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Offender eLearning: A systematic literature review on re-entry, recidivism, and life after prison

Gilbert Mahlangu and Eugenia Zivani

Abstract: Several studies have been conducted on education in the discourse of offender rehabilitation; however, little has been published on the nexus between offender eLearning and re-entry into a digital society. This study aimed to systematically review the existing literature on offender education focusing mainly on

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Gilbert Mahlangu is a holder of a Doctor of Information and Communication Technology from Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT), South Africa. He is currently a Lecturer in the Department of Information and Marketing Sciences at the Midlands State University, Zimbabwe. He teaches Informatics and Business modules. These include but are not limited to Data structures and Algorithms, Research in Data science and Informatics; Strategic Information Management and E-business, Strategy, and Innovation Management; Innovation and design thinking, Advanced Project Management and Applied Research Methods. His research interests are Digital inclusion; Digital transformation; Innovation and design thinking and Cyber offender behaviour. He participates in policy development for ICT in Agriculture and different presentations supporting ICTs at the university and national levels.

Eugenia Zivani is an ICT Officer employed by Zimbabwe's Corrections Department with working experience in Computer Networks and Systems Design. A holder of a Bachelor of Technology in Information Technology (HIT) and Master of Commerce in Information Systems Management from the Midlands State University-Zimbabwe. My area of interest is digital inclusion in marginalized communities such as inmates and rural communities in developing countries and Cyber offender behaviour. My vision is to pursue this journey of research in the area of digital inclusion/exclusion and come up with recommendations for the digital inclusion of those populations.

PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

The concept of education in prison within the discourse of offender rehabilitation is not a new phenomenon. Education in prison is one of the best opportunities present for offenders to receive the appropriate interventions needed to assist them in being able to successfully re-enter their ever-changing communities. The adoption of technology in correctional facilities could be seen as a causal precondition for the implementation of digital rehabilitation. Education in prison in the era of digital societies should embrace information technology so that together with rehabilitation efforts it may be seen as compatible endeavours in successful re-entry. Digital prison education gives offenders a purpose for their time in imprisonment as well as prepares them for life after prison. Thus, engaging in digital learning platforms and the greater inclusion of technology in prisons can enhance educational opportunities and inclusive experiences for isolated learners.
eLearning to explain how offender eLearning enables re-entry, reduces recidivism, and promotes a better post-release life. The review draws on the good lives model (GLM) of offender rehabilitation and the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM). Both theories acknowledge the paradox of digital inclusion in offender rehabilitation. We found that online education, facilitated by digital platforms, is a chance for offenders to learn new information and develop their abilities, presuming that the demand for education and training in prisons must be comparable to that of traditional educational institutions. Digital prison education gives inmates a purpose for their time in imprisonment as well as prepares them for life after prison. We conclude that technology cannot replace good teaching in offender rehabilitation; it can only support it. Moreover, the mere presence of the most innovative, mobile, user-friendly technology will not improve access and outcomes if the users on the ground do not have the time, space, resources, energy, and motivation to engage it. We, therefore, recommend that the technology for offender rehabilitation must be highly contextualized to ensure the long-term accomplishment of eLearning initiatives aimed at non-traditional and isolated students.

**Subjects:** Information Technology; Education - Social Sciences; Criminology and Criminal Justice

**Keywords:** re-entry; life after prison; eLearning technologies; offender education/eLearning; information communication technologies (ICTs)

1. **Introduction**

   The concept of education in prison within the discourse of offender rehabilitation is not a new phenomenon (Allred et al., 2020; Curtis et al., 2021; Gould et al., 2015; Hughes, 2016; Pestka, 2020); it predates the establishment itself (Geyer & Lawrence, 2003; Hall, 2015; Ohara et al., 2020). Several studies have been conducted on education in the discourse of offender rehabilitation (Addae, 2020; Badejo & Chakraborty, 2022a; Becker-Pestka, 2022; Burke & Vivian, 2001; Dennis & Halbert, 2022; Izuchukwu et al., 2021; Mihaylova & Peytcheva-Forsyth, 2022; Phulpoto et al., 2021; Riaz Raza et al., 2021; Tanaka & Cooper, 2020; Ward & Brown, 2004); however, little have been published on the nexus between offender eLearning and re-entry into a digital society. Research done so far has fallen into the trap of emphasising the significance of offender eLearning for preventing recidivism and preparing for re-entry (Adeyeye, 2019a; Barrow et al., 2018; Dennis & Halbert, 2022; Farley et al., 2019; Pamungkas, 2020; Pulido, 2021; Seo et al., 2021; Willems et al., 2018). There is a lack of research and knowledge relating to eLearning in the correctional field (Becker-Pestka, 2021; Behan, 2014; Crabbe, 2016; Hammerschick, 2010; Higgins, 2021, 2021; Jovanić, 2011; Rivera, 2020; Vandała & Bendall, 2019).

   Offender eLearning is the practice of offering educational and training opportunities to those who have been convicted of crimes using digital technology and resources. Online courses, video lectures, interactive simulations, and other types of multimedia content are just a few examples of the many ways that this kind of learning can be delivered. Offender eLearning courses can cover a variety of subjects, from fundamental literacy and numeracy skills to job readiness and vocational training. Some programmes might also emphasise stress management, drug rehabilitation, or other types of therapy meant to lower recidivism rates. However, it is important to note that offender eLearning is not a universal solution to the challenges facing the criminal justice system. It is just one tool among many that can help support rehabilitation and reduce recidivism rates. Thus, effective offender eLearning programmes must be thoroughly planned and carried out with the input of the experts in offender rehabilitation, and they must be customised to match the unique needs of individual offenders.
In this study, we systematically review the existing literature on offender education focusing mainly on eLearning to explain how offender eLearning enables re-entry, reduces recidivism, and provides a better post-release life; therefore, reducing overcrowding in prisons and cutting government expenditures on offender welfare. To our best knowledge, this research is the first comprehensive literature review on offender rehabilitation that incorporates the offender rehabilitation main result outcomes: re-entry, recidivism, and life after prison. The review draws on the good lives model (GLM) of offender rehabilitation by Ward et al. (2007) and Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (Davis, 1989). Both theories acknowledge the paradox of digital inclusion in offender rehabilitation—finding a balance between prison security and the acceptance of the eLearning system with the prison facilities as a precondition to satisfactory rehabilitation.

2. Theoretical framework
As indicated in the previous section, this study is underpinned in a dual theoretical framework: the GLM and the TAM to determine how best eLearning technology can be implemented in prisons for offender rehabilitation, considering the perceived outcomes, usefulness, ease of use as fundamental determinants of user acceptance of a given Information Technology platform. According to GLM, offender rehabilitation consists of four dimensions: the importance of adopting a positive approach to treatment; the relationship between risk management and good lives; causal preconditions of therapy; and the impact of therapists’ attitudes toward offenders (Ward & Brown, 2004; Ward et al., 2007). In their view on offender rehabilitation, Ward et al. (2007) pointed out that a good rehabilitation intervention should help offenders achieve valued or personally satisfying outcomes. As suggested by Ward et al. (2007) a rehabilitation program should give offenders the knowledge, skills, chances, and resources they need to fulfill their personal beliefs in ways that do not damage others. Rehabilitation should, therefore, be customised to each offender’s unique GLM and should only aim to establish the internal and external circumstances necessary for realising it. On the other hand, TAM is based on two variables: perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use. In this context, perceived usefulness is defined the degree to which it is believed that using offender eLearning will enhance re-entry. In contrast, perceived ease of use refers to the extent to which it is believed that using offender eLearning would be free of effort.

Therefore, using the lens of GLM and TAM, offender eLearning will ensure that incarcerated tertiary students are not isolated or left behind by their peers. Collectively the two models explain the nexus between offender eLearning and digital education in prison which can help to effectively prepare offenders for community reintegration upon release. The adoption of technology in prisons could be seen as a causal precondition for the implementation of offender eLearning. Thus, education in prison in the era of digital societies should embrace offender eLearning systems so that together with rehabilitation efforts it may be seen as compatible endeavours in re-entry. Additionally, offender rehabilitation programs should place less emphasis on recidivism and rather on securing the right to a modern education by offering digital education to the most vulnerable students (Pulido, 2021). This in turn fosters the social rehabilitation required for a transition back into the digital society. As a result, both teaching staff and students must make substantial use of online materials, telematic tools for communication and cooperation, and Internet devices and connections for the process of the digital transformation of education to be effective. Additionally, it demands extensive usage of ICT in non-presential settings such as classrooms.

Recently, Badejo and Chakraborty (2022) argued that since the main objective of rehabilitation programmes for offenders is to create well-rounded individuals who can integrate into society once they are released, using technology in prisons inspires incarcerated students to succeed in life after incarceration. Nevertheless, about the GLM, while adopting technology within the prisons, authorities should weigh the relationship between the security risks of offender eLearning and the good lives of digital learning experiences for incarcerated students. Subsequently, students will be prepared to use technology when they return to their communities. Consequently, eLearning is thought of as a part of rehabilitation, which seeks to provide offenders with skills and self-esteem. Offenders, like the rest of society, actively strive to satisfy
their ideals through whatever channels are provided to them by prison officials. The use of technology interventions is thus governed by TAM, which considers both internal and external considerations including security, resources, societal influences, and the target users of the eLearning platform.

Additionally, this study applies theories by researchers in this field (Addae, 2020; Badejo & Chakrabarty, 2022; Burke & Vivian, 2001; Earle et al., 2020; Hayzaki & Nurhaeni, 2018; Phulpoto et al., 2021; Pulido, 2021; Rosmilawati, 2020; Seo et al., 2021; Tanaka & Cooper, 2020; Thouin, 2021; Zitko, 2021), highlighting the effect of eLearning on re-entry, life after prison and recidivism. Considering this, the main research question is addressed by combining the Ward et al. (2007) GLM, TAM, and research theories by researchers in this field of study.

How does offender eLearning influence re-entry, good life after release and reduce recidivism?

The following objectives are formulated to answer the main research question:

- To explore how eLearning technologies can be used for offender education.
- To establish how eLearning for offenders influence re-entry, good life after release, and reduces recidivism.

3. Methodology

According to Webster and Watson (2002), a review of prior, relevant literature is an essential feature of any academic project; hence, an effective review creates a firm foundation for advancing knowledge. It facilitates theory development, closes areas where a plethora of research exists, and uncovers areas where research is needed. The authors further asserted that a methodological review of past literature is a crucial endeavour for any academic research work with the purpose to uncover what is already known in the body of knowledge before initiating any research study. As a result, this systematic review aimed to collect information that satisfies predetermined eligibility requirements and provides an answer to the stated research question.

There are several approaches available for doing systematic literature reviews, however, the authors chose the SLR method by Xiao and Watson (2019) because it offers an extensive, step-by-step process. The Xiao and Watson (2019)’s guidelines can be divided into four phases: develop and validate the review protocol; search the literature; screen for inclusion; perform the review process; and report the findings as follows:

4. Phase 1

The information to answer the main research question was gathered from Google Scholar, SCOPUS, JSTOR, ProQuest, Wiley Online Library, and Sage. The different databases were searched to avoid missing any valuable articles related to the topic. Search string and Boolean operators included the use of parentheses for each of the following suitable keywords separately: “eLearning for offender rehabilitation”, “eLearning for offenders”, “eLearning for prisoners”, “eLearning technologies for incarcerated people”, “eLearning for inmates”, “technologies for distance education in prisons”, “eLearning for rehabilitation of prisoners”, “eLearning in prisons”, “Education for offenders”, or some combination that involve other related words were included in the shortlist. The first inclusion criterion, therefore, considers articles published in the last five years (2018–2022). The process gathered a total of 74 articles (see Figure 1). We restricted the search to only articles with correctional education and eLearning to reduce the number of hits and save time in screening articles for eligibility. Since there is a lot of published research on correctional education from many perspectives, the main goal of limiting the hits to the exact scope was to concentrate on correctional education from a digital rehabilitation perspective. These articles were then processed using Mendeley reference management software capable of removing duplicates.
5. Phase 2: eligibility criteria
Several criteria are used to assess the included studies’ quality. Since the study's goal was to examine the literature on eLearning for offenders/prisoners, it was essential to use a systematic review technique to weed out irrelevant publications based on eligibility criteria. First, studies eligible for inclusion either quantitatively, qualitatively, or both examined prison education and eLearning in prison facilities across the globe. As can be seen in Figure 1, more articles (29) were drawn from the United States, followed by the UK (6), Spain (5), South Africa (4), and Australia (4). The flow diagram in Figure 2 represents the second aspect, which is more particular to the included research. The inclusion and exclusion criteria for the research under consideration are generally summarised in this Figure.

The inclusion criteria were developed with the aid of the exclusion criteria so that 74 papers could be screened into 56 papers. In other words, only 56 papers were chosen after screening the titles because the others lacked any of the important search phrases. The 56 papers were further assessed for eligibility and reduced to 39 papers. Thus, only 39 papers were included in the systematic literature review since they were found to be relevant and valid. The SPIDER tool, which allows for greater precision and a final judgement on whether to include the studies in this review, is the third part that is more in-depth. The sample, phenomenon of interest, design, evaluation, and study type are all included in this instrument. The selected sampling comprised human samples such as ex-offenders, inmates, prison officials, juvenile offenders, and participants in randomised clinical studies for offender rehabilitation. All the included studies examined correctional education in contemporary rehabilitation. Regarding the phenomenon of interest, the 39 papers can be divided into three categories (see Table 1). Offender Education; Offender eLearning Outcomes and Prison Policy on eLearning. The purpose of this classification was to find a nexus between offender eLearning and re-entry and whether digital education in prison can help to prepare offenders for community reintegration upon release. In terms of the design, the included articles used case studies, surveys, focus group discussions, semi-structured interviews, observations, structured questionnaires, experimental designs, and systematic reviews.

The type of outcome was determined using four evaluation criteria: positive, negative, intended, and unintended. The type of measure employed in the data collection and presentation of the data was utilised to determine the nature of the study because researchers frequently use interchangeable research terminology. Source, date, researcher identity, and context were also added, along with full and interesting abstracts. Exclusion of the studies that did not have all this data allowed for precise quality control of the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Additionally, non-English articles were also filtered.
6. Phase 3
This stage focuses on thoroughly reading, analysing, and drawing conclusions from pertinent publications that were gathered and selected considering the research question and objectives.

6.1. Results
This review intended to ascertain how eLearning may give offenders the information and credentials that will improve their re-entry process, their means of support once they are released and diminish their inclination to commit crimes again. The review also analyses how prison regulations allow programs for offender education and online learning. Therefore, achieving these objectives will result in the enhancement of prison education programmes to incorporate eLearning technologies that produce skilled and qualified ex-offenders. Further, in this section, the offender eLearning factors are discussed.
What is offender eLearning?

The term eLearning refers to information and communication technology (ICT) for virtual learning (Dennis & Halbert, 2022). In general, eLearning denotes the use of a fully integrated system by students, who log in with their password and have access to all services, functions, actions, and information related to their education from a single educational environment, through which they engage in all asynchronous and modern eLearning processes (Ali, 2019). The growth of eLearning in the field of offender learning gives a significant chance to investigate such “non-traditional” approaches as a way to help offenders overcome learning obstacles. Dennis and Halbert (2022) highlighted that the traditional lecture room environment is being replaced by an environment focused on knowledge production called the Virtual Learning Setting and online classrooms. Thus, online education, facilitated by digital platforms, is a chance for offenders to learn new information.

### Table 1. Cross-analysis of factors collected from offender eLearning literature

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Offender Education</th>
<th>Offender eLearning Outcomes</th>
<th>Prison Policy on eLearning</th>
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<td>Re-entry</td>
<td>Life After Prison</td>
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and develop their abilities, presuming that the demand for education and training in prisons must be comparable to that of traditional educational institutions (Moreira & Dias-Trindade, 2020).

However, eLearning professionals tend to build their courses based on the supposition that their students will have simple access to the internet and other suitable equipment. This is not always the situation, especially for marginalised populations like incarcerated offenders. Likewise, previous research has established that incarcerated people are among the most marginalised since they have no direct access to the internet, smartphones, or internet-enabled devices which means they are disconnected from social media and other networked communication platforms (Badejo & Chakraborty, 2022a; Becker-Pestka, 2022; Hopkins, 2022; Mihaylova & Peytcheva-Forsyth, 2022; Riaz Raza et al., 2021; Tanaka & Cooper, 2020; Zivanai & Mahlangu, 2022). Similarly, several studies show that most offenders cannot access the internet directly, thus they must rely on education officers to print out authorised online educational resources for them when they need them if they are accessible (Farley et al., 2016, 2019; Pillera & Farley, 2015; Willems et al., 2018). It is therefore noted that many prisons have qualms regarding education delivered through computers and the Internet due to security concerns.

6.2.1. Justification for offender eLearning
The use of eLearning technologies and platforms by educational institutions worldwide is having a significant impact on the eLearning of offenders. The ability of incarcerated students to access online learning in prison-based schools is anticipated to change the criminal justice system in the future (Rosmilawati, 2020). Potentially constructing the proper technical tools and modifying the teaching models in the prison process will change the role of the teacher, the issues of organizational class, the teaching and learning processes, and the mechanisms of contact (Ali, 2019). Access to the internet while in detention has the power to transform education and increase participation in secure environments. According to Pulido (2021), there are several advantages to online education in a prison setting. It is undeniable that the digital world, information, and communication technologies (ICTs), and the Internet are seen as ways to enhance and promote people’s autonomy as well as a participatory element that fosters social cohesion. They are also seen as integral to the effective right to education and as having a positive impact on the reintegration into society of vulnerable people, including those who are incarcerated.

Furthermore, Pulido (2021) argues that today’s society is characterised by the transition from the analogue to the digital age. No area of the human, personal and social sphere is conceivable without the intervention of digitalisation. The prevention of isolation in the “communication society,” in which the world is becoming more informed and globalized, is one advantage of integrating ICT into the educational process for inmate students (Rosmilawati, 2020). Digital prison education gives inmates a purpose for their time in imprisonment as well as prepares them for life after prison (Riaz Raza et al., 2021). The students who are incarcerated should have access to the same technologies used in typical classrooms so they can advance in their education (Barrow et al., 2018; Carvalho et al., 2021; Garner, 2019; Moreira & Dias-Trindade, 2020). The idea of digital education in prison acknowledges the offender as a person capable of engaging in primary academic, vocational, health, cultural, and social education and not just in the limited number of programs that are now available (Badejo & Chakraborty, 2022a; Becker-Pestka, 2022; Mihaylova & Peytcheva-Forsyth, 2022; Riaz Raza et al., 2021; Tanaka & Cooper, 2020). Employing online learning to educate offenders offers the ability to give them equal educational opportunities while also delivering instructions that can be tailored to their requirements (Becker-Pestka, 2022).

eLearning is a very adaptable teaching method that aids in removing geographical and educational barriers (Badejo & Chakraborty, 2022a; Becker-Pestka, 2022; Mihaylova & Peytcheva-Forsyth, 2022). With the use of online learning, the prison education system seeks to give offenders access to a greater variety of courses and make it simple for them to continue their education when they have to transfer to another prison (Rosmilawati, 2020). Offenders have the option to learn online through the use of digital platforms since they can use the technologies available to them in their
confined settings (Moreira & Dias-Trindade, 2020). The development of digital proficiency, which has been cited by the European Commission as one of the most crucial competencies for genuine social integration, should therefore be included in the education that offenders have access to (Pulido, 2021).

New technologies, therefore, will enable offenders to acquire and develop suitable skills and competencies, aid in the promotion of education in prisons, and prevent the phenomena of digital exclusion (Becker-Pestka, 2022). For example, as prisons and programs had halted programming to minimize the chance of spreading the virus within the prison system during the COVID-19 era, higher education in prison programs have had to figure out how to switch to a remote model of supporting rehabilitation programmes (Tanaka & Cooper, 2020). It is suggested that the adoption of digital technology in offender rehabilitation will provide a chance to stop the digital divide from contributing to social exclusion (Pulido, 2021). Thus, engaging in digital learning platforms and the greater inclusion of technology in prisons can enhance educational opportunities and inclusive experiences for isolated learners.

6.2.2. Impact of offender eLearning on life after release
The adoption of technology gives offenders newfound impetus and rekindles their dreams of making a positive difference in society (Badejo & Chakraborty, 2022b). Considering the enormous technological advancement, the need to educate offenders for life outside of prison, the open job market, and lifelong learning, it also appears that eLearning will play an unavoidable role in the education of prisoners (Becker-Pestka, 2022). Access to education by offenders should involve not only the development of skills in areas that may be useful for their reintegration into the community but also in digital proficiency, which is one of the most important competencies for real social integration (Becker-Pestka, 2022; Garner, 2019; Mihaylova & Peytcheva-Forsyth, 2022; Moreira & Dias-Trindade, 2020; Pulido, 2021; Riaz Raza et al., 2021). If they are to thrive from a personal, employment, social, and cultural perspective, it is crucial to provide this diverse group of offenders with learning technologies that are pertinent to modern society (Barrow et al., 2018). Consequently, blended learning is committed to lifelong learning, enabling students to continue growing and using resources that offer opportunities to acquire new skills, social competencies, and certificates (Becker-Pestka, 2022). For this reason, it is necessary to allow a positive learning environment to be championed in prisons. Therefore, to ensure offenders’ effective re-entry and a better life after prison, they must be given access to eLearning programs while serving their sentences, regardless of the length of the sentence.

6.2.3. Prison policies on eLearning
Riaz Raza et al. (2021) noted that prisons’ purposes had evolved from punishment to reform, correction, cure, and readjustment to society; hence, many committees and commissions were established to carry out the reformation of offender rehabilitation. Education is conceived in spatial and temporal coordinates that are alien to life in prison and often clash with economic or security and order-related contradictions that frustrate the right to education (Pulido, 2021). There is a consensus that people working in the criminal justice system must make sure that offenders have the same levels of literacy and numeracy as the general community (Amiri et al., 2021a; Dewey et al., 2020; Earle et al., 2020; Mihaylova & Peytcheva-Forsyth, 2022; Phulpoto et al., 2021; Pulido, 2021; Willems et al., 2018; Zitko, 2021). According to Zivanai and Mahluang (2022), prison policies that are out of touch with the outside world and societal advancements like the exponential development of digital usage are insufficient because they do not prepare prisoners for a transition back into society. In short, the binomial education and digital can no longer be dissociated, the digital reality being a transversal instrument to the different rights, including especially the right to education (Pulido, 2021). The goal of digital prison rehabilitation programs like eLearning should be better understood by policymakers and practitioners. However, the majority of correctional facilities throughout the world prevent prisoners from directly accessing the internet, further disadvantaging this segment of the population, as tertiary education institutions use blended learning (Willems et al., 2018).

There is a critical need for reforming the outdated approach to correctional education used in many institutions around the globe. Redesigning current learning models to properly embrace contemporary
technologies and learning materials is necessary to maximise the advantages of educating incarcerated pupils (Zitko, 2021). The effective implementation of these changes in prisons, particularly those geared at the re-socialization, reconstruction, and rehabilitation of offenders, can result in improved societal cohesion and a sharp decline in crime rates (Thouin, 2021). It is vital to incorporate digital education as one of the fundamental components for the proper realization of the right to education since education in contemporary prison rehabilitation cannot be understood without the existence of the digital world (Pulido, 2021). Regarding this, the public and educational policy should be informed about the use of ICT tools in prison education and reminded that these should not be used as “leisure tools” for students who are incarcerated (Rosmilawati, 2020). Therefore, policymakers and practitioners in prison rehabilitation should integrate corrections policies and practice on offender rehabilitation with digital transformation because society has moved to a digital era and now largely relies on technology for essential services (Zivanai & Mahlangu, 2022a).

6.2.4. Effect of offender eLearning on prison atmosphere

eLearning is used in prisons to stop the “digital exclusion” phenomenon. Recently, the use of eLearning contributed to preventing the spread of the Coronavirus by keeping inmates and teachers in their respective locations while the teaching process continued (Becker-Pestka, 2022). About the opportunities provided by eLearning to improve the professional qualifications of prisoners, this positive trend is maintained, and the opinions on the impact of eLearning in this regard are optimistic (Mihaylova Mihaylova & Peytcheva-Forsyth, 2022). Badejo and Chakraborty (2022) claimed that while incarcerated, offenders can learn about creating online content in addition to physical work that may not support all inmates. With such good intentions of technology, incarcerated people do not have to give up hope because they can still earn a living from skills they acquire while imprisoned. This is thought to act as a tool for behaviour modification, work empowerment, and reformation (Adeyeye, 2019b).

Furthermore, Barrow et al. (2018) asserted that educational programs have led not only to less violence between the offenders involved in the programs but have also created a more positive prison environment and produced positive results within the prison itself, including improved communication between corrections staff and inmates, the development of positive peer role models for offenders, and reduced problems with disciplinary infractions. Not only have educational programs reduced violence among the participants, but they have also improved the prison atmosphere (Barrow et al., 2018).

According to Badejo and Chakraborty (2022), technology has a favourable impact on incarcerated students’ motivation and involvement in academic study. The fact that podcasting allows offender students to learn at their convenience will help them since they are under a lot of stress while incarcerated and a specific time set aside for learning may not be conducive because they may occasionally be emotionally or psychologically depressed during that time. Therefore, eLearning will play a significant role in fostering inclusion through the development of digital competencies, which are understood as knowledge, attitude, and the capacity of an individual to effectively use “modern” digital tools as well as the capacity to recognize, access, integrate, evaluate, analyze, summarize, create, and communicate using digital resources (Becker-Pestka, 2022).

By improving education delivery, incarcerated students believe that they will be relevant once they get released (Badejo & Chakraborty, 2022b). However, the strategy of online teaching of moral education in prison-based education is not only to transmit the moral values from teachers to students in which the teacher acts as a role model for incarcerated students but also, the online learning strategies are associated with the progressive approach in which the objective of moral and character of education is to develop cognition in incarcerated students in an educational environment (Rosmilawati, 2020). The constructs highlighted in the offender eLearning process and the probable outcomes are outlined in the theoretical framework in Figure 3.
7. Discussion
The goal of providing prison education is to better the rehabilitation of offenders and their continued reintegration into society after their release (Andvig et al., 2021; Ertl et al., 2019; Farley et al., 2016, 2019; Jewkes & Reisdorf, 2016; McKay, 2022; Morris & Bans, 2018; Mufarreh et al., 2022; Reisdorf & DeCook, 2018; Reisdorf et al., 2021). As a result, this positions rehabilitation at the core of any correctional education endeavour (Addae, 2020). Education in prison is by intent and design limited to the face-to-face learning experience (Montenegro, 2021). Prisons have been cautious about opening access to eLearning facilities due to security concerns (Badejo & Chakraborty, 2022a; Becker-Pestka, 2022; Kaun & Stiernstedt, 2022; Mihaylova & Peytcheva-Forsyth, 2022; Willems et al., 2018). The challenge is to ensure incarcerated students are not left behind in this digital age and to balance institutional prison priorities such as order and security.
against opportunities for authentic and current learning experiences within the discourse of offender rehabilitation and digital Humanities.

Additionally, in an environment where post-secondary education is increasingly delivered online, prisoners without internet access face challenges accessing non-prison providers’ programs (Garner, 2019). When pursuing postsecondary education through Distance Education (DE), incarcerated students face a technology gap that divides them from other university students (Barrow et al., 2018). This completely undermines the socially constructive pedagogy popular in many post-secondary institutions and inadequately prepares students for a world in which employers demand that their staff be proficient with social networking and other Web 2.0 resources (Farley et al., 2019). Nevertheless, access to education and digital resources must compete with security measures, which typically impede creative online learning methods (Johnson, 2022).

This study aimed to evaluate how technologies can be used for offender education and their effect on re-entry, life after release and recidivism. There is a consensus among researchers on digital rehabilitation that ICT is a potentially powerful tool for distance learning in secure environments and can be very motivating (Arcangeli et al., 2010; Attewell et al., 2007; Mihaylova & Peytcheva-Forsyth, 2022; TAUGERBECK et al., 2019). Using digital platforms while incarcerated can be a highly effective way to reenergize the educational process for offenders. It is increasingly important to underpin the larger numbers of offenders studying in custody for Open University qualifications. However, research had found that a very high percentage of offenders have poor literacy skills, and this can be both a factor in their offending and a barrier to rehabilitation (Attewell et al., 2007; Bedford et al., 2014a; Hopkins, 2022). Investigating the challenges to the Educational “Digital Divide” in Spanish Prisons, Pulido (2021, p. 2) affirms that: “The digitisation of society and education affects everyone being human. And the prisoner, just because he is in prison, does not stop being a human being”. The question that needs to be answered is whether it is possible to completely realize the right to education and training in prison without taking into consideration the digitalisation of society and education (Brosens et al., 2018; The Centre for Social Justice, 2021; Cullen, 2001; Dufva & Dufva, 2019; Farley et al., 2019; Pulido, 2021; Smith et al., 2020) (Pulido, 2021). Hence, literature emphasizes that online learning is advantageous for “weak” individuals like women, immigrants, and inmates in prison as well as pupils who have trouble attending classes (Bedford et al., 2014b; Holt & Bossler, 2020; Järveläinen & Rantanen, 2020; Kerr & Willis, 2018; Link & Reece, 2021; Mufarreh et al., 2022; Toreld et al., 2018).

The drivers or manipulators of eLearning for offenders are thought to be technology-mediated pedagogies and other environmental elements like COVID-19. The COVID-19 pandemic brought to light the need for eLearning options for students who are incarcerated, and modern technology has made secure intranet eLearning platforms available for correctional education (Dias-Trindade & Moreira, 2019). These factors include sociocultural changes, technological advancements, and changes in society. A second factor driving the use of eLearning is the commitment of prison facilities to uphold the UN’s minimum standards for the rehabilitation of offenders (right to education). However, most of the research in this systematic literature review focused on the impact of eLearning on offender re-entry, improved prison conditions, and reduced recidivism (The Centre for Social Justice, 2021; McDougall et al., 2017; Nwokoye, 2018; Pulido, 2021; Rantanen et al., 2021; Reisdorf & DeCook, 2018; Reisdorf et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2020), while a small number focused on life after prison, which is the primary cause of recidivism.

While these studies helped to validate the theoretical component of eLearning for offenders and its effect on the three key result areas/outcomes described above, they also highlight some serious difficulties, such as the technical requirements and how offender eLearning can be applied (The Centre for Social Justice, 2021; Dufva & Dufva, 2019; Kerr & Willis, 2018; Verbaan et al., 2018). It was concluded by Barrow et al. (2019) that remote learning contributes to the realization of the right to education in prison because, in the vast majority of situations, incarcerated students cannot attend university campus classes. It can be argued that tertiary students once incarcerated, are disconnected from their academic pursuance and support the view that the options for
distance learning are limited since correctional facilities do not provide internet to incarcerated due to high-security protocols (Brosens et al., 2018; Cullen, 2001; Farley et al., 2016; Gurusami, 2019; Morris & Bans, 2018; Mufarreh et al., 2022; Reisdorf & DeCook, 2018; Reisdorf et al., 2021; Robinson et al., 2018; Van De Steene & Knight, 2017). The rules governing Internet access in prisons make it challenging to integrate digital technologies into education in prison.

Given this, incarcerated students will have challenges in pursuing their various learning endeavours since a prison by default is an isolated place. These limitations put incarcerated students of being left behind in a digital society. Considering the increasing importance that technologies have assumed in society, scholars (Attewell et al., 2007; Mihaylova; Mihaylova & Peytcheva-Forsyth, 2022; Willems et al., 2018; Zivanai & Mahlungu, 2022b) believe that offenders should have access to internet platforms for educational purposes. Moreira and Dias-Trindade (2020) also hinted that some online and digital education initiatives, like the Internet for Inmates, had been launched in prisons because of the limitations incarcerated people have when it comes to attending educational activities in higher-learning institutions.

Regardless of the duration of the prison sentences they must serve, the implementation of eLearning for convicts is a challenging procedure, but it gives them the chance to complete any educational gaps they may have and to further their education (Becker-Pestka, 2022). However, findings from earlier studies highlighted that correctional institutions lack the necessary eLearning resources and facilities to meet the needs of students across all their study centres, including desktop or laptop computer equivalents, internet access, projectors and screens for display, video cameras, compact disks, and many others (Adedaye, 2019a; Becker-Pestka, 2022; Dias-Trindade & Moreira, 2019).

Tanaka and Cooper (2020) noted that, although the rising use of technology inside prisons may present the potential to enhance access to information resources, there has not been much research on how this intersection of technology and information in prisons may or should promote higher education. One of the criticisms of attempting to deliver prison education primarily through eLearning is that the Internet is perceived as a threat to security in many prisons (Borseková et al., 2020; Hasenbein et al., 2022; Kerr & Willis, 2018; Link & Reece, 2021; Pamungkas, 2020). Therefore, if adopted without due diligence, prison facilities might breed technically sophisticated criminals.

One of the most important lessons discovered so far is that the problem of incarcerated students in the virtual university is a complex and multi-layered “problem” that cannot be resolved just by technological means alone. For incarcerated students, in particular, Hopkins (2022, p. 44) argued that: “Technology cannot replace good teaching [in offender rehabilitation]; it can only support it. Moreover, the mere presence of the most innovative, mobile, user-friendly technology will not improve access and outcomes if the users on the ground do not have the time, space, resources, energy, and motivation to engage it”. Thus, the technology for offender rehabilitation must be highly contextualized to ensure the long-term accomplishment of eLearning initiatives aimed at non-traditional and isolated students.

Although the instructor’s or educator’s actual engagement with the offender is a necessary component of rehabilitation, supplementing it with online resources yields better results (Andvig et al., 2021; Chan et al., 2019; Ertl et al., 2019; Farley et al., 2019; Jewkes & Reisdorf, 2016; Morris & Bans, 2018; Reisdorf et al., 2021). Prisons should adopt offender eLearning systems that allow, for example, the creation of hybrid or blended learning communities, combining face-to-face and virtual environments, modalities, tools, and digital technologies. In our view, the best course of action is to concentrate on maintaining and developing social systems that support a digital learning culture, with technology serving as a key tool to support this effort. In the same vein, the literature recommends that the best practices in correctional education and training, include the importance of interactive content, personalized learning, gamification, bite-sized learning, feedback and reinforcement, and accessibility in promoting engagement and retention of information among offenders (The Centre for Social Justice, 2021; Holt & Bossler, 2020; Järveläinen & Rantanen, 2020; Kerr & Willis, 2018;
Pamungkas, 2020; Seo et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2020; Verbaan et al., 2018; Willems et al., 2018). The cross-analysis of the factors collected from the literature about offender eLearning is shown in Table 1.

8. Contributions
This section provides contributions to theory, literature, policy and practice

8.1. Contributions to theory and literature
The Good Lives Model (GLM) and the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) are two theoretical frameworks that may be used to guide offender rehabilitation research. The GLM is a strengths-based approach to analysing human behaviour that stresses the necessity of defining and fostering good objectives and values in people’s lives. In the context of offender rehabilitation, the GLM argues that treatments should focus on helping offenders build the skills and resources they need to live satisfying and productive lives, rather than only addressing their criminal behaviour. TAM, on the other hand, is a paradigm that explains how consumers adopt and employ new technology. TAM might be utilised in the context of offender rehabilitation to better understand how offenders perceive and engage with technology-based treatments aimed at encouraging positive transformation. These models, when combined, might provide a valuable framework for planning and assessing interventions aimed at promoting positive outcomes in the lives of offenders. For example, researchers may utilise the GLM to identify the exact objectives and values that offenders desire to attain, and then use TAM to create technology-based treatments that are aligned with those goals and values and are more likely to be accepted and used by offenders.

8.2. Contributions to policy and practice
The use of eLearning in offender rehabilitation programs has several implications for policy and practice. The prison administration must strike a reasonable balance between the goals of public policy and respect for the educational rights of people behind bars. Thus, prison policy design should consider the use of eLearning technology and digital resources in prison as mandatory so that rehabilitation practices align with digital society. Overall, using the GLM and TAM might assist bridge the gap between policy and practice in offender rehabilitation by offering a clear framework for creating and evaluating evidence-based treatments that have the potential to make a significant impact on offenders’ lives.

9. Conclusion
In this study, we systematically reviewed the existing literature on offender education focusing mainly on eLearning to explain how offender eLearning enables a positive re-entry, reduces recidivism, and promise a better post-release life; therefore, reducing overcrowding in prisons and cutting government expenditures on offender welfare. The educational options available to prisoners are being improved and expanded by recent innovations in the corrections environment. These technical advancements, which were initially geared toward security concerns, have demonstrated their efficacy when applied to issues of education.

In our investigation, we discovered that using digital technologies for offender education not only has a good impact on an offender’s release but also assures that they uphold their constitutional rights. There is potential for eLearning to improve the quality of offender learning and skills. However, the difficulty is to balance institutional prison concerns, such as order and security, against possibilities for real-world, in-the-moment learning experiences in the humanities. This is especially important in the digital age when incarcerated students are at a disadvantage. According to the rhetoric, electronic access to learning opportunities, including course materials, learning exercises, and engagement with peers and teachers, helps inmates enrol in higher education when they might not be able to do so otherwise. Therefore, we conclude that education technology interventions which aim to prepare incarcerated students for the digital society must also consider the situated context of the postmodern prison and problems that emerge around the technology.

Departments of Correctional Services must increasingly evaluate educational technology and support educational programming using podcasting technologies that give teachers the chance to quickly broadcast engaging content that incarcerated students can listen to at any time as
education slowly becomes a higher priority for states. Studies have demonstrated the potential of eLearning programmes to improve offenders’ knowledge, skills, and favourable attitudes toward behaviour modification. Furthermore, eLearning allows for flexibility in terms of access and learning speed, which can boost offenders’ involvement and participation in rehabilitation programmes. The use of eLearning in the rehabilitation of offenders is a useful tool that can improve the results of these programmes. Thus, as society increasingly relies on digital technologies in many different aspects, those who lack relevant access and skills are lagging increasingly behind. Accordingly, we conclude that, in this process of personal development, digital literacy aids the offender in creating a digital identity as an independent, knowledgeable, and democratic citizen online—a goal that is particularly desirable for individuals who are incarcerated. By addressing some of the shortcomings of conventional rehabilitation approaches, the inclusion of eLearning in criminal rehabilitation programmes can increase the accomplishment of these programmes. Because of this, professionals should think about integrating eLearning interventions into their current programmes to improve the results for offenders.

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