"'Can I Get Some Harder Work?': Former Juvenile Offenders Narrated Educational Experiences in Juvenile Correctional Facilities" (by Deneil D. Christian, Joshua L. Adams, and Carl M. Miedich): Review 1

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Overall, this was a very interesting read on a critical topic that fails to receive much attention. It is oftentimes believed that juveniles always receive educational services during detention. After personally witnessing poor educational services in juvenile facilities, I, too, recognized that there was a serious problem in this area. Still, it seems this issue is lower on the priority list for researchers and practitioners. This study fills an important gap in this area. However, I do have some bits of feedback to share.

While checking some references, I noticed several sentences in the manuscript were direct quotations from original sources. Please review the entire document thoroughly for instances of this and paraphrase.

I think this study could have benefitted tremendously from a sample that included both those who obtained an education in a correctional facility and those who were unsuccessful. By excluding those who were unsuccessful, the reader cannot compare factors that contributed to success. For example, what if they both had similar educational experiences, but the dropouts had additional negative experiences (e.g., substance abuse, mental health) that contributed to dropout?

Qualitative research typically relies upon small sample sizes, but there is an exceptionally small sample size in this case. I was surprised to see no mention of this in your limitations section. I did see you make one mention that your study met the requirements for a phenomenological study, but I think that this could be elaborated upon in the limitations. I believe that this is the absolute bare minimum that is needed for this type of study. What impact could this have on your findings?

I saw no mention of selection bias, which could be quite strong in a study like this. This was quite evident from the first paragraph of your manuscript. You stated that “few states provide comparable educational and vocational programs to incarcerated youth, [and] such shortcomings might explain the low academic achievement.” This is also essentially the conclusion made in your study. What if you have a selection effect where you select participants who would have had low academic achievement regardless of the low-quality education they received while incarcerated? Relatedly, is there a possibility that even if they were given quality educational programs, they wouldn’t seize upon them, and they would go to waste?

One of the key findings and policy implications in this study was that coursework quality was poor and needed to be improved. While prior research demonstrates that the quality of coursework in juvenile institutions is lacking compared to education provided in traditional high schools, I’m not sure the results of this study necessarily support this point. Specifically, the only indicator of educational quality was that the work was too easy. I can understand why easy coursework can indicate that the quality is poor, but is this necessarily true? This indicator seems so subjective, considering that some juveniles may find coursework exceptionally easy,
and others may find the same coursework exceptionally challenging. Were there any other indicators of the quality of coursework? If not, you may consider changing to something other than coursework “quality.”

Related to this, one of the policy implications was that “policymakers should address concerns regarding… access to special education services.” While I don’t disagree with this point, only four participants received special education, and only two appeared to address their degree of access. Of the two who reported on special education services, one stated that he was not provided with services, and one stated that the services benefited him. It seems like you selected the one response where services were portrayed as negative, but you could have easily selected the positive response to focus on for your conclusions.

There are several quotations from participants that could benefit from the inclusion of ellipses. Think about how the content of the quote benefits the point you are trying to make. If there is extra content that is not supporting your point, I would suggest removing it. For example, the following quotes would appear much better with well-placed ellipses. These are just a couple of examples, but there are many others throughout the manuscript.

Original- “Yeah, sometimes but due to, due to you being a placement, one person can always ruin that for you. So, for example, say if I had tutor right now or whatever the case is 10:30/10:45, right now in the morning or whatever. And I’m on campus, and I got tutoring class right now. As soon as a fight breaks out or something like that. Yeah, that tutoring class, that [expletive] over with, you feel what I’m saying. I don’t got that tutor class no more.”

Suggested revision- “Due to you being a placement, one person can always ruin that for you… As soon as a fight breaks out or something like that. Yeah, that tutoring class, that [expletive] over with, you feel what I’m saying. I don’t got that tutor class no more.

Original- “So, I’m just guessing what’s, what’s the answer because they know they give you multiple choice answers to the multiple-choice answer, so I’m just like, you’re not helping us out, so I’m just going to guess, so I was guessing my whole time there.”

Suggested revision 1- “I’m just guessing… the answer because they know they give you multiple choice answers…, so I’m just like, you’re not helping us out, so I’m just going to guess.”

Suggested revision 2- “They know they give you multiple choice answers…, so I’m just like, you’re not helping us out, so I’m just going to guess, so I was guessing my whole time there.”

In the manuscript, you sometimes break up sections depending on whether the response was a survey or a one-on-one interview. This feels unnecessary, as these are both responses by the participants. I would suggest removing language identifying the data collection method in your analysis.
I suggest renaming the “instructional methods” section and slightly modifying this section. I expected to see the “various instruction methods” you mentioned, but every response discussed using computers for instructional delivery. There was no variance in the “methods.”

In the limitations section, you have a sentence, “Another limitation of this study is participants with a high school diploma equivalent.” I get what you mean, but this is a bit of an awkward sentence.