

# Demir Parmaklıklar Arkasında: Şiir ve Edebiyat

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## Özet

Cezaevleri baskıcı toplumlarda genelde tecriti akla getirirken, sosyal devlet anlayışının belirgin olduğu toplumlarda ise bir rehabilite yeniden topluma kazandırma aracı olarak görülmektedir. Bu yaklaşımdan yola çıkarak cezaevlerindeki rehabilite çalışmalarını bu çalışmada gözden geçirilmiş ve bir rehabilitasyon politikası olarak cezaevlerindeki mahkumların şiir ve edebiyata ilgilerinin artırılması tartışılmıştır. Konuyla ilgili akademik çalışmaların sınırlılığına rağmen metod olarak akademik mevcut literatür ve literatürde cezaevlerinde yapılmış anket sonuçlarının incelenmesi benimsenmiş olup bir politika analizi ortaya konulmaya çalışılmıştır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *Cezaevi Rejimi, Rehabilitasyon, Suçluların Rehabilitasyonu,*

## Literacy Among the Stripes

### Abstract

“In your memoir *A Place to Stand*, you note that you 'learned to believe in myself and to dream for a better life in prison,’” the interviewer, Lorraine Roy, asks of Jimmy Santiago a man who had discovered a proficiency for writing poetry while in an Arizona Prison (Roy, 2010, p. 28). Literacy directly impacts his “dream for a better life” within the confines of his prison cage. Using results of the National Adult Literacy Survey in an article named *Literacy Behind Prison Walls*, author Jacob Tobi's article in *Corrections Today*, and the interview of released inmate Jimmy Santiago, displays literacy as a part among correctional facilities. Literacy among the prison community is essential for a smooth re-integration into society and perhaps a more full life for the prisoner. Yet, the paper in particular provides an in-depth look at the importance and review of literacy skills prisoners incarcerated in state and federal prisons possess or wish to possess.

**Key Words:** *Rehabilitation, Offender Rehabilitation, Sentencing Policy*

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## 1. Literacy in Prison

“In your memoir *A Place to Stand*, you note that you 'learned to believe in myself and to dream for a better life in prison,’” the interviewer, Lorie Roy, asks of Jimmy Santiago a man who had discovered a proficiency for writing poetry while in an Arizona Prison (Roy, 2010, p. 28). Literacy directly impacts his “dream for a better life” within the confines of his prison cage. Using results of the National Adult Literacy Survey in an article named *Literacy Behind Prison Walls*, author Jacob Tobi's article in *Corrections Today*, and the interview of released inmate Jimmy Santiago, displays literacy as a part among correctional facilities. Literacy among the prison community is essential for a smooth re- integration into society and perhaps a more full life for the prisoner. Yet, the paper in particular provides an in-depth look at the importance and review of literacy skills prisoners incarcerated in state and federal prisons possess or wish to possess.

## 2. Data

The levels of literacy portrayed by prison inmates in the United States may compare to the average American household as a contrasting literacy population. The survey reads around 7 in 10 prisoners perform at the barest minimum of literacy levels (Haigler, et al., 1994. xviii). The three left with no literacy sadly left to struggle in an already difficult position. All adults, incarcerated, need literacy at some basic level or not. Yet, the minimal skills are not enough to function properly in society (p. xxii). The differences in demographics of prison vs. household explain a little why prisoners have lower literacy proficiencies. Of the populations who have completed a General Educational Development (GED) program 76 percent of the household population has compared to only 51 percent of the prison population (p. xviii). White inmates perform greater than their black inmates with hispanics and other races perform at the lowest levels. Yet, there seems to be no difference of performance levels in gender with females and males performing at the same level (p. xix). Experiences before, during, and after incarceration differ from the householders. Practicing reading, writing, and arithmetic in prison effects the inmate self- perception of literacy skill. Finally a lofty and unrecognized national goal as stated by the U.S. Department of Education was all adults would be literate by 2000, including the prison population (Haigler, et al., 1994, p.

xxiii). However, the lofty goal left out the benefits of at least an all inclusive minimally literate prison population.

The background of describing literacy within the prison population was simple and sparse. The survey used in *Literacy Behind Prison Walls* was conducted in 1992 (p. 1). Only two other previous surveys incorporated literacy. A 1985 survey only for householders from the ages of 21-25, and 1989-90 survey for job seekers (p.2). The parameters of the survey in 1992 conveyed literacy as english understanding, reading, writing, and basic math. All of which must be proficient enough to function in society. Each prisoner demonstrated understanding of prose, documents, and quantitative reasoning. The three areas were rated among the prison population against a householders population in eleven states with the ages of 16 to 64 (p. 6). The proficiency level was rated on a numerical scale from 0-500 (p. 7). The number of prisoners who participated was 1,147 (Linacre, 2011, p. 1). However, the article disclaimed their findings “they do not enable us to say what specific level of prose, document, or quantitative skill is required to obtain, hold, or advance in a particular occupation, to manage a household, or to obtain legal services” and no single factor determines a level of proficiency (Haigler, et al., 1994, p. 9-13). Therefore the survey's results used to color facts about literacy in prison.

### **3. Results**

Results of the survey followed the strict parameters described above while the entire prison population under some sort of criminal supervision estimated at 4,641,000 (p.16). Around 61 percent probation, 17 percent of the population were in prison, 13 percent parole, 9 percent jail (p.16). Of that population, a low range of 30 percent could perhaps only read short pieces of text to find a single fact, fill out information about them, and count. The next level of proficiency had a higher range of 30 percent that could think deductively about literature that was given and basic math functions. The third level in the 20th percent range could read long text, efficiently categorize documents, and arithmetic. Levels 4 and 5 had smaller percents ranges, but were at the most proficient and advanced literacy demonstrated (p.17).

Educational attainment, race, sex, and age were some factors of the level of literacy

proficiency. Only 35 percent of the prison population had up to 12 years of education (p.21). While the average householder has 12 years of education with the option of another 4 and above for college or other education (p.17). Also the higher the level of education the higher the level of literacy proficiency the prisoner demonstrated during the survey (p.22). Racially the white ethnicity performed at a higher rate than Black and Hispanic prisoners. Interestingly the Black and Hispanic prisoner and householder population performed at the lower proficiency levels, concluding that at basic skills it did not matter if one was incarcerated or not (p.28). However, at the secondary education level the prison population performed at a lower level than the householder (p.28). Also interestingly the proficiency levels were equal among female and male prisoners. The same proved true for age of the prisoners. Lastly the prison population reported to have a high rating of disabilities ranging from mental to learning disabilities (p.33). Within the survey 44 percent of prisoners convicted for violent crimes with drug crimes coming second at 26 percent (p.51). Of the entire prison population 77 percent repeated an offense (p.60). Also note the prison population has significantly more of minorities, males, younger adults, and lower education than the householder population (p.34). Therefore the survey's results used as a springboard for conclusions about future benefits were individually drawn.

One literacy program, called SpeakOut! Women's Writing Workshop, came in 2004 by the author Tobi Jacobi (2009, p. 52). The program helped groups within Larimer County Community Corrections. The program centered around literacy work using life experience, but also used writing to understand and change the inmate in a positive and healthy manner (Jacobi, 2009, p. 52).

Those pieces of writing came from before, during, and after, the unique experience of being incarcerated. The past of the prisoners influenced the factors upon the chances of success and failure in later life. The prisoners already experienced the norm that they had lower levels of literacy. Usually the higher level of education the prisoner reached the greater their proficiency during the survey (Haigler, et al., 1994, p.39). The prisoners with lower levels of literacy also dropped out of school before being incarcerated. Lost interest and a difficulty too great lead the main reasoning for dropping out of high-school (p.41). The prisoner's experiences at their home also

influenced their literacy. Usually the prisoner had significantly lower levels of education than their parents (p.42). 36 percent of prisoner's parents reported less than a high school diploma (p.43). The spoken language between parent and child at home also effects literacy. The prisoners who lived in non-english speaking homes suffered greatly in the survey demonstrating very low literacy scores (p.46). Surprisingly, before being incarcerated, 2/3 of the prisoners wrote they had a legal paying job before being arrested (p.46). So certain prior experiences influence the life of a prisoner and hurt his ability to perform well at literacy tests, but what of experiences unique to presently incarcerated prisoners.

#### **4. Discussions**

Prison depicted a life of unforgiving punishment with perhaps some rehabilitation. Yet, nearly all prisoners claimed to enroll in some sort of program within the prison (p.49) While in the facility literacy skills may be divided by type of offense. Prisoners of violent or drug crimes performed at a lower literacy level than prisoners of property crimes (p.51). The prisoners involved in educational programs or worked within the prison performed better than the ones who were not attending an educational program or did not work (p.51-52). Yet, there was no difference in literacy skill level of prisoners who served long time sentences (p.51). Like the householder the prisoner with a higher level of education was more likely to be involved in work (p.55). In general those prisoners involved within the prison facility demonstrated better literacy than those who were uninvolved (p.56). The repeat prisoner, who used the facilities numerous times, led to criticism of pushing for literacy among the prison population.

Prisoners also grappled with attempts to find successful rehabilitative programs when the correctional facility and others focus on retribution and deterrence (Mentor, 2011). The principle of least eligibility was again cited as a reason. Critiques spoke of reading and writing as a privilege to be taken away as a form of punishment, a less harsh version of solitary confinement. Another way to cut off the prisoner from the outside world, and perhaps even prevent the prisoner from any chance of a success re-integration into society outside the prison facility. The prisoner was ideally not allowed to dally in fiction, a certain luxury. The prisoner who read more than once a week

performed at around the same literacy level as the householder who read less than once a week (Haigler, et al., 1994, p.73).

Perhaps the comparison of literacy skills in practice and self-esteem of the critics against the prisoner allowed for a cleaner picture. The criticisms come mostly from the population not currently incarcerated. Compare the variety of materials, filing materials, types of books available, using math, frequency of reading and writings, and finally the differences in proficiency (p.71). The prisoners and householder populations agreed the most frequently read and used reading was reports and articles (p.73). However, the prisoner reported minimal use of directions, instructions, and bills (p.73). The prisoner and householder also differ in types of books available to them. The prison population preferred fiction, reference, and religion or other such inspiring types of books (p.79). The householder preferred fiction, reference, and lastly manuals (p.79). The effected prisoner with limited resources and under the indirect punishment lowered his self-image.

The prisoner himself forms an image of his own literacy skill level. Compared to householders the prisoner has a lower opinion of his own skill level at reading, writing, and math (p.79). Goes to show the prisoners said they performed at a higher skill level in fact performed better in the tests than fellow prisoners (p.81). Yet the higher skill level prisoners performed lower than householders who said they performed literacy skills well (p.81). The prisoners who did poorly commonly used others as collaborators. Generally, the prisoner received less help than the householder and received limited help for math and notating (p.83). The householder and prisoner of the lowest level of proficiency reported getting the most consistent and constant help (p.83). In essence, the ones who reported only some help do better than the people who reported constant supervision. With the major criticisms in place an important change must appear.

The acceptance of the retributive attitude towards prisoners may also be addressed. The number of prisoners who commit crimes out of some form of ignorance must outnumber the crimes done in full knowledge of a malicious mind. The ignorance would easily be dispersed by literacy. Also intelligence could lessen the number of prisoner disturbances out of boredom and thereby prison systems would not have to

exact harsh punishments for disobedience. Education leads to intelligence, which could also lead to understanding on both sides of the correctional system. Correctional officers themselves could be focused on teaching rather than punishing (Mentor, 2011). Safety, while a deep concern, would not be in danger by the prisoners learning to sign their name to a piece of paper.

## **Conclusion**

Finally self-esteem would improve the more literate a prisoner became. Especially if a proposed literacy program focused on juveniles. The program would serve as educational program but also raise the self-esteem of juveniles who are at the most awkward and perilous of times in their lives.

Although the prison is a place of punishment the correction system is partially responsible for ensuring the literacy of its tenants (Mentor, 2011). Teaching literacy to the prison population at any literacy level would only increase the prisoner's chances of a successful journey back into the society that had previously deemed him unfit. With more literate individuals the community benefits in both the prisoner and householder populations. The article *Literacy Behind Prison Walls* along with interviews done with prisoners portray benefits outweighing the criticisms. The nation has separated the people into the prison. The people don't want to be separate from their families and nation. Their ignorance is as much our responsibility as their own.

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