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JAIL INMATES SEEK BETTER LIFE THROUGH OPEN SCHOOLING:
A CASE STUDY OF NIOS, INDIA

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ABSTRACT

As it has been continuously experiential, one of the major reasons for crimes all over the world is lack of awareness, education and unemployment. Through education, the prisoners can learn and become skilled how to behave with the people living in society. Education helps the inmates to make themselves capable enough to work in the outside world on release and hence, they can lead a crime free life. Moreover, the education to the prisoners makes them more conscious of their rights and the responsibilities. Hence, ensuring the appropriate and adequate education to the prisoners is an enormous step towards.

For the reformation of prisoners, National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) has taken initiative to educate and provide skill training programme the Jail Inmates in Jails (Sudhar Grah) free of cost across the country. Therefore, the present article aims to understand, how jail inmates can make best utilization of their time and to develop optimistic and constructive thoughts through National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS). The data and other information have been taken from 41 study centres of Jails under jurisdiction of NIOS Regional Centre, Chandigarh (Punjab, Haryana and UT Chandigarh).

Keywords: Jail Inmates, NIOS, Education

INTRODUCTION

The National Institute of Open School is the world's largest open schooling system with cumulative enrolment of 2.46 million learners per year. It offers both academic and vocational courses upto pre-degree level. It offers Secondary and Senior Secondary level and vocational courses in more than 100 different areas with the help of accredited academic and vocational study centers across India. A network of 22 Regional Centers and over 6000 Study Centers makes NIOS an integrated educational board with wide reach throughout the country.

The National Institute of Open Schooling with its mandate to 'reach the unreached' has been constantly striving to reach to those disadvantaged sections of the society like the marginalized, geographically disadvantaged, economically backward and socio-culturally deprived communities. NIOS has reached even those who are behind the barrels of the iron grills of jails. NIOS runs its academic and vocational courses in different Jails in India. Some NIOS Jail study centres are found to be more active like Raipur, Gurugram, Ambala, Karnal and Tihar Jail study centres. These study centres of NIOS mainly focus on mainstreaming inmates and equipping them with skills to earn livelihood post completion of their tenure. Even if they leave the jail during their studies, they can always give their exams subsequently in any of the nominated NIOS centres.

It is important and necessary to provide a conducive environment to the inmates lodged in such Jails to facilitate their holistic development and transform them into productive citizens of the society. This could be achieved by imparting them with education in combination with skill development through NIOS. NIOS works to promote on a broad scale as well as very locally. This institution plays a major role to empower Jail-inmates in holistic manner. Through open and distance education, the prisoners can learn and become skilled how to behave with the people living in society. Education helps the inmates to bring positive changes in their attitudes and make themselves capable enough to work in the outside world on release, and hence, they can lead a crime free and peaceful life. Moreover, the education makes them more conscious of their rights as well as responsibilities. Hence, ensuring the appropriate and adequate education by NIOS to the prisoners is an enormous step forward.

Therefore, the present article aims to understand, how jail inmates can make best utilization of their time, to seek better life and to develop optimistic and constructive thoughts through National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS).

Data Base and Methodology: The data have been taken from NIOS study centres of Jails under jurisdiction of NIOS RC, Chandigarh (Punjab, Haryana and UT Chandigarh). Some information has been collected from Jail and Jail-inmates during visit of Karnal, Amabala and Chandigarh Jail, which was a difficult task to compile and analyze to understand psychological behaviour of Jail-inmates. In order to know the Jail-inmates opinion and perception an interview of 100 Jail-inmates from NIOS Jail study centres has been taken place. These Jail-inmates have been selected randomly basis from 18 years old or above and Secondary, Senior Secondary and Vocational learners from Karnal, Ambala and Chandigarh NIOS Jails Study Centres to get information and observation study regarding to seek better life through NIOS.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Previously conducted studies have discovered the perspectives for prison education programs to create constructive institutional cultures. These changes have been thought to be brought about by prisoners' exposure to positive institutional culture and care. Prison management encourages prisoner enrolment in education because it can provide an opportunity for good behavior, and is thought to produce responsible and mature individuals who influence other prisoners and even prison officers (Ross, 2009). The provision of education can be of help to prison management to address issues of prisonization, the process whereby prisoners become accustomed to the negative values of the prison sub-culture (Brazzell *et al.* 2009). Investing of public funds in education and training in prisons will achieve better community outcomes as compared to building prisons. A reduction in prisoner misconduct is strongly related to a reduction in recidivism rates (Lahm, 2009). Physical and verbal abuse from prisoners is a very important component of the workplace stress that is experienced by prison officers therefore contributing to a high burden of stress-related chronic diseases (Gould, Watson, Price, and Valliant, 2013). Certainly, effective prisoner engagement with education and training might moderate the tensions and reduce the violence typically experienced with prison overcrowding (United Voice, 2015). All across the country, citizens are heatedly against the funding of criminals' education

when they themselves might go into deep debt to fund their own. “Education is a privilege, and if you commit a crime, that entitlement is revoked” (Aalai, 2014). There is a large number of researches that prove that these fears are baseless. Inmates who receive an education behind bars are 43% less likely to return to a life of crime after their release (Keller, 2014). Educational and library environments often represent few positive settings for a prisoner in which they can experience a constructive forward looking character and the prospects of continuing their education on release has the potential for drawing individuals into positive and away from negative settings that are associated with the criminal activity (Rod Clark, 2016). Engaging prisoners in education is one of the measures that could remove security risk in prisons. For prisoners, one of the main challenges with imprisonment is monotony (Farley, 2016).

PRISONER EDUCATION THROUGH NATIONAL INSTITUTION OF OPEN SCHOOLING IN INDIA

The National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) was set up by the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India as an autonomous organization in 1989 by amalgamating Open School project of CBSE started in 1979. It was known as National Open School till 2002, when it was rechristened as NIOS. NIOS provides educational opportunities using distance and open learning methods to persons who wish to study and qualify for a better tomorrow. The mission of NIOS is to provide "Education for All" with special concern for girls and women, rural youth, working people, SC/ST, BPL, sports persons, physically and mentally challenged and other disadvantaged groups. NIOS operates through a network of 22 Regional Centres, 2 Sub Regional Centres, 2 NIOS Centers, five departments at Headquarters as well as more than 5,517 Accredited Institutions (AIs) and more than 1478 Accredited Vocational Institutes (AVIs) in India, Nepal and Middle East (NIOS Prospectus, 2018).

NIOS announced its ‘Free Education for Prisoners’ initiative in the 2012 academic session and waived off fees (all type of fee viz. admission fee as well as exam fee) for all jail inmates across the country. It was a very innovative scheme taken up by NIOS to enroll jail inmates all over the Nation in its education programmes. The guiding principle was to give them an opportunity to reform through education rather than bringing justice to them. The Enrollment pattern of NIOS is shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1: ENROLLMENT PATTERN OF JAIL INMATES IN NIOS

Year	Total Admission	% of Total Admission
2012	585	5.44
2013	756	7.04
2014	1511	14.06
2015	2167	20.17
2016	2012	18.73
2017	2262	21.05
2018	1451	13.51
TOTAL	10744	100.00

Source: National Institute of Open Schooling, Computer Unit, 2018

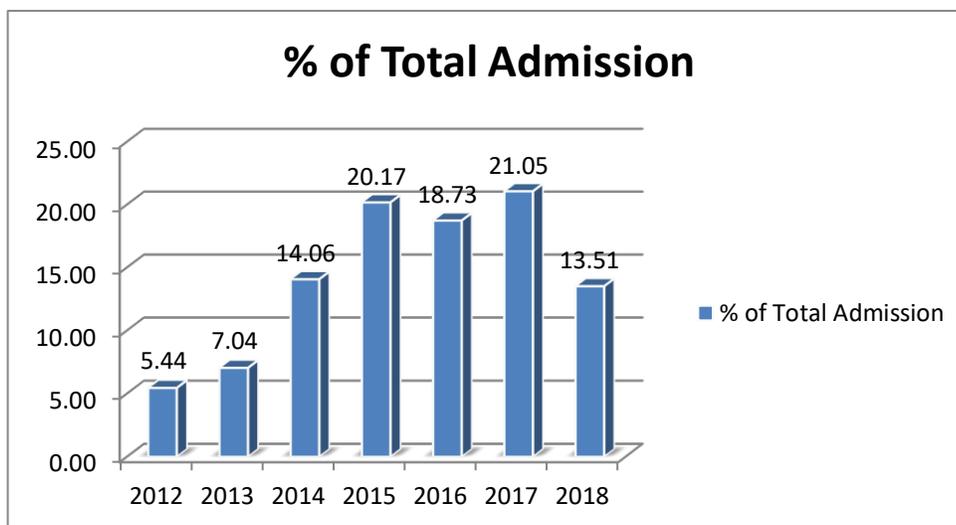


Fig. 1: Enrollment Pattern of Jail Inmates in NIOS

NIOS has started to provide education through the open distance mode in Jails from year 2012 and enrollment of the students/learners in year 2012 are less than the expectation of NIOS. But after regular counseling and motivation of Jail-inmates they started realizing that their life will be better after education and skills developed by them. The Table 1 and Fig.1 revealed that the enrollment of students increased year by year from 2012 to 2015 i.e. (585 to 2167) because the interested students got enrolled through offline mode. The enrollment of students slight decreased from year 2015 (20.17%) to 2016 (18.73%) but it again increased to 21.05% next year as compared to past year. The students' enrollment drastically decreased in year 2018 especially from the time of Block-II admissions. The main reason of this drastic decrease of enrollments was due to acceptance of admission form through online mode only for open and distance education system in NIOS. The admission forms from Jail study centres were accepted in both offline as well as online modes till Block-I of the year 2018. NIOS circulated new guidelines to accept the admission form through online system only for easy and faster processing.

NIOS Regional Centre, Chandigarh and Prisoner Education

NIOS RC Chandigarh is running the Study Centres in Jail premises to provide education to Jail inmates free of cost and to cater the educational needs of prisoners for their reformation and the development of nation. There are 41 study centres under RC, Chandigarh but some are more active e.g. Chandigarh, Karnal, Ambala, Hisar, Kaithal, Rohtak, Sirsa, Sonapat and Yamunanagar NIOS study centres.

TABLE 2: ACADEMIC ENROLLMENT OF JAIL INMATES AT NIOS REGIONAL CENTRE, CHANDIGARH

Years	Total Admissions in Jails (Under RC, Chandigarh)	% of Total Admission
2014	897	26.63
2015	762	22.62
2016	730	21.67
2017	665	19.74
2018	314	9.32
TOTAL	3368	100.00

Source: National Institute of Open Schooling, Computer Unit, 2018

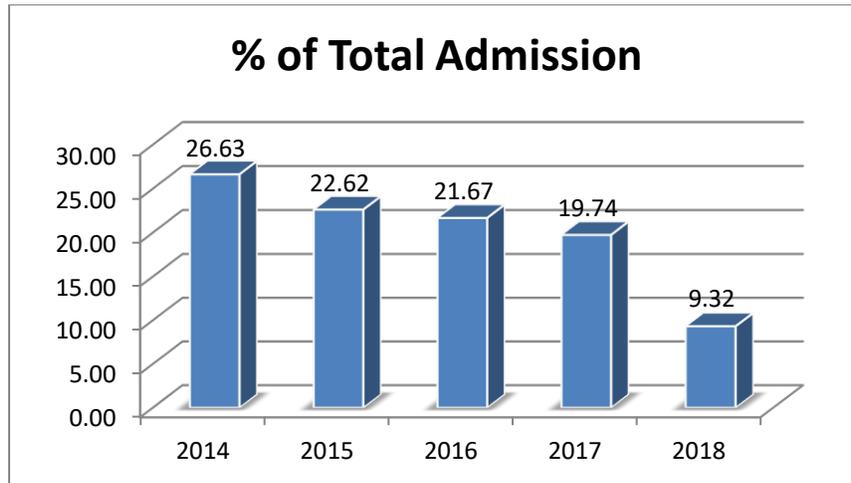


Fig. 2: Academic Enrollment of Jail Inmates at NIOS Regional Centre, Chandigarh

Table 2 and Fig.2 reveal that the enrollment of students decreased year by year from 2014 to 2017 i.e. (26.63% 19.74%). The main reason of this decrease was the rejection of admission forms due to incomplete desired details and strict following of rules by NIOS. The table shows that the students' enrollment drastically decreased especially in year 2018 because total admission considered only Block I and not Block II. In NIOS Block II session, the admission forms from Jail study centres were not accepted in offline mode. After the year 2018 Block II session, NIOS started accepting the admission forms through online system only.

TABLE 3: VOCATIONAL ENROLLMENT PATTERN OF JAIL INMATES AT NIOS REGIONAL CENTRE, CHANDIGARH

Years	Total Vocational Admissions in Jails (Under RC, Chandigarh)	% of Total Admission
2014	109	18.79
2015	125	21.55
2016	104	17.93
2017	85	14.66
2018	157	27.07
TOTAL	580	100.00

Source: National Institute of Open Schooling, Computer Unit, 2018

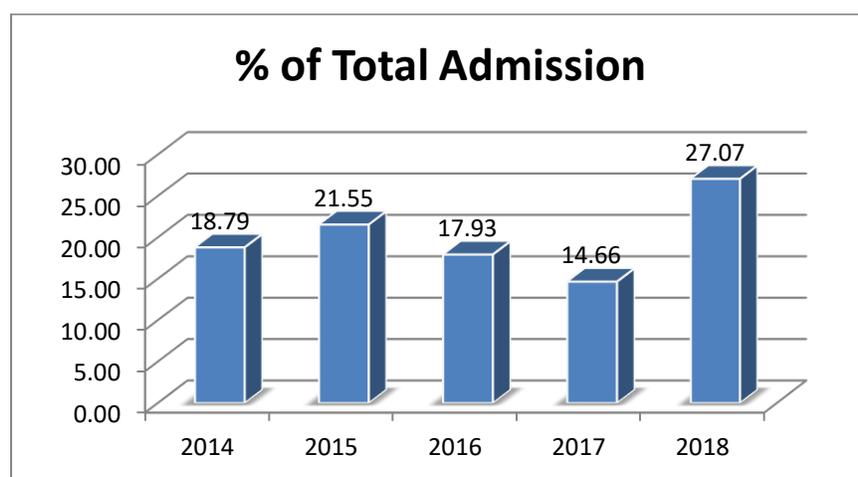


Fig. 3: Vocational Enrollment of Jail Inmates at NIOS Regional Centre, Chandigarh

There are some very popular vocational courses like beauty culture, certificate in yoga, cutting and tailoring, plumbing and welding technician in jail study centres under the jurisdiction of NIOS Regional Centre Chandigarh. The Table 3 and Fig.3 showed that the enrollment of students increased year by year from 2014 to 2015 i.e. (18.79% 21.55%) because of self motivated as well as good counseling by the jail staff. But from the year of 2015 to 2017, the enrollment of vocational courses has decreased. But from the year 2017 to 2018, the enrollment drastically increased because NIOS started emphasizing on the skill development and contributed to the SKILL INDIA Mission launched by the Government of India.

TABLE 3: JAIL-INMATES OPINION ABOUT EDUCATION PROVIDED BY NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF SCHOOLING

Sr. No.	Questions	5-Strongly Agree (%)	4-Agree (%)	3-Neutral (%)	2-Disagree (%)	1- Strongly Disagree (%)
1	Do you think that you have become skilled after getting education from NIOS?	6	45	37	8	4
2	Do you think that education through NIOS has made changes in your behavior?	9	41	29	18	3
3	Do you think that education has made you more empowered?	1	42	29	25	3
4	Do you feel that you have become more conscious about your rights and responsibilities after getting education from NIOS?	6	42	30	21	1
5	Do you think that education provided by NIOS is appropriate and adequate as per your expectation?	1	44	32	22	1
6	Do you think that inmates can make best utilization of time to through open education?	5	45	33	16	1
7	Do you think that education has made your outlook constructive and optimistic towards life as well as society?	8	52	30	9	1
8	Do you think you will be able to earn livelihood through the education provided by NIOS?	4	48	31	16	1
9	Do you think you will be able to contribute to society after release?	12	55	29	3	1
10	Do you think that your life has improved after getting education from NIOS?	1	61	35	2	1

Source: Calculated by Author based on Jail-inmates' Interview

Table 4 indicates that the majority of inmates think that their life has changed after getting education from NIOS while 37% were neutral in their response and 8% of the inmates have disagreed with any change in their lives. 4% have strongly disagreed and 6% have strongly agreed. Most of the inmates have agreed (41%) that open education has made changes in their behavior. 9% of the inmates have agreed while 29% were neutral in their responses. 18% have disagreed while 3% have strongly disagreed with this. On the question whether education has empowered the inmates, 42% have agreed and 29% were neutral. 29% have disagreed and 3%

have strongly disagreed. 1% of the inmates surveyed agreed strongly with this. 42% have felt that they have become more conscious about their rights and responsibilities after getting education. 30% were neutral while 21% have disagreed and 1% have strongly disagreed. 6% of the inmates have strongly agreed that they have become more conscious. The above table indicates that most of the inmates feel that the education provided by NIOS is quite appropriate and as per their expectations. 44% have agreed and 32% were neutral, 22% have disagreed and 1% have strongly disagreed while 1% have strongly agreed. 45% of the inmates have felt that they can make best utilization of time through open education, 33% have agreed and 16% have disagreed. 5% have strongly while 16% have disagreed and 1% have strongly disagreed. Most of the inmates felt that education through NIOS has made their outlook optimistic towards life as well as society. 52% have agreed and 30% have disagreed with this. 8% have strongly agreed with this while 9% have disagreed and 1% strongly disagreed with this. 48% feel that they will be able to earn livelihood by the education provided to them by the NIOS, 4% strongly agreed and 31% were neutral, 16% have disagreed and 1% have strongly disagreed. 55% of the inmates think that they will be able to contribute to society after release, 29% were neutral, 3% disagreed and 1% have agreed while 12% have strongly agreed. Majority of the inmates feel that their life has improved after getting education from NIOS (61%), 35% were neutral, only 2% have disagreed and 1% have strongly disagreed while 1% have agreed strongly. Therefore, on the basis of interview, it has been observed that NIOS is contributing value integrated education and skill development. Through education and technical education, the inmates feel more empowered and more sensitized about their roles and responsibilities towards the society.

CONCLUSION

The Jail-inmates are becoming more empowered and skilled through National Institute of Open Schooling. NIOS is helping the inmates to make more capable and more consciousness of their rights and responsibilities. This article suggests that Jail-inmates enrolled in NIOS may help to improve safety risk in prisons through dropping re-offending by promoting critical judgment skills. This article shows that how Jail-inmates can make best utilization of their time and to develop positive and constructive thinking in their mind in place of crime thoughts. As a result, education enables them to contribute something encouraging and productive inside and outside the jail towards the society as well as life. Activities related education keep them occupied and so help in reducing and releasing anxiety as well as stress. It is also supportive in the overall development of Jail-inmates in holistic manner. NIOS adds to their reformation across the nation. Education gives values and makes them better persons to contribute in development of society. Major reasons for crimes are lack of awareness, education and unemployment at global level. Only awareness, education and job opportunities can reduce the crime rate. Therefore, National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) is educating and providing skill training programmes to the jail inmates in Jails (Sudhar Grah) free of cost across the country for reformation and development of nation. Hence, ensuring the appropriate and adequate education through NIOS to the prisoners is an enormous step forward.

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