

IMPACT OF ISLAM AS A SOCIAL TOOL FOR REFORMING INMATES: A CASE STUDY OF IFE PRISON INMATES

Muhammad Abiodun Fagbenro

Department of Religious Studies, Obafemi Awolowo University, Osun, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

Religion is a universal phenomenon and is a social tool in most part of the world we live in today. Several studies has clearly shown that spirituality is sufficient enough to rehabilitate and reform humans in as much as they seek it (religion) and are ready to go by its dictates. This study investigated the impact of Islam as a tool for reforming prison inmates using Ile-Ife, Osun state prison as a case study. A qualitative research methodology was used whereby oral interviews were carried out and questionnaires were issued. The population used for the study comprised of 20 inmates from an only-male prison in Ile-ife, Nigeria. The data collected through questionnaires were analyzed using frequency, tables and percentage. The findings revealed that Islam has been very useful in reforming the inmates of Ife prison. Muslim missionaries have helped in establishing good relationships, end disputes and foster love between convicts and their families. The study revealed that the impact of I am and the activities of Muslim missionaries in curbing crime and reforming inmates have been great but lack of empirical data makes it difficult to quantify or measure this development.

KEYWORDS

Islam; inmates; prison; crime; Muslim; Missionaries; reformation.

1. INTRODUCTION

Prisons are said to be institutions designed to securely house people who have been convicted of crimes; these individuals are known as prisoners or inmates, and are kept in custody on a long-term or on a short term basis depending on the nature and gravity of offence, and the punishment stipulated by the law of the land (Champion J., 2007). The most common use of prisons is as part of a criminal justice system, in which individuals officially charged with or convicted of crimes are confined to a jail or prison until they are either brought to trial to determine their guilt or complete the period of incarceration they were sentenced to, after being found guilty at their trial (World Population Prospectus, 2015). Outside of their use for punishing civil crimes, authoritarian regimes also frequently use prisons and jails as tools of political repression to punish political crimes, often without trial or other legal due process; this use is illegal under most forms of international law governing fair administration of justice. In times of war, prisoners of war or detainees may also be detained in military prisons or prisoner of war camps, and large groups of civilians might be imprisoned in internment camps.

The beginning of prisons can be traced back to the rise of the state as a form of social organization. Corresponding with the advent of the state was the development of written language, which enabled the creation of formalized legal codes as official guidelines for society. The most well-known of these early legal codes is the Code of Hammurabi, written in Babylon around 1750 BC. The penalties for violations of the laws in Hammurabi's Code were almost exclusively centered on the concept of *lex talionis* ("the law of retaliation") where people were punished as a form of vengeance, often by the victims themselves. This notion of punishment as vengeance or retaliation can also be found in many other legal codes from early civilizations,

including the ancient Sumerian codes, the Indian Manama Dharma Astra, the Hermes Trismegistus of Egypt, and the Mosaic Code (Michael W., 2004). A common punishment in Early Modern Europe was to be made a galley slave. Some Ancient Greek philosophers, such as Plato, began to develop ideas of using punishment to reform offenders instead of simply using it as retribution. Imprisonment as a penalty was used initially for those who could not afford to pay their fines. Eventually, since impoverished Athenians could not pay their fines, leading to indefinite periods of imprisonment, time limits were set instead (Danielle A. S., 2000). The prison in Ancient Athens was known as the *desmoterion* ("place of chains"). The Romans were among the first to use prisons as a form of punishment, rather than simply for detention. A variety of existing structures were used to house prisoners, such as metal cages, basements of public buildings, and quarries. One of the most notable Roman prisons was the Mamertine Prison, established around 640 B.C. by Ancus Marcius. The Mamertine Prison was located within a sewer system beneath ancient Rome, and contained a large network of dungeons where prisoners were held in squalid conditions, contaminated with human waste. Forced labor on public works projects was also a common form of punishment. In many cases, citizens were sentenced to slavery, often in *ergastula* (a primitive form of prison where unruly slaves were chained to workbenches and performed hard labor).

The concept of the modern prison largely remained unknown until the early 19th-century. Punishment usually consisted of physical forms of punishment, including capital punishment, mutilation, and whipping, branding, and non-physical punishments, such as public shaming rituals like the stocks (Spierenburg P., 1998). From the middle ages up to the 16th and 17th centuries in Europe, imprisonment was rarely used as a punishment in its own right, and prisons were mainly to hold those awaiting trial and convicts awaiting punishment. Furthermore, an important innovation at the time was the *Bride well House of Corrections*, located at *Bride well Palace* in London, which resulted in the building of other houses of corrections. These houses held mostly petty offenders, vagrants, and the disorderly local poor. In these facilities, inmates were given jobs, and through prison labor they were taught how to work for a living. By the end of the 17th century, houses of correction were absorbed into local prison systems under the control of the local justice of the peace. This we say was a turning point for the prison authorities in making people better citizens" right from the prison and also of tremendous benefit to the prisoners who leave prison having learnt one skill of the other (Spierenburg P., 1998).

Methods and practices used to correct inmates before the 18th century might always vary, but the aims are mostly the same such as; elimination of crime in the society, protecting citizens and a desire for vengeance. Isolation, banishment and death were sanctions for law-offenders which were gotten from reasoning that inmates and law-offenders were enemies of the society and they deserved extreme punishments to eliminate future participation of citizens in crime (Inciardi, 2005). But after the 18th century, the ideology of the practices and methods used previously began to change. Understanding the imperfections of the human behavior and reforming inmates was beginning to be embraced. This movement accepted the cruelty of previous laws and fought against the conditions (Inciardi, 2005).

Religion makes an inmate feel loved and wanted back in the society so far its reformation process has been positively impacted in the lives of the inmate (American Correctional Association, 2000). Religion plays a crucial role in the reformation process as it increases purpose in life of an individual. Religious programs carried out for inmates in the prisons assisted in countering psychological problems of the inmates which were as a result of the anger that consumed them against the society (Gunathilake & Edirisinghe 2010). In all matters, a Godly approach assures the best way to resolve conflicts and counter psychological problems without laying credence to the past, revenge and hurting individuals (Olayemi et al., 2019).

1.1. Statement of the Problem

Religion is a universal phenomenon, and in this research study, it would be seen as a social tool that clearly shows that spirituality is sufficient enough to rehabilitate and reform everyone in as much as they seek it (religion) and are ready to go by its dictates. According to Syed Anwer Ali, “religion is not a mere code of belief and prayers. It is in fact a complete code of life which satisfies the human mind regarding the ultimate problems relating to the existence and nature of reality, creation, control, and end of the universe, development of the individual personality and establishment of social institutions based on principles of morality, decency and discipline”. We should note that since religion is always associated with the solution of man’s inexplicable problems, as long as such problems continue to exist, religion will remain a characteristic of human cultures.

Since we have recognized religion as a social tool for rehabilitation, this work is aimed at addressing a missing gap which is “The impact of Islam as a social tool for reforming the inmates of If prison”.

1.2. Aim of the Study

It is a well-known fact that religion is a characteristic of human life and that man is generally considered to be incurably religious. Therefore, religion is a factor that cannot be left out in the study of any aspect of human life. It should also be emphasized that religion permeates the whole life of man, it tells him about his Creator (the Almighty God), as well as informs him about the aim and ultimate end of life. In addition, it teaches man how to achieve the success of life on earth and in the hereafter. To the religious people, the dictates of religion are divine, complete, universal and final. They bring solace to the human mind from its multifarious problems and provide it with the fundamental principles that will secure for its success and near perfection, recognizing that God Almighty Alone is perfect.

A typical Nigerian is obsessed with religion to the extent that Nigerians have been identified to be one of the „most religious“ people in the sub-Saharan continent. As the largest African country with a population of over 182 million in 2015, it is nearly equally divided between the Christians and Muslims, though the exact ratio is uncertain. The majorities of Nigerian Muslims are Sunni and are concentrated in the northern area of the country, while Christians dominate in the Middle Belt and south.

Unfortunately, despite the high presence of religion in Nigeria, crime and criminality is on the increase day and night. Even though crime is against the basic teachings of any religion, but these supposed religious people still continue to perpetrate crime. A time comes when they get locked up behind bars and these inmates many times desire to seek support from somewhere which can be inform of social, physical or spiritual support in order to be able to cope with the challenges they encounter while serving their jail term. This support can be gained through various means such as drug addiction in order to gain a social and powerful status within the walls of the prisons, brutality towards weak inmates and other similar acts while some engage in meditation and building spirituality in order to gain inner peace and peace with all creation.

Generally, religion has its way of relieving people of their pains, agony and distress while giving hope to people even when all hope appears to be lost. It serves as a supporter and comforter for those who are willing to seek it.

The main aim of this study is to determine the impact of Islam in reforming the inmates of If prison.

1.3. Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of the study are:

- 1.To know if Islam is actually relevant within the walls of If prison;
- 2.To know how the strong presence of Islam in Nigeria has helped in reforming the inmates of If prison;
- 3.To ascertain the result of the reform whether it has been successful or not.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

“The Impact of Islam as a social tool for reforming the inmates of If prison” is a topic of study which little or nothing has been written and therefore, this work will fill that gap. Islam plays an important role in the lives of both Muslims and non-Muslims; however, lack of empirical research makes it difficult to find out how much impact Islam has in the lives of prison inmates in general. Numerous Nigerian researchers have studied the different types of reformation of inmates in prisons (Nwolise, 2010; Attere,2000; Okunola, 1986); however, very few studies investigate the effectiveness and impact of religion on reforming inmates in Nigerian prisons.

Akunesiobike (2016) studied the role of religious groups in offender reformation in Port Harcourt prisons. He examined the association between religious activities and practices with inmates’ character reformation. He also investigated the challenges faced by religious groups in reforming law-offenders. The findings of the study showed that deep character reformation among Port Harcourt inmates is dependent on the religious groups’ dedication in reforming the inmates. His study was focused on the Christian religion as a reformation tool for inmates of Port Harcourt, Rivers State. His study concluded that prisoners who participate in religious activities are likely to derive more significant benefits both while in prison and post-release.

Bolkas (2000) studied the significance of Christianity in reforming prisoners whereby prisoners and ex-prisoners in Victoria, Australia were interviewed. The study investigated whether Christianity has being a form of reformation in the character of prisoners who considered themselves „genuine“ Christians. The researcher examined the prisoners’ religious backgrounds and whether Christianity has benefited them or hindered them. The findings of the study concluded that while religious belief/practice had an impact in reforming prison inmates, Christian prisoners and ex-prisoners generally did not receive enough support, which had the ability to foil their faith/reformation prospects.

The available literature carried out in connection with Muslim prisoners mostly highlights general issues, concerns, difficulties and crimes that had been expressed towards members of an ethnic minority inside the prison (Mahmood T., n.d). The other type of literature highlights only the negative aspect of Muslim prisoners’ religiosity. This last group of studies often depicts Islam and Muslims as dangerous to the safety of the societies of the world, especially towards the West. This may be based on naivety, lack of information, media’s Islamophobic reaction or hatred toward Islam but appears to somewhat produce counter-productive results in prison settings. Proportionately only a small amount of literature focuses on Muslim prisoners’ religiosity and issues related to their ideology and faith embedded identity. There are some general studies that only focuses on the general social issues of ex-prisoners and does not engage with how Muslim prisoners interpret and utilize Islam within the challenging and sensitive context of the prison service.

Awojide O. D. (2007) researched on the prisons at Ilesha and Ilé-If respectively by with the title: “A study of the impact of faith based organizations on prisons in Osun state”. He concluded that through the efforts of faith based organizations, ex-convicts who have availed themselves with the chance of a new life offered by these religious groups and the prison authority have come out to become changed persons and law abiding citizens. With the aid of this successful piece of work, my own research aims at taking the study of Nigerian prisons to the next level while laying emphasis on Islam.

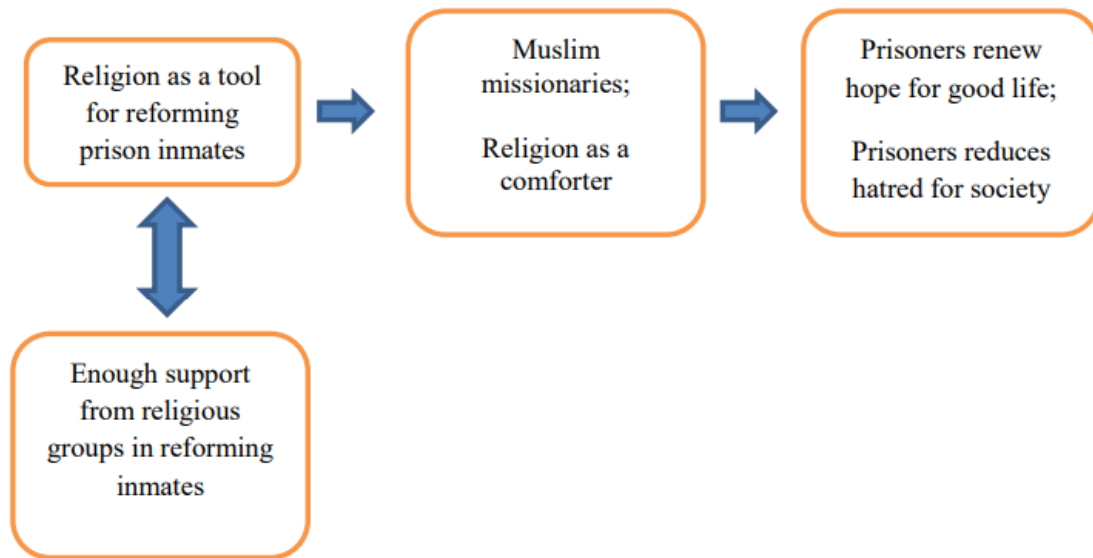


Fig 1. Conceptual framework of the Study

3. METHODOLOGY

During the course of this work, the prison under study was visited; oral interviews were taken at the prison from the prison authorities while questionnaires were issued to the inmates respectively. The necessary information needed to be gotten from the inmates has been done by the means of the close ended type of questionnaire with careful exertions. Consultations have also been made with scholars of religion, educationists and more.

Another important source of data collection include research work of Scholars of religion and students, published and unpublished works, Newspapers and records from Muslim missionary groups and organizations. An objective analysis of the data collected was done and the information provided is critically discussed.

4. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Socio-Demographic Characteristic of Respondents

Table 1. Gender (Source: The If prison field survey, 2016)

Sex	Frequency	Percentage(%)
Male	20	100.0

Female	0	0.0
Total	20	100

Gender: Table 1 shows that the respondents were only males from a male prison.

Religion: Results showed 75.0% of the respondents are Christians; 20.0% of the respondents are Muslims while 5.0% of the respondents belong to another faith besides Christianity and Islam.

Age: The results revealed that 50.0% (majority) of the respondents were between ages 21-29; 30% were between ages 40-49; 10.0% are between ages 30-39; while ages 18-20 and ages 50-above shared the same percent, which was 5% each.

Marital status: The study revealed that the respondents' marital status was same. Both single and married variables have the same percentage. That is to say, all the respondents are either single or married. This implies that none of the prison inmate is a product of marital conflict or other related vices. Occupation: 55% (majority) of the respondents were self-employed, while 45% were students.

The Presence of Islam Among The Inmates of If Prison

Table 2. The presence of Islam among the inmates of If prison

Variable	Yes Frequency (%)	No Frequency (%)
Do you think the Muslim inmates of Ife prison are more than the non-Muslims?	6(30%)	14(70%)
Are the Muslim inmates Practicing Muslims?	15(75%)	5(25%)
Do you think these Muslims were Practicing Muslims before they came into prison?	13(65%)	7(35%)
Are the practicing Muslim inmates better than the non-practicing Muslim inmates?	14(70%)	6(30%)

Table 2 above revealed that 30% of the respondents are of the opinion that Muslim inmates are more than their counterpart while 70% of other respondents said Muslim inmates are in the minority compared to their non-Muslim counterpart. Also, 75% of respondents asserted that the Muslim inmates are practicing Muslims but 25% stated that the Muslim inmates are not practicing Muslims. Also, 65% affirmed that the Muslim inmates have been practicing Islam before they came into prison while 35% said they only started practicing Islam when they came into prison. 70% of the respondents said practicing Muslim inmates are better than the non-practicing Muslim inmates while 30% of respondents think otherwise. From the representation above, it is obvious that Muslim inmates are in minority compared to other faiths.

THE RELEVANCE OF ISLAM AMONG THE INMATES OF IF PRISON

Table 3. The relevance of Islam among the inmates of Ife prison

Variable	Yes Frequency(%)	No Frequency(%)
Is religion relevant/important in the life of inmates of Ife prison?	13(65%)	7(35%)
If yes, which religion?		40%
Islam	8	50%
Christian	10	10%
Others	2	
Are there new Muslim converts in Ife prison?	12(60%)	8(40%)

Table 3 above reveals importance of religion among the prison inmates. 65% (majority) of the respondents said religion is important in the life of inmates of Ife prison while 35% believe it is not. Again when the question was asked to know which religion is relevant among the prison inmates, 40% said Islam, 50% said Christianity while 10% of respondents said others faiths apart from Islam and Christianity. 60% also said there are Muslim converts in Ife prison but 40% said otherwise. The information above suggests that, religion is very essential in the life of the inmates in Ife prison as it is evident in the 65% recorded from the respondents and also that Christianity and Islam are the most relevant religion in the prison.

Impact of Islam in Reforming Inmates of if Prisons

Variable	Yes Frequency (%)	No Frequency (%)
Have Muslim missionaries been coming?	18(90%)	2(10%)
If yes, how regular?		
Very regular	7	35%
Regular	8	40%
Not regular	5	25%
Has this improved your likeness for Islam?	12(60%)	8(40%)
Has Islam reformed the Muslim inmates of Ife` Prison?	14(70%)	6(30%)

Are Muslim inmates well taken care of during Ramadan?	18(90%)	2(10%)
Are there non-Muslim inmates who also fast during Ramadan with the Muslims?	17(85%)	3 (15%)

Table 4 above reveals the impact of Islam in reforming inmates of If prison. According to 90% of the respondents, Muslim missionaries have been coming to prison to visit them but 10% think otherwise. About the regularity of the Muslim missionaries, 35% of the respondents think they are “very regular”, 40% think they are just “regular” while 25% think they are “not regular”. Also, 60% of the respondents said the visit of Muslim missionaries has increased their likeness for Islam but 40% said no. Another 70% of the respondents said Islam has reformed the Muslim inmates but 30% think it has not. Not only that, 90% of the respondents said Muslim inmates are well taken care of during Ramadan while 10% say they are not. Also, 85% of the respondents said there are non-Muslims who fast with the Muslims during the month of Ramadan.

5. DISCUSSION

The information gotten above suggests that Islam has a great impact in the life of the inmates of If prison, both Muslims and non-Muslims. Both Muslims and non-Muslims alike attested to the fact that Muslim missionaries have been visiting the If prison is a pointer to the fact that Islam does not neglect the prison inmates and its adherents are concerned about the well-being of inmates. Another instance to buttress this fact is that, non-Muslims are of the opinion that the visit of Muslim missionaries has increased their likeness for Islam. This implies that the missionaries must have been engaging them in heart to heart discussions, showing them love, care and kindness, educating them about Islam and giving them gifts even though they are non-Muslims.

Furthermore, it is also noted from the interpretation above that Muslim inmates are well taken care of during Ramadan. If this is anything to go by, we might as well assume that this is the reason why some non-Muslims are motivated to join the Muslims in fasting. Not only that, for non-Muslim inmates to fast during Ramadan also shows that Islam really has a great impact on the lives of the prison inmates both Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

In conclusion from this research study, Religion is a very relevant tool for reforming inmates in If prison and Christianity is the most relevant religion, and then followed by Islam. Islam has actually been very useful in reforming the inmates of If prison. Although some ex-convicts result back to crime the moment they are released but several ex-convicts especially those who received good spiritual, financial and intellectual support, turned a new leaf, became successful and are now models worthy of emulation in the society.

From this research study, some recommendations have been identified and they include the following:

1. The present practice of housing those detained and awaiting trial in prisons needs to be stopped. In other words, an alternative to imprisonment should be found and this may necessitate the need to revise penal codes.
2. The great effort of Muslim missionaries and Muslim organizations towards reforming the inmates of Ife prison cannot be over emphasized but these organizations lack the financial wherewithal to do more. Therefore, assistance from the government, private firms, international organizations and good hearted individuals would be very helpful.
3. The government has a duty to scrutinize the programs, trainings and workshops that are done in the prison so as to know those that are really beneficial to the inmates and invest more in them.
4. Citizens themselves have to show concern to the problem of crime in their various societies because this cannot be solved alone by the government without the support of the people.
5. The Ife prison requires more trained staffs to carry out their respective duties. It is not the same to have staffs who just took up a job because they have nothing doing.
6. The government should always try to encourage the staffs of the prison service with various incentives such as upgrading their salaries, paying them on time and so on.
7. The prison seems to be either poorly funded by the government or the top officials are misappropriating the funds, this angle should be critically examined by the government.

REFERENCES

- [1] Akunesiobike C. A. (2016). The role of religious groups in offender reformation: A Study of the Port Harcourt Prison in Rivers State, Nigeria. *Africology: The Journal of Pan African Studies*, 9(10).
- [2] Awojide O. D. (2007). A study of the impact of faith based organisations on prisons in Osun state” department of religious studies.
- [3] Bolkas, A. J. (2000). The significance of Christianity in „reforming“ prisoners, an M.A Dissertation submitted to The Department of Criminology, University of Melbourne.
- [4] Champion J. (2007). “Prison.” Microsoft in Encarta, p.12.
- [5] Danielle A. S. (2000). "Punishment in Ancient Athens". Harvard University, Center for Hellenic Studies.
- [6] Gunathilake & Edirisinghe (2010). Role of Religion in the Rehabilitation of Offenders University of Kelaniya press, Sri Lanka.
- [7] Inciardi J. A. (2005). Criminal justice. Academic press.
- [8] Mahmood T. (n.d.), “An Islamic Approach to Rehabilitation of Muslim prisoners: An Empirical Case Study”, Retrieved May 22, 2016 from http://stmichaels.ac.uk/news/wpcontent/uploads/Tariq_Mahmood_Islamic_approach_to_rehabilitation_of_Muslim_prisoners.pdf. Pg 2.
- [9] Michael P. (2006). Prisons and Prison Systems: A Global Encyclopedia. Greenwood Publishing. p. xxvi.
- [10] Michael W. (2004). "A Social History of Punishment and Corrections". Corrections: A Critical Approach. McGraw-Hill.
- [11] Okunola R (1986). Institutional Treatment and Social Stigma: A Comparative Study of Amanawa Leprosarium and Sokoto Prisons. Sokoto: F. S. S. A Research Publication, University of Sokoto.
- [12] Olayemi M. O., Olugbenga D. A., & Oluokun O. N. (2019) A study of biblical approach to conflict management in the family among postgraduate students of babcock university, Ilishan-remo, Ogun State. *International Journal of Humanities, Art and Social Studies*, 4(1).
- [13] Spierenburg P. (1998). "The Body and The State: Early Modern Europe". Oxford University Press. p. 44.
- [14] World Population Prospectus (2015). Revision (PDF). Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations. 2015. p. 21.