Thematic Article

Polish Prison Education System

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Abstract

The article presents the ideas of the Polish prison education system. It has been based on current Polish legal regulations, statistical data and specialist literature. Nowadays the situation in the labour market requires people to acquire education and to improve their qualifications. People without education, who are excluded from the access to professional development and in-service training, find themselves in an extremely difficult situation. The lack of qualification and vocational skills usually leads to exclusion from the labour market. People who serve their sentences in prisons find themselves in a particularly difficult situation, because their lack of education may push them back into crime. A very positive tendency that may be observed in Poland is a growing demand for prison education. Convicts may acquire knowledge and raise their qualifications at various levels and in various fields. They may follow the curricula at the level of a primary or secondary school; they may pass their Matura certificate and, after the consent of relevant authorities, they can continue their education at the university level. Convicts may also learn a new profession, change their professional qualifications or acquire new additional skills during specialist courses. The qualifications acquired in this way shall meet current demand in the labour market, and convicts may find employment after they leave prisons. Education allows them to improve their self-esteem and self-reliance, to catch up with any deficiencies and to work on their self-discipline. At the same time, education offers opportunities to expand knowledge, to return to the society and to the labour market. Education is one of many possibilities and a real chance for rehabilitation. It is important for society and prisoners to foster the pursuit for education among convicts. It is worth realising, that lot of prisoners still do not want to learn. It may be a result from their previous school failures, the sense of embarrassment caused by their knowledge deficiencies, the lack of interest and faith in

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their own potential. The material for the text has been collected on the basis of the method of theoretical analysis, and it includes available statistical data, legal regulations and literature which refers to the discussed problems. The article aims at the presentation of the Polish prison education system, how it is organised and what advantages it presents for both: convicts and the society. The system is based on formal education, special training courses, career counseling and programmes of prison education. They are implemented by correctional staff in prisons. Problems which refer to the education of convicts in Poland are regulated by the Act of 6th June 1997, the Executive Penal Code, the Act on the Education System and executive acts to the above-mentioned regulations.

**Keywords:** prison education system, education of convicts, penitentiary correctional measures, social re-adaptation, social rehabilitation.
Introduction

Education is one of the most important elements of effective resocialisation. While in prison isolation conditions, convicts are exposed to certain stagnation associated not only with deprivation of freedom, but with related limitations. It is all about access to knowledge, technology, following changes taking place in various areas. Convicts are therefore particularly at risk of social exclusion. It is likely that when they leave prison they will not find work, and they will return to crime and prison. Education is, therefore, a means of minimising the consequences of detention in prison which are disadvantageous from the point of view of the individual and the society.

It should also be noticed that the Polish law guarantees citizens access to education and training. At the same time, it should be taken into account that convicts constitute a specific group of recipients of educational activities. This results not only from the environment in which they are currently staying, but also from school delays and educational negligence.

The education system of convicts in Poland consists not only of schools and trainings, but also of counseling activities and programs initiated and implemented by the prison service. These projects concern education of convicts in various areas and include activities in the field of vocational counseling and counseling. The activities of personnel and convicts in this area have a real influence on the re-adaptation of convicts.

The presented text explains the Polish prison education system. It shows how it is organised in Poland, what kind of solutions are used and what are the advantages for convicts and the society.

The material for the text has been collected on the basis of the method of theoretical analysis. It also includes available statistical data, legal regulations and literature which refers to the discussed problems. It is worth noticing, that available statistical data on prison education in Poland are published and collected by the Prison Guard. It is needless to add, that there are relevant legal regulations which are important in order to manage all the issues related to prison education.

Although there is a number of publications on the significance of education in the process of re-adaptation of convicts, it is necessary to check the available solutions and to perform a constant, in-depth analysis. There is a gap in this area that should be filled with empirical research. Education, improvement of qualifications and re-adaptation of convicts are the elements which affect convicts’ lives after they leave prison, their self-esteem, perception of the world. The point is that convicts should not return to the criminal path, obey the law, have a possibility to earn their living in the form of legal work. It is important to prepare them for returning to the labor market, finding themselves in conditions of freedom, achieving life satisfaction. It is important that while in prison, convicts should experience discipline, learn proper time organisation, learn
how to perform their responsibilities and how to be responsible for themselves and others. It is needless to say, that learning understood as the process through which the person “acquires knowledge and develops competences and also as the potential insight of the individual as gaining understanding of previous experiences of humankind is an everlasting task of the author as a researcher, as a curriculum developer as much as a teacher trainer and a facilitator of partnership between different agents of the educational arena. Such learning processes need to take place both in synchron and historical dimensions on vertical axles as much as on horizontal ones overlapping time, disciplinary and social status/roles of autonomous individuals who are responsible citizens of today’s democracies” (Dezso, 2014, p. 73).

The functioning and assumptions of the Polish prison education system

The functioning of activities concentrated around the organization of education of convicts is governed by the law. These include regulations such as the Act of 6 June 1997 Executive Penal Code (Journal of Laws of 1997 No. 90, item 557, as amended), Act of 7 September 1991 on the system of education (Journal of Laws of 1991 No. 95 item 425, as amended), Act of 14 December 2016 - Educational Law (Journal of Laws of 2017, item 59) and executive acts to them. The Constitution of the Republic of Poland (Journal of Laws 1997 No. 78 item 483) is very important, as in Art. 70. it guarantees the right to education for every citizen.

Prison schools operate in accordance with the Act on the Education System. Teachers who are employed at prison schools are subject to the same regulations and requirements as teachers who are employed in external schools. (Służba Więzienna [SW], 2017a).

During the process of convicts adaptation to living in freedom, providing conditions for the improvement in convicts’ education and professional qualifications becomes extremely significant. All prisoners at penitentiary institutions and custody suites are given opportunities to exercise their statutory right for education which is organised in accordance with the regulations of the Executive Penalty Code (Art. 102 and Art.130-134).

Schools and education centres which operate within penitentiary institutions and custody suites offer education at all the levels, except for higher education level. Regulations allow some convicts to continue their education outside prison. The operating network of prison schools provides education opportunities for under-age convicts who undergo obligatory education as well as to those who voluntarily apply for education. Prison education is organised in a 5-level system: a primary level, a junior level, a junior vocational level, a secondary level and a post-secondary level. On average, school education is provided to about 3500 convicts every year. They are provided with care and education which are the most efficient elements of work in the field of social rehabilitation. Convicts who attend schools come as 4.5% of all convicts who serve their
sentences in penitentiary institutions and custody suites. Education opportunities offered by various types of prison schools are addressed mainly to juvenile convicts and those who serve their sentences for the first time. They form the largest group of pupils at prison schools, and they come as 66% of all the pupils of prison schools. Nevertheless, education is also available for convicts classified in other groups, if they wish to continue their education at school.

During the organisation of the network of prison schools, special emphasis is laid on providing convicts with an opportunity to graduate from primary and junior high schools, because it is impossible to continue further education without the completion of these two school levels. The number of places at prison schools covers the demand for education among all the convicts who require learning at these levels.

Convicts who have already graduated from their secondary school, but who do not have any profession, there are post-secondary vocational schools which offer education in the profession of an IT specialist. In vocational education of convicts, special emphasis is laid on the quality of practical training. Its efficiency is verified during external vocational examinations which are organised by regional examination boards. For a few years now, external vocational examinations have already proved prison school graduates’ readiness for professional work.

It should be also emphasized that the number of graduates who have passed their secondary school final examinations at prison schools is relatively high.

Every year there is a number of convicts who continue their education outside their penitentiary institutions. Addressed to convicts, a supplementary education offer includes training courses organised by penitentiary units. Training courses are dedicated, first of all, to adult convicts who do not have any professional skills or who need to learn a new profession. Training courses are offered mainly to convicts who are at the end of serving their imprisonment sentences in order to provide them with a chance to start a professional career after they leave prison, and to prevent them from crime recidivism.

Training courses are organised in cooperation with employment agencies, and their scope is adjusted to the requirements of the local labour market. The advantage of training courses is their relatively short time and their wide variety.

Considering the fact that an average imprisonment sentence served at penitentiary institutions is relatively short – about two years, training courses come as significant supplementation of the education offer available for convicts with short sentences.

Education of convicts, particularly, preparation for their future professional career after leaving prison is one of the essential components of social rehabilitation at penitentiary institutions.
Tasks related to the improvement of conditions in which professional training of convicts takes place and to the establishment of new education centers for training courses dedicated to convicts have been of primary importance in the programmes implemented by penitentiary institutions. As a result of such activities, a significant improvement in the conditions of work at prison schools can be observed along with the improved quality of vocational education of convicts (SW, 2017a).

As it is indicated by the data published by the Prison Service, in 1st September 2017 schools which operate at penitentiary institutions and custody suites provide convicts with knowledge and qualifications which allow them to work as: cooks, tailors, confectioners, building installation and machine fitters, bricklayers, plasterers, construction installers, electricians, locksmiths, carpenters, steel fixers, concrete placers, electromechanical technicians, hair stylists, electronics installers, IT technicians, assistants to the disabled, industrial maintenance specialists, upholsterers, machine tool operators, book-binders, machine and appliance installers and mechanics (SW, 2017d).

At present (status as of 1st February 2018) schools which operate at penitentiary institutions and custody suites/detention centres provide convicts with knowledge and qualifications which allow them to work as: a tailor, cook, confectioner, building fitter and finishing works in construction, a bricklayer - plasterer, a construction fitter, a concrete mixer - steel fixer, locksmith, carpenter, electrician technician, electromechanic, mechanic - fitter of machines and devices, hairdresser, computer specialist, operator of cutting machines, bookbinder. Education will take place primarily in the form of qualifying vocational courses (SW, 2018).

Valuable sources of information are statistical data. The data for 2016 indicate that on 31st Dec. 2016 there were 71 250 convicts in Polish prisons. There are 87406 places for prisoners. Regarding the problems discussed in the article, the data on prison education are the most interesting for our considerations (SW, 2017b).

A table below presents information on prison schools and school units. It also comes as information on the types of schools which operate in Poland. Prisoners who serve their imprisonment sentences are provided with education within this structure.
Table 1. Prison schools and school units

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Detailed information</th>
<th>The number of schools in the school year</th>
<th>The number of school units in the school year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>3 529</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary schools</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior secondary schools</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic vocational schools</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary vocational schools</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-secondary schools</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary schools</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational training courses</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Prison schools provide convicts with an opportunity to complete their primary education and to acquire a profession. Covering any deficiencies in their education and being granted a certificate of school graduation come as a chance for convicts to enter the labour market.

Averagely, school education is organised for approximately 3500 convicts each year. They undergo educational procedures which come as most efficient elements of social rehabilitation. Convicts attending schools come as 4.5% of all convicts who service their sentences at prisons and custody suites. While planning the chain of prison schools, the most important is to provide convicts with a possibility of graduating from the primary and junior high schools, because convicts’ further education will be impossible without such graduation certificates. The above-mentioned schools provide education for all the convicts who require courses at the discussed levels. At the same time, it should be emphasized that a relatively high number of convicts pass their examinations for the Matura certificate at prison high schools (SW, 2017a).

A table below presents statistical data referring to the number of convicts who were provided with education at various types of schools.

Table 2. Convicts who were provided with education at prison and non-prison schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Detailed information</th>
<th>People in a school year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>4 413</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary schools</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior secondary schools</td>
<td>323</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic vocational schools</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary vocational schools</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-secondary schools</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary schools</td>
<td>1 568</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colleges</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational training courses</td>
<td>2 232</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Focusing on the area of education of convicts, it is worth noting that on 1st September 2017 a reform of the education system came into force. The reform introduced a change in the education system. The previously binding structure of a 6-year primary school, a 3-year middle school, a 3-year general high school, a 4-year technical high school, a 3-year basic vocational school and a post-secondary school was transformed. The target education system will include:

- an 8-year primary school,
- 4-year general high school,
- 5-year technical college,
- 3-year vocational school of the first degree,
- a 2-year industry school of the second level,
- a 3-year special vocational preparatory school, post-secondary school.

According to the assumptions of the reform, teachers' workplace will be preserved. Additional expenses related to the changes will be financed from government subsidies. Pupils are to learn independence and creativity (Ministerstwo Edukacji Narodowej [MEN], 2017).

Due to legal regulations and the structure of education, these changes also include education of convicts.

As it has been already mentioned, in the field of education of convicts, programmes are important. Among them there are such solutions as the Prison University programmes - and Road to Freedom or Re-adaptation through Education (Moroz, 2009, pp.101-105, Marczak, 2009, p.353). These and other applied solutions are intended to prepare convicts to life in freedom. It is important to avoid committing crime after leaving prison. It is also important to find a way to live, integrate, have a job, pay taxes, cooperate with other people.

Another exemplification of the applied programme is the project "Raising the professional qualifications of prisoners in order to return to the labor market after imprisonment". The Prison Service began its implementation in 2016. As a part of the Knowledge, Education and Development Operational Programme for 2014-2020. In 2016, 257 training cycles took place, which covered 2,926 people. In 2017, 922 trainings were planned and 11,064 convicts participated in them. It is planned to provide training to 46 thousand prisoners within five years - both women and men, in over 30 professions. It will allow them to become employed while serving their sentences, and it will also help to find them a place in the labor market after leaving prison. The programme is a response to the needs of employers. The list of occupations covered by the courses was prepared after the assessment on local labor markets. In the forthcoming time it will be updated. It complements the Government Work Programme for Prisoners. The convicts will be educated in general construction and catering professions, in the field of forklift service, installation of electrical and gas networks, and
development of green areas. There are also courses for the career of an assistant to the disabled, hairdresser, seamstress, florist. The vocational courses will prepare prisoners to obtain employment in production halls that are being built in prisons. 56% of graduates will have their job guaranteed while serving a prison sentence. After completing the training, the prisoners will be directed to employment for a fee, for example at private external contractors, as well as free of charge to local self-governments (SW, 2017c).

The problems discussed in the article are presented in the following figure. It comes as a graphic representation of the collected material. It systematises the contents and indicates the most important issues presented in the text.

*Figure 1. Polish prison education system*

Although this text is focused on the Polish education system, it is important to cite H. Farley and A. Pike. The authors find that if the prisoners are engaged in education it becomes “one of a range of measures that could alleviate security risk in prisons. For prisoners, one of the main challenges with incarceration is monotony, often leading to frustration, raising the risk of injury for staff and other prisoners” (Farley, Pike, 2016, p. 65) Engagement of imprisoned people in education “may help to alleviate security risk in prisons through relieving monotony and reducing re-offending by promoting critical thinking skills” (Farley, Pike, 2016, p. 65).

**Conclusions**

The solutions in the field of education of convicts applied in Poland are difficult to be defined as a structure. However, this is a certain area of organised activities regulated by
the Polish law. Convicts have the right to education, with special emphasis on the education of juvenile prisoners. It is important to adjust the educational activities and educational offer to the conditions of the labor market.

There is no doubt about the fact that teaching convicts and equipping them with the skills to take up work after leaving prison is one of the most important components of penitentiary work. The actions undertaken are modified and systematically improved, which increases their value and effectiveness.

Prison education is organised to provide convicts with such professional skills that should give them a chance to find employment after they leave prison.

In order to prepare prisoners properly to return to social structures, opportunities should be created for them to acquire education and to equip them with such skills that are in demand on the labor market. Acquiring formal education and professional competences allows prisoners to reduce the risk of returning to crime. It is important to provide prisoners with professional support within available educational and counseling resources so that they can find their place on the labor market after leaving penitentiary units.

The author of the text asks whether the introduced reform of the education system contributes to the improvement of its functioning. Is it possible to predict what changes will occur on the labor market and to plan educational activities in advance? Will sentenced prisoners continue to gain knowledge after leaving prison? Will prisoners use the acquired qualifications and return to the labor market after leaving prison?

The social significance of the problem and its value for re-socialised individuals implies the need to undertake further empirical research and reflection on the problems posed here.

The social significance of the problem and its value for prisoners implies the need to undertake further research and reflection on the problems explained in the article.

References


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