attending undergraduate degrees in the form of Distance

Learning and e-Learning at the Open University, Portugal. Tables 1 and 2 present the characteristics of all the candidates (FC) and students (ST) according to variables that allow us to understand the profile of the respondents.

ID	Age	Detention Time	Detention regime*	Open University (PT) Courses
FC01	30	2 years and 7 months	Closed	Management
FC02	42	5 months	Closed	Social Sciences
FC03	29	5 months	Closed	Management
FC04	24	3 years	Closed	Social Sciences
FC05	36	3 years and 4 months	Closed	Social Sciences
FC06	49	7 months	Closed	Social Sciences
FC07	60	1 year and 6 months	Closed	Social Sciences
FC08	23	3 years and 7 months	Open	Informatics
FC09	37	3 years	Closed	Social Sciences
FC10	33	2 anos and 5 months	Closed	Social Sciences
FC11	38	4 years	Closed	Management
	Education Level		Occupation	Training inside prison
FC01	10th year		Businessman	Completion of the 12th year
FC02	12th year (incomplete)		Accounting Assistant	-
FC03	12th year		Accounting Assistant	-
FC04	9th year		Student	Completion of the 12th year
FC05	10th year (incomplete)		Distributor of pharmaceutical products	Completion of the 12th year
FC06	6th year and adult education course		Automobile parts seller	Completion of the 12th year
FC07	9th year		Administrative assistant	Completion of the 12th year
FC08	11th year		Serviceman with the Air Force	-
FC09	8th year		Postal worker	-

FC10	6th year	-	Completion of the 10th year and computer course
FC11	12th year (incomplete)	Businessman	Mechanics training
	*The detention regime can be open or close to the outside of the prison.		

Table 1. Characteristics of candidates

ID	Age	Detention Time	Detention Regime	Open University (PT) Courses	Year
ST01	34	2 years and 8 months	Closed	Social Science	1º
ST02	42	3 years	Closed	Management	1º
ST03	44	5 years	Closed	Social Science	2º
ST04	42	6 years and 6 months	Open	Social Science	2º
ST05	47	4 years	Closed	Social Science	1º
ST06	41	6 years and 6 months	Closed	Management	1º
ST07	35	4 years	Closed	Social Science	1º
ST08	31	4 years	Open	Management	1º
ST09	39	2 years and 2 months	Closed	Management	1º

	Education Level	Occupation	Training inside prison
ST01	12th year	Driver Assistant	ICT training
ST02	12th year (incomplete)	Clerk	Management Assistance technical course
ST03	11th year	Restaurant owner	Completion of 12th year and mechanical course
ST04	12th year /1st year of Degree in Architecture	Designer	-
ST05	10th year	Technician at an alcohol and drug abuse centre	Gardening course
ST06	12th year	Mariner	ICT training
ST07	12th year	Electrician and mechanic	Portuguese for foreigners

ST08	11th year	Serviceman with the Air Force	-
ST09	12th year	Salesman	-

Table 2. Characteristics of students

Note that the analysis of resulting data was based on two alternating phases. In the first phase, a vertical analysis was made of each interview, and in the second phase a horizontal or comparative analysis was made using the "constant comparative analysis" method (Miles & Huberman, 1994) to identify common and different aspects of the representations and perceptions of respondents. The information resulting from the interviews is also shown in tables so that can explain the relevance of some of their opinions. In our opinion, choosing this information organisational model, which allows us to study the views of respondents in a systematic and analytical way, will give us a better view of their overall ideas. Finally, it is important to highlight that because some of the records encoded with the acronym SIG relate to the actual assessment, they are marked with the expressions *Positive perspective* (+), *Negative perspective* (-) and *Hesitation/Undefined* (+/-). The acronyms FC and ST refer to Candidates to Courses and Students, respectively.

Analysis and Results

This section presents the research findings with a view to identifying the respondents' views on their motivation when choosing to attend a higher education course, their expectations regarding their future professional situation after completing the course, and the difficulties felt and the conditions available for engaging in educational activities in prison. It should also be noted that we prepared an interview roadmap to achieve the objectives defined, which allowed us to organise the information in a structured way along the three categories considered relevant for making the objectives more efficient.

For the first category, *Motivations for attending Higher Education,* with forty-three records of candidates and students, we chose the theroretical approach proposed by Ryan and Deci (2000), which considers two types of motivation: intrinsic motivation, related with psychological rewards, such as recognition, status, respect and satisfaction, and extrinsic motivation, related with socioeconomic reasons, easier access to jobs, or work-related conditions (Lavery, 1999; Vallerand et al., 1992). This dimension covers the issues related with a life project, and must be analysed based on the reasons given for their choices. We chose to analyse the two types of motivation in an integrated way, as the reasons given for most of the records are both intrinsic and extrinsic. Table 3 presents the identification of the interviewees (INT), the register number (RN), the response orientation (SIG) as well the content units.

INT	RN	SIG	CONTENT UNITS
FC07	1	6 +	I was curious and I like this area. I also like to study and it keeps me occupied here. I work in the archive department. I hear the comments of fellow prisoners working at the library who already attend the Open University, and they said it was cool. This is something I can do when I leave.

S T04	73	1	+	Although this area is completely different from my area, I've learned to like it here. I like working with people, I'm in a separate pavilion, in the DFU (Drug-Free Unit), where we do a lot of therapies, lot of group work, we work with feelings, behaviours, attitudes, and I've learned to like it. And because I've always wanted to take a degree...
S T06	17	2	+	I have a vision for my future and it's always interesting to have knowledge in management. However, I'm more at ease with History and Geography, and maybe Social Sciences are easier for me. But I'm not very comfortable with Portuguese because I'm Colombian.

Table 3. Motivations for attending Higher Education

Having read the results obtained and the records, we find that the main motivations of respondents are characterised by intrinsic and extrinsic factors, namely: a) personal satisfaction; b) the desire to advance professionally, looking forward to a more attractive future; c) the need to have an academic diploma for when they are rehabilitated into society; d) to escape the prison routine; and also e) the desire to become a better citizen (Fischer, Yan, & Stewart, 2003; Long, 2004; Monteagudo, 2008; Newstead & Hoskins, 2003). There is, therefore, a clear commitment to acquiring cultural knowledge, and especially social knowledge (ACE, 2007; Forrester-Jones & Hatzidimitriadou, 2006; Walker, 2006; Withnall, 2006, 2012).

However there are some negative perspectives or limitations for the motivations expressed by the inmates. In this sense, student -ST09- incorporates an inhibitory factor related to external factors, referring that:

> ST09 – Honestly, I would like to follow Informatics, but due to the conditions or limitations we have here, I ended up opting for Management (RN 279).

The second category, defined as *Expectations after completing higher education*, is based on the students' expectations on their professional situation. This dimension refers to the planning of effective and desirable futures based on an overall idea of reality.

The forty-six records, which represents the totality of the register units of this particular category, are broken down into representations of *Optimism* (+), *Reflection* (+/-) and *Pessimism* (-), mostly related to their social and professional rehabilitation. The latter had quite a large number of references, suggesting that these prisoners are very apprehensive, expectant and worried about their ability to be rehabilitated back into society. The more positive considerations, fewer in number, show that some prisoners are optimistic about their future and see the course as an important tool for their rehabilitation.

INT	RN	SIG	CONTENT UNITS
C05	F4 4	+	When I leave here I have a job waiting for me, I even have a document saying I will be given a job. I think the degree is a plus when dealing with clients. It shows that I have made the most with my time here. It would help me go up another step in the ladder and it might just give me new opportunities.
C02	F4 1	±	I don't really have an idea about what's going on outside in terms of Social Sciences, but I live in social housing in Porto and I would really like to help those people socially. There are things we can do...
T04	S76 1	-	Although people say it's all the same, in fact it isn't. If I look for a job where people don't know me and they find out that I've done six and a half years they might think I'm a gangster, a terrorist. In Portugal people still think like that...

Table 4. Expectations after completing higher education

As can be seen from the answers, the professional expectations of respondents are optimistic, and in their opinion having a degree means a more receptive labour market.

> ST02 – We don't just learn for the degree, we learn a lot about other things and I've made a big effort, so I have high hopes about a job. A degree makes a difference. Work can be a bit different, because it's something we didn't have before... (RN 131).

> ST08 – The degree will allow me to have deep knowledge about management that I can use outside. For me, it changes everything, because I will have acquired other knowledge and I can say I am privileged because my job opportunity is guaranteed (RN 259).

Many respondents say that they already have professional projects in the pipeline after they serve their sentence (RN44), thus raising their expectations. In turn, their fears are directly related with the social stigma and prejudice, due to their prison time, as stated by respondent ST04:

> ST04 – We still suffer the prison stigma. I haven't felt it much perhaps because I'm not looking for a job yet, but I'm already thinking about it. And then there is the down side... Some of my friends have a degree and last time I was on parole I heard that a friend of mine, who's a graduate and has good grades, is working at a Call Center. This is how I feel, if young 25 or 26 year olds can't find a job, what will happen to me at 42 with my past? It won't be easy (RN 177).

Expectations are seen as a probability of satisfying some of the individual's needs based on previous experiences (Hersey & Blanchard, 1986). According to Dhami et al. (2006), most studies on this topic commonly conclude that future expectations of prisoners regarding their successful social and professional rehabilitation are overly optimistic. These authors suggest that participating in activities inside the prison, having more contacts with relatives and high expectations of finding a job help increase the optimistic expectations of these individuals regarding their rehabilitation.

The category *Difficulties*, with twenty records, refers to the difficulties felt in the teaching-learning process of these students. We note that records are clearly negative, showing that the greatest difficulties are: lack of guidance on what to study; lack of bibliographical resources; and lack of access to the Internet, in particular to the UAb platform.

I NT	R N	S IG	CONTENT UNITS
S T02	1 47	-	Our biggest difficulty is the lack of guidance and access to the learning materials. We study and we never know if it is right (...), if that's the right answer the teacher wants us to give in the exam... so it's tough.
S T04	1 92	-	The main difficulties are not having any guidance on what to study (...), lack of access to the platform or access to the topic. I can draw some conclusions by reading the course plan, but I only know for sure when I go outside and access the platform.

Table 5. Difficulties

Pachane (1998) states that university students have different ideas about their personal difficulties. However, in this specific context, we realise that the difficulties felt by these students are over and above those difficulties and clearly have to do with lack of support, monitoring and an academic pathway done much in isolation, which goes against Article 6 of the Jomtien Declaration (UNESCO, 1990), which states that 'learning does not take place in isolation'. These results tell us precisely the opposite, as the prisoners' autonomy is already diminished and the exercise of citizenship is decreased, making learning difficult. As mentioned, by the students:

ST01 – It's the study itself. I don't have access to a lot of the subjects; I needed to have someone tell me what I have to do. I have to rely on myself to understand the subject. I don't have anyone telling me how this or that works. When I study, I think I'm doing it right and I always wait for the results to see my grades. It's not always easy, because I have to share the sleeping quarters with 16 other prisoners. When I'm alone I don't ask anyone for help. When I'm with my colleagues, I ask for their help... even a guy who works here at the school (RN 124).

ST05 – When we have doubts, we do not have anyone with specialized expertise to turn to ... we support each other ... (RN 198).

ST07 – We're not given any help or guidance on what we should study… (RN 271).

As for the category *Equipments and Resources*, with forty items, all respondents refer that there are special learning facilities for HE students, but they do not have any computer equipment or technology to assist them in their learning process.

I NT	R N	S IG	CONTENT UNITS
S T01	1 26	+	A room was created in the school establishment for us to study and there is a library.
S T02	2 15	+	Yes, a room was created for university students. There is also a library where we can borrow books to study or to consult.
S T03	1 49	-	The school has two computers rooms for ICT training… I mean, I do have access but it's because I work here at school and I am even the one who fixes computers, but the rest of the staff do not have access.

Table 6. Equipments and Resources

After reading and analyzing all example units, presented in Table 6, we can conclude that there is only one study room (without computers) for students attending Higher Education at the school.

Furthermore, and as stated by the students:

ST04 – We have a library, but there is no point in going there because the staff just discusses processes, sports and it's impossible… too much noise... (RN 170).

ST05 – If you need one or another photocopy, you can't get it; it's difficult. There is little bibliography here (RN 189).

ST08 – A room, a table and a chair, only this. I bought textbooks and materials. I have to do it myself. I know that they provide notebooks, sheets, pens, but I never asked because I don't need them. Fortunately, I never need to ask for them because my family also helps in this regard. So, I leave it for those who need it most and are not so fortunate as I am (RN 271).

This obviously limits the access to digital, audiovisual and multimedia contents provided by the teachers of the different course units in each course, especially because, as Lévy (1993, p. 75) refers: 'technologies have a key role in establishing the intellectual and space-time references of human societies'.

Considering this and the definition of e-Learning already given by Sangrà, Vlachopoulos and Cabrera (2012), who speak of an educational model that uses electronic means and devices to facilitate the access, development and improvement in the quality of education and training, it is not possible to talk of e-Learning at this prison, but rather of a "primitive" generation of Distance Learning.

As already mentioned, the resources available to students at this prison bring us back to the first generations of Distance Learning, which relied basically on printed material for educational purposes. In specific contexts, such as this one, where the digital reality is still remote, textbooks, notebooks, pens and pencils are, therefore, key resources, as they are physically tangible work tools which belong to students and can be handled by them, as they are always at their disposal. But even these resources are scarce and often depend on the support of the University and technicians who assist in the educational process at the school.

In an increasingly digital society, where education is supported by educational resources, that include e-mail and online teaching platforms, "Learning Management Systems" (LMS) and "Learning Content Management Systems" (LCMS), and discussion forums and web conference systems (Lagarto & Andrade, 2009), this type of teaching makes less and less sense.

In a prison context, based on the participants' expressed needs and perception about the difficulties, it is important to adopt a collaborative blended e-Learning approach. According to Vryonides (2016, p. 72) the strengths of this modality are:

- Replaces (rather than supplements) some in-class time with online, interactive learning activities.
- Gives careful consideration as to why (and how often) classes need to meet face-to-face.
- Assumes that certain activities can be better accomplished online – individually or in small groups – than in a face-to-face class.
- May keep remaining in-class activities more or less the same.
- May make significant changes in remaining in-class meetings.
- May schedule out-of-class activities in 24*7 computer labs or totally online so that students can participate anytime, anywhere.

In short, as referred by Monteiro and Leite (2016, p. 31), the online course must have the following characteristics: 'be based on a student-centered paradigm and skills development; be interactive and collaborative; stimulates self-confidence, motivation,

and learning autonomy and self-management processes; promotes reflection and formative assessment'. According to the inmates interviewed and the literature available, the appropriate ICT solution must cater for Internet connectivity, intuitive navigation, diverse multimedia resources in proper working conditions, and must meet accessibility requirements and responsive design.

Conclusion

If we look at imprisonment from a rehabilitation rather than punishment viewpoint, education is an undeniable factor in rehabilitation and in the reduction of recidivism. If rehabilitation seeks to support successful reintroduction of individuals in a post-release phase, which in turn can deter future criminal activity, as we have concluded in this study, there has to be more access to technology, technology literacy instruction, e-Learning, and simulated environments.

The combination of the many methods and learning technologies that involve the interaction between educational approaches and technological resources is essential to promote quality education in prisons in Portugal. The greatest challenge of higher education in prisons and, consequently, of new learning and teaching models or environments is to ensure that learners in prison develop appropriate skills and competences for their level of knowledge.

As we have seen, these students are very motivated to attend and complete the course, because they envisage a more attractive future. Even though their expectations are not very high, due to potential rehabilitation issues, it is essential that we move towards this inclusive and quality education. However, to turn this into reality, we need to thoroughly redesign the architecture of information systems in prisons in Portugal and provide them with digital platforms to allow the implementation of Distance learning and e-Learning. By reading and analysing the views of students/prisoners and applicants– the latter having a more institutional opinion perhaps more closer to reality, we have concluded that the current situation in the Porto prison, extensible to other prisons in Portugal, at this level has many weaknesses and limitations that need to be resolved as quickly as possible.

As emphasised by the students/prisoners, the IT resources must be strengthened and more technological resources must be provided to the prison, for e.g., contents and learning management platform or videoconference technologies, not available at the moment at the prison's school. Moreover, they also add the need for Internet (or intranet) and more support from teachers in educational activities in virtual classroom context, as this is very flexible in terms of time and study plans, allowing them to also continue to study in other prisons or once they are released, anywhere in the world.

To address this challenge, and considering this framework outlined by the learner prisoners, the Open University (UAb) and the General Directorate of Prison Services and Social Rehabilitation (DGRSP) have recently signed a protocol (April 2016), which states in its 2nd clause the need and commitment to create and develop a Virtual Campus specifically designed for the prison population, with safe access and specific contents for developing activities in the field of education and training in Distance Learning and e-Learning (Moreira et al., 2016).

Today, following the deepening of relations between Open University and DGRSP. This "Virtual Campus of Education/Training, Employability and Digital Citizenship" - EFEC@ is being designed with the main goal of building and developing an academic campus that responds to the organisational and training needs of DGRSP and of prisons.

The "Virtual Campus" will consist of various online services and will be supported by a technological platform that delivers e-Learning and eManagement technologies, to make the educational, academic, administrative and digital citizenship processes easier.

The e-Learning component will be developed based on the "Moodle" platform, focusing on the most important services of educational and learning content management. The eManagement component will be based on a philosophy of organisational Intranet, containing a number of applications and computer services to support and manage the administrative processes.

Besides these two platforms, the "Virtual Campus" will also have a tool – "Repository of Contents and Resources" – intended for the organisation and sharing of resources and learning objects, allowing the users to access both educational and administrative contents, and a platform with digital citizenship-related services.
The idea of the "Campus" is to design an integrated information system, with e-Learning, eManagement, workflow and groupware technologies, with a view to the automation of administrative, decision-making and educational processes, and to a more efficient management of resources and educational logistics.

This project is expected to address some of the issues referred by the respondents in this study and the challenges posed today by the digital society and the new technologies to Distance Learning and e-Learning, in particular in contexts of great social vulnerability, as is the case of the prison population. At the same time, it will contribute to ensure the right of access to education to all citizens, respecting the human rights of individuals, deprived of their freedom or not.

The construction of the "Virtual Campus EFEC@" is a complex and cross-cutting challenge that requires a collaborative commitment. The teachers and researchers of the Open University (UAb) believe that this project will also help to fulfill the mission of UAb as a world-wide university that goes beyond political and geographical borders or prison walls, providing the conditions so that everybody has the chance to invest in their education.

Finally, it is important to add that as an instrument of an active policy of public intervention and of citizenship, the "Virtual Campus EFEC@" will seek to shape a cross-cutting renewal matrix. The effective role of education as an essential frame of reference of the adequacy of citizens to the new challenges of knowledge society aims to foster a structured culture of innovation and requalification, as a tool for the development of institutions.

We need to bear in mind that the prison context is very specific, closed within itself and has very unique rules. It is also important to insist and, above all, believe that it can make a difference in the education and training of prisoners. By introducing adapted and attractive technological and educational resources that can support and motivate these students, we can create opportunities for the development of skills aimed at their integration.

'Education for all, throughout life, equally accessible to the specific nature of each and everyone, will necessarily cover the education and training of adults and, therefore, the education and training in a prison context' (Tscharf, 2009, p.148).

Acknowledgments

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