Identity and trajectory of students deprived of their freedom: the case of a school in Chile

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Abstract
The following study examines the academic formative process within a high school in a context of detention in northern Chile, focusing on how education contributes to the reconstruction of the identity of incarcerated students. The goal is to understand the identity and educational trajectory of both graduates and currently enrolled students, recognizing the role of education in their rehabilitation and reintegration into society. Using a qualitative methodology, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 11 participants, and the data was analyzed through content analysis. The main findings of this study highlight the importance of creating educational spaces that integrate pedagogical, recreational, and interdisciplinary activities, demonstrating a positive impact on the students' development both academically and personally. This educational approach not only improves their academic skills but also fosters a sense of identity and autonomy, crucial elements for their social reintegration process.

Keywords: Adult education in a prison context – prison education – identity – student profile – prisonization.

Introduction

Education in contexts of detention may be addressed in different ways. In the international scenario we can mention the cases of Finland or Norway, which, with a progressive approach, promote rehabilitation and social reinsertion with education focused on these contexts, with curricula according to the needs of the student and constant accompaniment to those who

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teach in their penitentiary systems (Scharff, Ugelvik, 2017; Tønseth, Bergsland, 2019). In Latin America, some examples are the programs promoted by Brazil, Argentina, Colombia, and Mexico, countries that have specific policies on education focused on the possibility of reintroducing people deprived of their freedom to society and reducing recidivism for different crimes (Zinny, Gorgal, 2014; Rangel, 2019).

In Chile the regular modality of Young and Adult People Education (EPJA, Educación de Personas Jóvenes y Adultas), also known as education in a context of detention, has been implemented, aimed at people who are deprived of their freedom and currently using the curricular framework established by the Ministry of Education.

Nowadays, when speaking about education in a context of detention, a field of dispute is generated in which more questions without answers from the criminological and educational approaches arise which require other outlooks, both theoretical and from different disciplines (Gaete, Acuña, Ramírez, 2020: 2), since both at a national and a Latin American level education in contexts of detention has had a scarce social visibility, research on it is limited, and there is an absence of public policies adequate resources and instruments to address specifically this educational reality (Fernandes, 2018; Rangel, 2009; Acuña, Scarfó, Catelli, 2021).

In the case of Chile, there are currently no specific studies on the rate of recidivism and its link with the education of people deprived of their freedom. However, we may consider the figures of recidivism in the findings of the Executive Summary of Evaluation of Governmental Programs, EPG (2018-2019), from which we have taken specific data on programs of rehabilitation and social reinsertion being conducted within some penitentiary establishments (Resumen ejecutivo, EPG: 8).

In this summary we found that criminal recidivism is considered a public and latent problem in the country that affects the security of the rest of the population. Hence, the State will provide the funds required to reduce those numbers. According to the recidivism study conducted by Gendarmería in 2013, "20.7% of the people released from all the Gendarmería sub-system establishments in 2010 returned were sentenced to prison again in the 24 following months, without significant differences between men and women" (Resumen ejecutivo EPG: 8).

According to Chile's Gendarmería (2023), there are now 140,841 people deprived of their freedom, 125,762 (89.29%) of whom are men and 15,079 (10.71%) are women. However, more recent statistics might show other numbers since the latest formal studies were conducted between 2018 and 2019.

Therefore, the main goal of this study is to understand the link between the education offered in a school within a prison in the north of Chile and the identity of those who have studied there or who are regularizing their studies while they serve their sentence. Considering the statistical data and the current policies on this issue in Chile, the study will delve into the academic formative process within this prison to explore how the reconstruction of the identity

of the students who are serving a sentence can be fostered. Thus, we aim to analyze ways to offer these students contingent and pertinent tools that favor their future insertion in free society.

Contextualization

In Chile, prisons are in the charge of Gendarmería de Chile (GENCHI), which in turn depends on the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights. However, some prisons are licensed, and in that case they depend on a license holder that manages and controls them. The penitentiary system is formed by three levels of detention: 1) the closed system, which houses people who are detained, processed, and sentenced, and are imprisoned 24 hours a day without the possibility of leaving, 2) the open system, with people under some alternative measure to detention or some benefit of social reinsertion, that is, who after serving all or part of their sentence obtain their freedom, and 3) the semi-open system, where people serve their sentence in a Center of Study and Work (CET), which may be in a city or a rural area (Gendarmería de Chile, 2023). The present study was conducted in a prison within the closed system.

In regard to education in a context of detention, the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Education, through Supreme Decree of Education N° 298 of March 1978 made the first agreement to carry out educational work jointly, with the aim of giving orientation and rehabilitating people serving a sentence in these penitentiaries. This degree arose from the need to adapt the continuity of the basic and middle education of people deprived of their freedom, "within the framework of the educational and social reinsertion policies developed by the Ministries of Education and Justice, respectively" (Decree 298/1978 Art. 2), which was updated in August 2013 and made official in November of the same year.

This agreement established the obligations of both ministries to provide the educational offer, promote personal and cognitive development, and contribute to the social reinsertion social of people once their period of deprivation of freedom ended.

In this context, the mission of the Ministry of Justice (MINJU), through Gendarmería de Chile, is to allow for the development of educational activities, protect and maintain order and security, facilitate access to teachers and education professionals, and promote benefits obtainable in prison. Gendarmería must designate a person in charge of education to act as a nexus between the school and GENCHI officials, as well as maintain an updated statistical record of the educational situation, monitor inmates' attendance, and inform periodically through the educational Technical Councils (Decreto exento N° 1447, 2013).

For its part, the Ministry of Education (MINEDUC) instructs all the ministerial secretariats of education in order to provide the institutional means, coordinate and foster the development of educational processes in educational establishments, report statistics of class attendance and educational materials to students enrolled, and offer incentives to teachers and administrators for their constant professional performance (Decreto exento N° 1447, 2013).

Both ministries constituted the Combined National Commision (Comisión Mixta Nacional) to carry out their joint obligations. The commission has played a fundamental role in this context, since its faculties allow for carrying out the proper performance of the regularization of studies in prisons. It can make proposals for improvement and set goals and deadlines. It can also establish policies and plans according to the education within prisons, to guarantee the implementation of educational policies and programs that contribute to the development of people who are deprived of their freedom.

The Decree with the Force of Law N° 2, which sets the rewritten, coordinated and systematized text of Law N° 20.370 with the unrevoked norms of the Decree with the Force of Law N° 1 of 2005, points out that "curricular adaptations must be made" for schools in the context of detention and the modality of adult education (Art. 23). The problem is that such adaptations, which the Law itself, now rewritten in that Decree with the Force of Law, indicated, have not been published as such, but as mentioned in the 2016 report of the National Institute of Human Rights (INDH), "thus, it is not possible to know if there is an adapted policy to guarantee the education of people deprived of freedom, according to the specific conditions and requirements of the case" (INDH, 2016: 260).

Although the purpose has existed for some time, there is no common and pertinent educational program or strategy for schools within prisons. The work is carried following the plans and programs of the Ministry of Education, which cover the requirements of the Curricular Bases associated to the levels of EPJA, without considering the specific context of those who are part of this modality, nor the teacher training of those who teach there, despite the agreements and their updated versions.

Theoretical framework

From the above we may observe a level of concretion in which we may intervene, since education in context of detention gives rise to a space of learning experiences where there may be significant interactions for the reconstruction and co-construction of individuals with their environment.

Authors such as Del Pozo and Añaños-Bedriñana (2013: 48) have launched several debates about the viability of education in contexts of detention. The question of whether a liberating education is possible in a context where people are deprived of their freedom generates a utopian, and in other situations even paradoxical, thought. In spite of that, there is the premise that education is a fundamental and universal right of every human being, and it is therefore important to demystify utopian thought, making it a reality through processes that may be carried out in these spaces with specific projects.

Stickle and Schuster (2023) recently published in the *American Journal of Criminal Justice* on the significant benefits of education in contexts of detention in the United States, analyzing

studies on the subject published between 1980 and 2023. Among their main findings are that education in contexts of detention reduces recidivism, improves employment prospects, and increases the income of people who have served their sentences. The study not only includes primary and secondary education, but also considers the importance of undergraduate studies, which may provide them with a better income.

In Chile there are important figures to be considered:

> There are 95 educational establishments that provide their services in the centers of deprivation of freedom throughout the country. 79 of them function with their own RBD; that is, they are officially recognized within the centers and six of them also have annexed courses in other facilities. To these we may add 16 officially recognized educational establishments located outside prisons that cater to the educational needs within these centers as annex locations and that offer educational services, generally in the level of middle school education. The total number of students registered is 15.412 (DEG, 2019: 1).

Since 2001, the program "Education for Freedom" has gradually been implemented with the aim of integrating and learning about the context of education in detention for youths and adults from different such schools in the country. However, the criteria for adaptation – or rather the curricular design that allows us to use the Curricular Bases and the elements that should characterize educational intervention in order to achieve the goals of education and also support social reinsertion – have not yet been defined.

Before there were prisons there was no clear idea of a criminal's profile, so its particular characteristics were not known. Prison allowed us to know a criminal's behavior and physical features, customs and way of speaking, thus creating the image we have now of what we call an inmate. Michel Foucault, in *Discipline and Punish* (1975) explains the making of the figure of the criminal in two senses: creating the proper conditions for recidivism, such as social stigmatization and demoralization and, in an epistemological sense, creating the category of individual criminal, an object of control and study.

Currently, the term *prisonization* refers to the research of the prison habits, customs, and culture (Clemmer, 1940; Goffman, 1979). These effects will take place both during the individual's period of incarceration and in their subsequent life in freedom. If we take into account the physical and psychological characteristics that the prison exerts on the inmates (prisonization), we can also become aware of how the school transforms them again within their context, making them develop these characteristics within their daily activities. This concept, along with that of *depersonalization*, were considered in the work of Jesús Valverde Molina, a Spanish psychologist who has conducted ethnographic research in penitentiary centers throughout his whole professional career. His main findings are summarized in the following table.

Table 1. Relevant aspects of a person deprived of his/her freedom

Key ideas	Description
Conversion in penitentiary imprisonment	· People deprived of their freedom, regardless of their penitentiary regime, show common characteristics. · They develop sensory problems, such as visual disturbances. · Their self-esteem is affected by poor personal hygiene and limited activities.
Prisonization and deterioration of the persons deprived of their freedom	· Increased vulnerability. · Changes in their behavior, becoming more aggressive. · Loss of autonomy. · Containment of their emotions. · Loss of communication with their family. · Deterioration of sexual and/or affective relationships.
Depersonalization and adaptive behaviors of people deprived of their freedom	· Modified behavior. · Prison generates dependence, thus creating the expectation of obtaining benefits without making an effort. · They act as if in pain when they do not get attention or recognition. ·They create specific codes, some kinetic and other verbal, which allow them to communicate with other people deprived of their freedom.

Source: Own, based on Valverde, J. (1997, 98-136).

In socio-economic terms, the universe of the prison population shows some homogeneous characteristics, where "poverty and low income are clearly determining factors of school dropout" (Observatorio por las Trayectorias Educativas, 2021). There are also psychosocial and educational peculiarities, since many students decide to drop out of school because they need to acquire early training for work, which may be associated with homes in situations of marginality and vulnerability, with precarious early socializations in terms of affection and security, high-risk life experiences and social contexts, criminal history, failure in school and early dropout, drug abuse and experiences of homelessness or frequent vagrancy (Observatorio por las Trayectorias Educativas, 2021).

By learning about these characteristics it is possible to consider that those who are deprived of their freedom have undergone a constant process of social exclusion in which, before being sentenced to actual prison terms, they have experienced individually or collectively the absence of their social right to health, education, culture, economy, and they are continuously compared to those who do enjoy these rights, making the social gaps even more visible. These difficulties in access to education and training for work are conditions widely linked to social integration problems and criminality (Currie, 2000: 9). According to the European Community Commission (1992), this concept alludes to:

The impossibility of enjoying social rights without help, the undervalued self-image and personal capacity to cope with one's duties, the risk of being cast for a long time as a person needed of help, and the stigmatization that all of this entails for the people and, in cities, for the neighborhoods in which they live.

Zaffaroni (1991), an Argentinean attorney and criminalist, points out that one cannot speak of social reinsertion or resocialization of the people who are deprived of their freedom if they have never been able to join a system, if they have never had access to health care or education, opportunities of employment and personal growth, benefits that they should have as human beings and that our policies and Constitution mention – but do not enforce – thus reinforcing social gaps. According to the author, we can understand that: "the decline within prison or prisonization is but the inevitable effect of the measures that must be taken to establish and uphold the *status quo*" (Zaffaroni, 1991).

Following this premise, it is important to consider how people deprived of their freedom gradually lose their identity as human beings when they undergo a process of prisonization. In Herrera's (2008) words, "identity may be defined as the perception a person has of himself or herself, shaped by discourses, daily practices and situations that regulate our everyday life, all of this linked to a constant transformation of our history". Pereyra (2019: 651), on the other hand, states that "the process of reconstruction of an identity depends on the *habitus* and the cultural environment one is going through".

Cunha *et al.* (2023: 35-42) addressed the importance of mental health in these contexts, and they claim that sentences may have a severe impact on the mental health of people deprived of their freedom, which has a negative effect on their reintegration into society and contributes to recidivism. Furthermore, they point out that the rate of disorders associated to mental health is high in this context, but little is known about how the deprivation of freedom perpetuates or worsens mental health symptoms.

Thus, education plays a crucial role in the penal process of people deprived of their freedom. Education is fundamental for them to acquire tools that allow them to live in a society that has largely not provided them with opportunities, to strengthen their culture, and to develop their critical thought so they can recover their own identity.

The GENCHI regulations underscore the importance of social reinsertion through programs that foster a work ethic, strengthen moral and ethical values, and promote the importance of the family and working habits. However, the democratization of teaching poses challenges due to the inequalities reproduced by the school system. Access to education does not guarantee the same capacity of reception, since each social group has its own linguistic capital linked to their context and way of life.

We must know the history of the people deprived of their freedom and the reason for their sentence since the individual, the situation and the context are interlinked in the educational process. Besides formal education, artistic, cultural, literary, and civic knowledge workshops must be offered to enrich thought and value the environment. This will help strengthen the individuals' autonomy and capacity of discernment.

The quality of education within prisons is a right that must be guaranteed. It is not enough to enroll half of the prison's population in educational programs, but they must also be treated constantly with dignity. Education is not just a tool, but a right that offers the tools needed to face different situations. It is a responsibility of the State, through the ministries of Justice and Human Rights and Education, to guarantee education of quality in all contexts, including prisons. If not enough attention is paid to this aspect, everyone's rights are violated. In short, education in prisons is fundamental for social reinsertion and must be a priority in the State's agenda.

Methodology

The methodology of this research is qualitative, which in words of Quecedo and Castaño (2002: 7), is the "research that produces descriptive data: the actual words of the people, written or spoken, and their observable behavior", since we wish to understand social contexts of a certain complexity through the experiences of the participants. In accordance with education in a context of detention, it is of primordial importance to consider the experiences and trajectories of the students who are regularizing their studies while they serve their sentence, thus achieving a comprehensive view of how they live this educational process and of the impact it will generate on their lives. We also opted for a single case study design. The case study, in the words of Escudero, Delfín and Gutiérrez (2012: 10) "Represents a very useful tool for doing research, since it allows us to have as a result a holistic approach of a situation or event under study, offering the researcher a wide range of possibilities to address a research problem." Therefore, this allows us to examine more precisely a case in particular, in accordance with the context of study, which in this case is the experiences of current students and alumni of a school within a prison facility.

Participants

We used an intentional qualitative sampling, which consists of deliberately selecting cases that meet specific characteristics. The research case is a centralized school located in a penitentiary facility in the north of Chile. It has its own Data Base Role Registry (RBD, Registro de Rol Base de Datos) since May 2014 and maintains an annual average of 380 students enrolled, distributed in 17 courses that range from basic education without crafts to humanistic scientific education and professional technician specialized in electricity (Flick, 2015: 38-43).

The participants selected for our research are students enrolled or alumni of this school within the prison facility. They are all adults and were serving a sentence at the time of our research. Their sentences go from 3 to 12 years, which are deferred.

Our selection criteria considered the degree of criminal compromise of the participants, according to the segmentation conducted by Gendarmería de Chile to control situations and prevent crime-generating contacts among the population deprived of their freedom. We identified five participants with low criminal compromise, three with medium, and three with a high criminal compromise.

With this approach we sought to understand education in a context of detention from the viewpoint of the students and alumni themselves, to gain a deeper understanding of their educational experiences and their impact while they were deprived of their freedom.

Other data of interest about the participants is in Table 2.

Table 2. Statistical summary of the participants

Participant	Age	Marital status	Children	Recidivism in sentence	Beliefs	Nationality
1	26	Single	1	First-timer	None	Chilean
2	34	Single	2	Reincidente	Catholic	Chilean
3	34	Single	0	First-timer	Catholic	Chilean
4	26	Single	1	First-timer	Catholic	Bolivian
5	39	Single	0	Reincidente	Catholic	Chilean
6	51	Married	3	First-timer	Evangelical	Chilean
7	33	Married	3	reincidente	Evangelical	Chilean
8	32	Single	0	Reincidente	None	Chilean
9	23	Free union	0	First-timer	Catholic	Chilean
10	52	Single	1	First-timer	Catholic	Bolivian
11	32	Single	1	Recidivist	None	Chilean

Note: Own source.

Research instrument

The main production technique used in this study was the semi-structured interview, defined by De Toscano as:

> The semi-structured interview is a technique that allows us to obtain relevant information about the participants, enabling us to explore their experiences. This technique was chosen because it produces a dialogic encounter between the participant and the researcher, and becomes a valuable tool to gather memories, opinions, and experiences, giving priority to the environment in which the communication and their interaction with the context takes place (De Toscano, 2009).

The interviews were conducted over a three month (April to June) period in facilities of the centralized school. The questions aimed to identify contact networks in the process of their sentence, such as family, school, friends, and also to learn about their previous educational experiences, and their current ones as students deprived of their freedom.

Analysis techniques

The analysis technique used was the contents analysis. According to Cáceres, the qualitative contents analysis allows us to reduce and re-elaborate the data obtained. Among the aims of this technique are to be able to "detonate both the manifest content and the latent contents of the data" (Cáceres, 2003: 35), as well as restructure the data obtained in homogeneous groups. Thus, it is possible to make a larger interpretation of the data obtained, establishing links among the topics discussed according to the theory that supports the research.

Fernández (2002) specifies some stages of the contents analysis applied in this study: 1. Identification of the population to be studied, 2. Selection of the participants, who represent the population studied in the specific context, 3. Identification of the units of analysis and context to analyze the documentation, 4. Construction of the categories with the aim of analyzing the data obtained, forming general groups, 5. Coding, according to the data obtained before their categorization, 6. Categorization: grouping the codes for their specific analysis, and 7. Analysis of the results.

Therefore, we identified recurrent issues according to the responses obtained in the semi-structured interviews with the participants. These issues were classified in five main categories, from which we then made subcategories to introduce greater specifications and gain a deeper understanding of the data to be analyzed. From the categories created we selected the three categories that bore the greatest relation to the aims of this study.

Ethical protocols

Our ethical protocol was, first, to speak with each prospective participant and explain briefly what the study was about. If the participant was interested, he or she was asked to sign an informed consent form detailing the main aim of the study and its characteristics. Each informed consent was read with the participant the day of the interview and the participant was later given a copy.

Results

Context y networks

Networks are defined as the set of interactions and connections the participants have with one or more actors in the course of their sentence and regularization of studies. According to the information given by the participants, we were able to subcategorize this category in two: family support, related to the links they have with their family, and contact with friends, which refers to the presence of other people not members of their family with whom they maintain a link while they are serving their sentence.

Family support

Family support was defined as all contact existing between the participants and one or more members of their family while they were serving their sentence. The family support could be

take place physically, through weekly or conjugal visits, but also at distance, through telephone calls. Furthermore, the contact could be observed when the family member of the participant prepared parcels (toiletries, packed food allowed by Gendarmería de Chile). Family contact in person took place mainly in the female figure that accompanied the participant, generally their mother, partner or wife:

> Eh, family, mostly my missus, my couple, and my mom, who are the closest ones I have, she comes to see me at the visit" (Participant 9).
> Yes, my mother used to come, but… she passed away with this business of the pandemic…, she got… Covid and… sadly, we lost her, then'" (Participant 2)

On the other hand, we observed a distant contact with some members of the family group of some participants, sometimes underscoring the detachment from others.

> With my [hesitates] sister a little, but not much, and it's like 'Hi, chao, and I sent you the money'" (Participant 1).
> And… and my father… two months ago stopped calling me. I don't know if he may have lost the phone… or… it's that they lend him the phone, maybe my sister… with my sister we don't get along very well, so I guess maybe my sister asked him for the pone and she knew I was talking with him, it's two months since I could speak… with… my dad, who is the only one in the family with whom I have any contact (Participant 11).

Foreign participants or those whose family group was very far, despite the geographical distance, stayed in touch with their families.

> Eh, yes… eh yes, there in the module with the cellphones and… thanks to the cellphones I can communicate with my aunt in the outside, with my family in Bolivia and also with the phone in the module, very good (Participant 4).
> Yes, with my family, my mother and my daughters, I have contact… by telephone with the telephone that is authorized here in the module where I am (Participant 5).

The Covid-19 pandemic affected in some cases the dynamics of visits in person and physical contact for some participants. However, technological devices were the main useful elements that allowed them to continue their communication, despite the geographical distance.

> Some time within these three years and a half I've been in prison, eh, I had visits, I had family support, but, before the pandemic. In the pandemic I have lost contact with them and no, I haven't heard anything [from them]'" (Participant 7).

> Yes, my son comes, he visits me, my son, my couple, my [female] friend, my niece, come to visit me… now they're gone because of the pandemic, they are in Bolivia, but they always send me, uh, parcels, they send me parcels, and a lady who brings me the parcel… (Participant 10).

Contact with friends

We defined contact with friends as any relationship outside the family links that could take place while the participants were serving their sentence. We discussed contact with friends, the relationship there may be between the participant and someone outside of their family links, and whether it took place while they were deprived of their freedom. Most participants admitted not having contact with friends while serving their sentence. They even said they had no Friends before being incarcerated.

> None. That is… no, I never had, uh, I was always alone, me and my family (Participant 1).

One of the participants mentioned having had contact with friends, but explained the reasons why he did not keep in touch, because they were mostly friendships linked to crime; that is, that could make them relapse into their previous antisocial behavior.

> Eh, no, little, few, but… I don't say yes because it's not much, more than a "Hi, how are you?'" but… […] they are friends from the street, but also criminals, so I don't have much contact with them… because all the same I'm now… in the module where I am, it's rehabilitation, a therapeutic unit module, so then … eh, it has helped me a lot because… in part I know that to change my life I have to get away from some things… in this case some offenders like my old friends in crime, then it's not much what I have so, and healthier people, I don't have so many friends, so then that's why I'm farther from them. […] Of course they're offenders too that may have, I don't know, toxic conversations that don't agree with the recuperation I'm doing (Participant 5).

Synthesis

The participants had the support of and contact with their families despite the health contingency of 2020 to 2022. They managed to maintain these support networks, mainly with their mothers and couples. But not with their friends, whom they said they didn't have, even before they were deprived of their freedom.

School trajectory outside prison

We defined this as the set of experiences during the childhood and adolescence of the participants that took place outside the context of prison. This category sought to learn about and understand the educational levels they were able to take when they were free, as well as the

reasons why they dropped out. From this analysis we obtained two sub-categories: school experience outside of prison and cause of dropout.

School experience outside of prison

We define school experience outside of prison as the time the participants spent in school when they were free, before they were detained. We took into consideration the regular education of children and youths and the education in the modality EPJA, both regular and by validation of studies. According to what the participants described, we were able to identify a set of out-of-prison experiences in which we observed a scarce, and in some cases none, attendance to educational/school activities, due to different difficulties for their continuous attendance in a regular modality of studies when they were minors, which affected their stay in the school system.

> I had never gone to school (Participant 2).
>
> Yes, look, to say that I went, I didn't go, because anyway I was present at school, but I skipped or played hooky, so it was like not taking the exams. No, I was never really there (Participant 8).

Other out-of-prison experiences were characterized for not having finished their studies during their childhood or adolescence:

> In Bolivia yes, here no... […] There in Bolivia I studied up to third grade, third… basic (Participant 10).
>
> Yes, I went… well, in Santiago I studied there and I finished my basic education, when I was in the first year of middle school I came to this city and… I did the second year of middle school in the industrial school (Participant 5)
>
> It's been a long time since I last studied, long, long time… that I didn't come to a school, I went to one like until I was 16 years out (Participant 11).

We also found experiences of unfinished studies of basic or middle education, in the modality of education for youths and adults (EPJA).

> I mean, the last time I went to school…, anyway it was [laughs] not a very good process. What school process can I tell you, because… at the beginning from first grade to third basic, I was in the community schools… then, I was in, serving a sentence as a minor, on parole in the street and then they sent me to a school… that was for adults… Just like this […] Then… I passed the course because they sent me teachers […] and I passed the course… and… then I left. I served my sentence and… then they put me in prison [laughs] (Participant 1).
>
> Eh, eh, I studied at the Giant school, but it was a night school, over at Corazón de María. There I studied… first and second year of middle school… (Participant 3).

I studied at Vallenar from first to eight grade basic, then when I went to first year of middle school, eh, I moved again to the city of Antofagasta and I got here and no, no, I didn't go on studying, then, I took, I resumed my studies, and I was able to finish first and second grade of middle school […] with education for adults (Participant 9).

Finally, we also found participants with a full schooling abroad, but since they did not do their apostille paperwork their studies were not recognized, so they are regularizing their educational situation while they serve their sentence at the prison center.

…In an institute […]. No, in Bolivia, Bolivia. Electronics (Participant 4).

Causes of school dropout

School dropout was defined as the abandonment of the educational system by the participants during their childhood or adolescence. The causes are understood as the factors that led the participants to decide to abandon their regular education. One of the causes that came up was recurrent moving of the participants with their families, as well as the school dropout associated with the onset of phases of rebelliousness, as a result of the moving.

I was at several schools… because at that time my father was already in a political party [...] we had to be moving constantly, eh, because of the political situation in those years [...] sometimes we got behind, sometimes I didn't study for six, seven months, and then I had to start again quickly, sometimes I had to study on my own… (Participant 6).

Eh, the reasons why I had to… abandon my studies were that, moving from one city to another… I got here and man… anyway it was like, my decision rather than rebelliousness, I'd say, because all my family told me "man, study, study" and I was lazy, most of all, I didn't continue studying (Participant 9).

Another cause of dropout we observed had a direct link to criminal behavior, which was an abrupt detonator for them to stop going to school, as well as their gradual detachment from the educational system and their family nuclei.

Because… I came here to bring drugs [laughs] (Participant 4).

Eh… well, most of all the separation from my family, because although I liked going to school… I was already committing crimes, at that age I was already committing crimes and, they were never part of that and then when they found out... I decided to leave home… and I came here to my sister's and supposedly like, to change, but I continued committing crimes, then […] in that moment I wasn't planning to stop committing crimes, so… well, once I thought about leaving home and continue studying and… as I had always done, but then the idea of crime was still strong because I wanted… to commit crimes and study, then when I left home for good… it's like I lost the motivation to study and… all that was left was crime. That's when I was detained, in prison already, I completely lost the idea of studying (Participant 5).

The most frequent cause of school dropout is linked to the economic problems their families went through.

> I left school… because… my mom was, eh, she was pregnant […] my older brother left and… formed his own family. And my sister was also pregnant, so, the two buses came, and I had to help my family, so I had to abandon my studies and… I began to work then (Participant 3).
>
> No, I didn't finish high school, because there, eh, I began to work since I was very young, I began to help my family […] so sometimes I missed school and so time went by (Participant 10).

Along with economic problems, we also observed an early start in the abuse of ilegal substances, while they dropped out of school and began a life of crime.

> All my brothers, my parents are, are people with low income, you know? All my family has worked in the city dump […] working with other people's garbage is complicated, it's complicated and at the same time hard because, you don't imagine seeing your family like that… you know? Then, that was one of the first things that made a mark on me and, and, made me change my, my way to look at things, in the sense of, of crime […] I began to do, eh, things, again I began to commit crimes, I began to do drugs, I began to do… the world, my life, my life got out of my hands […] That led me to be able to, eh, eh, to commit crimes, to try to make money easily, so I could help… (Participant 8).

Also associated to their families' economic problems, participants mentioned behavioral problems during their schooling as a cause of school dropout, which were increased by complex family situations, such as their parents' separation or alcoholism.

> Eh… first, for money… eh, I with my, at least I've always lived, I, my father and my mother, my sister lived with… my grandfather, for the same reason that there was no money to feed five mouths, then, always… we didn't have enough money, eh… for material stuff, you understand, eh, and also at that time, I was a time when my father was always drunk, he always spent almost all the money of the income that he brought home on alcohol, then, we didn't have the means to support, so… so that, that was one of the reasons why I stopped… going to class, also messy, no, how can I tell you, no, I didn't have… let's say self-control, so, that is, I was stubborn, eh, troublesome, my mom anyway never hit me, so that, so that had an influence so my rebelliousness got stronger all the time (Participant 11).
>
> The first time it was because, the economic situation [in a low voice] …because we were… my father and my mother separated, and there we were… so I had to find a way out and look for an income […] at the age of five I fell into a boarding school, and there I had to learn to… how can I say it, to survive, because there I was already a different person then, there, I began to, think differently, and in the school I reflected that, someone told me something, I wanted to stand out, to be there, and that where all the bad stuff began (Participant 1).

Synthesis

In this category we observed that some participants did not have a regular schooling process when they were minors. They all dropped out of school for different reasons, which led them to start committing crimes.

School trajectory in prison

We defined this category as every educational action of each participant once they were sent to prison. Having access to their school trajectory in prison allowed us to learn about the inmates' motivations to finish their studies while serving a sentence. From this category we obtained the sub-categories of schooling experience in prison, motivation to enroll, and significant experience.

Schooling experience in prison

We defined schooling experience in prison as all experience by the participants in regard to the regularization of their schooling while serving their, past or current. In this sub-category we observed the experience in prison of recidivist participants, where they mentioned the Program Chile Califica, applied nationwide, whose goal is to reduce the educational gaps of adult people with or without previous schooling.

> Eh, no, in the old prison, I had studied… I had finished my education in Chile Califica, and when I entered this prison they told me it wasn't validated in the … Ministry of Education and I had to… take the test to see in what course I would be and there I started in seventh and eighth (Participant 5).
>
> I was in the prison that is there on Prat Street, there, I studied there, I also did first and second grades of middle school, if I'm not mistaken, in Chile Califica, yes, and here, here in this prison, here, eh, of course, I did the rest (Participant 7).

One of the participants mentioned SURGAM, an organization that worked together with Servicio Nacional de Menores (SURGAM) and Gendarmería de Chile. Now it is called Centro de Internación Provisoria y de Régimen Cerrado (CIP-CRC).

After 2007, when Law 20.084, known as the Law on the Criminal Responsibility of Adolescents (LRPA, Ley sobre Responsabilidad Penal Adolescente), the CIP-CRC were created with the aim of differentiating youth criminal justice from adult criminal justice, answering to the need of "Giving a specialized response that acknowledges that adolescents are in a particular stage of their development as human beings and that the way in which they are treated on entering the justice system will have a great significance in their future" (Internación en Régimen Cerrado con Programa de Reinserción Social, 2009).

> From the first to the fourth basic in the SURGAM, in the SURGAM it was, it was the first school in quotation marks, the first school I had, because when I was in the street I went to the school, but I never went insi-

de a classroom or sat on a chair […] At the SURGAM it was, it was… more… like educators, it was more people like you, not policemen, there Gendarmería had a, a perimeter where they could walk or they could not … then, eh, my, my first experience at the SURGAM anyway was complicated because it was the first time when I, because it's like, so to speak, it's a prison, because it was a prison for minors, right? Anyway… I felt the same… a little out of concentration, I felt a lot like this thinking about the street because I came from the street, it was always in my mind, "street, street, street", then… my experience of being able to be like that in the school was… being able, eh, to take the street out of my mind, right? And being able to start what I was already doing, what… they would not give me, supposedly they would not give me my freedom, because I had to pass my process in that place (Participant 8).

We also learned about the schooling experience in prison of a participant that was transferred from a penal unit where he began his schooling in Antofagasta, then to Valdivia for a brief period, to return to the city and continue his studies.

Eh, no, in Valdivia I went the last days, as I was a free student, and I was transferred to Valdivia, eh, there I took a test, but… they sat me in an office away from the others [laughs] (Participant 1).

Another participant recalled his first schooling experience in prison while serving another sentence. However, it was not very significant due to a process of adaptation related to his incarceration:

I… studied… at the old prison… I did… seventh, I think… I don't remember well… it was a long time ago, like in 2012 […] at that time I didn't have much of a motivation to study… in fact I was like 18, and… it was more because I resisted… living in that routine (Participant 11).

Motivation to enroll

We defined motivation to enroll as the reasons that led participants to start or regularize their studies, whether of basic or middle school. One of the reasons why they enrolled in the school was to spend their time in a productive way, especially if they were serving long sentences:

It also… helps me pass the time here (Participant 4).
Because… I always had this idea of wanting to study, then, and… as I told you, I always liked to study, but now having a sentence also quite long, I realize that, I want to take advantage of the time and… one way to do it is to be able to study, and to have done, to have finished my studies (Participant 5).

Besides taking advantage of their time in prison, they also mentioned the importance of having middle school certificates, an essential document to be hired when they regain their freedom.

> I wanted to finish my studies and one of the things was also… that for everything they ask you for the fourth grade of middle school, so… A person with the fourth of middle school can get something, even the most basic (Participant 8)

Another important reason why the participants decided to regularize their schooling had to do with improving and "obtaining behavior", and thus have access to benefits.

> Because of my behavior […] I needed behavior, I was risking many, many years […] there in that moment, it was more for behavior, it was not something personal… or that I wanted to improve, or that I wanted to learn, no, it was only for behavior that I enrolled (Participant 6).
> At first… eh, … for behavior. Because before, I'll tell you that I was in the prison and my thoughts were not on working, on anything like that, but it was faster to look for the street and this was a requirement for that… (Participant 1).

In some participants we found the desire to continue studying and specialize, especially when they finished their sentence.

> I want to be a different person, I want to keep studying, because it's like this encouraged me more to, when I finished the fourth grade of middle school, it encouraged me to keep studying… I studied colorimetry but… It's like I… I don't see feel comfortable in the barber shop, I saw that I like cooking, and for that they ask you for the fourth grade to continue studying (Participant 3).
> I'm… very interested in getting my fourth grade of middle school […] to see if I have the opportunity to study a technical degree, in some institute or something like that, that's what I would like (Participant 9).
> Right, to be able to specialize more, and learn more … (Participant 10).

Perhaps obtaining some benefits and good behavior are some of the main reasons why they enrolled in the prison school. However, we observed that their enrollment in the school allowed them to reconnect with themselves and forget for a moment that they are deprived of their freedom.

> Studying is like an aid […] it's like an opportunity, eh, the school, it's something that …, eh, that makes an inmate, somehow, eh, take his mind away from the prison, eh, eh, it's very, eh, gratifying, it's very good (Participant 7).

Personal improvement was a reason frequently brought up, which we found was related with family links they had or still have.

Because… I saw that… as they say, I was missing the train […] I, besides my daughter, I have a year old son… and I, when I spoke with him, he said "Dad, you know they told me this at school, and, you know?" …then I had no answer for him because… I didn't have the answer, like, son, you know, no eh, this is the answer, eh, you, you have to do this to solve that and I didn't have the answer, so, then, this was what led me to… to come to the school (Participant 2).

Two days after I was sent to the yard my mom died […] and I couldn't say goodbye, I was… bad, I felt bad with myself […] my mom always insisted that I study, she urged me to study to make some progress… then it stayed in my mind… being able to… get an education, be someone, and I didn't trust myself really, I didn't have much confidence and… I set myself goals, to be someone, I don't have her anymore, but at last… to feel that, man, I managed to be what she wanted (Participant 11).

Significant experience

We defined a significant experience as the most pleasant memory of the participants as they were regularizing their schooling in prison, and which had a positive impact on their development as a persona and participant member of the school penal. The significant experiences described by the participants were different. For one of them, his most significant memory was the first day he was in the school penal, because it reminded him of experiences from his childhood.

Eh… the first day I went to class… that reminded me of when… my father took me to school, when I was a child… I had never gone that far back…, it was nice, because it reminded me of that… (Participant 4).

Another participant remembered his graduation from basic education, when he last saw his mother.

My graduation [confidently] when I finished basic… because apart from that, it was the last time I saw my mother… eh… it was an achievement for her and made her feel good (Participant 1).

Curricular activities are important for the educational development of those who are regularizing their studies. That was demonstrated by another participant, who remembered his participation in an activity that was significant for him, where he wore a costume, and another participant did a musical presentation.

Even today, everyone teases me about the shark [laughs] Because… As they say here, the… the shark is like the… the black feet, the… the lover, then' […] that was like… for me it was funny, for me it was funny and for the others too, you see? "Good, man, dressing as a shark and all that" and all that… even now they all remember (Participant 2).

When I went to the sports court to sing […] That was the most important moment for me, you know? To feel that, that… all the audience sang, Dante, Dante Justiniano, another one, another one, one more song. You know? There I felt, I'll say, loved by my fellow inmates, you know? (Participant 10).

It is known that there are security norms, enforced by Gendarmería de Chile. These norms aim to prevent problems with the prison population by separating them in modules. Despite this division, all the people deprived of their freedom have access to schooling, some as free students in the program of validation of studies given by the Ministry de Education nationwide and others with daily in-person classes in the module in which they imprisoned, so it is the teachers who have to go to these module since it is believed that this population represents greater risks of conflict if they are together with inmates from other modules. In this scenario, the significant experience of one of the participants was related to being able to go to the school to an award ceremony, which motivated him to do better every day, since at that time he was housed in a maximum security module.

> Eh, yes, precisely because in that module they did not allow us to come, eh, to this, to this school [...], they called so I could come to the school to participate in an award ceremony… me and another inmate from, from that module, were the only ones from those two modules who were not allowed to come to the school, anyway they allowed us to come to a presentation, a ceremony, so… when you have those, those accomplishments, eh, it's like it motivates you more to keep studying, it motivates you to contribute something, and… be able to go on acquiring knowledge and experiences that, also feel gratifying (Participant 5).

The daily evaluation activities in the school also left in the participants significant experiences. That was mentioned by two participants when they referred to how significant it was to have learned to do a dissertation and be evaluated this way.

> Dissertations, being able to dissert, being able to show more of your personality, because one who, one who didn't do that, and doing it here is good anyway (Participant 8).
> A significant experience? Eh, when it was my turn to dissert, well, I had to dissert and… I was more worried about getting, getting the card to see, the things, what, what I can say, what this or that meant, then', it was also significant (Participant 11).

Finally, one of the participants summarized his significant experience by recalling the impact that the school has on his personal commitment and motivation, taking once more the view of the school as a liberating space within the prison.

> Yes, eh, the school, eh, it took me out of, of, this time, eh, deprived of my freedom, it took me out of, of this prison in a manner of speaking, because I was studying, eh… it was my mind, it was my world and I made an effort, I studied all the same and when I couldn't, I approached the teachers, I tried, I asked for their help, one day I remember that, that, eh … eh, I got a bad grade, if I'm not mistaken it was a red one, and I almost cried, because I couldn't accept that I had a bad grade, and that experience also

marked me because I saw that I was taking it seriously, and that is what, what the school generated, for example on me, that's what it generated, commitment, motivation, yes, that experience was significant for me (Participant 7).

Conclusions

In this article we discussed the identity and educational trajectory of alumni and current students of a school in a context of detention in the north of Chile. We were able to analyze aspects that showed the importance of their educational process for their rehabilitation and subsequent insertion into society.

In 2019 the study "*Modelos penitenciarios educativos como base del* éxito *en la reinserción social de las personas privadas de libertad*" ("Educational models in prison as the foundations of success in the social reinsertion of people deprived of their freedom") was published by authors Enjuanes and Morate (2019: 12), whose main conclusions were about the assertiveness towards the intervention of people deprived of their freedom, with an educational models approach to reduce recidivism. These models promoted dynamics that made people deprived of their freedom participate actively, improving aspects of their quality of life.

This study may provide us with elements to glimpse the conclusions obtained from the intervention with this population, among which the following stand out:

In regard to the context and the support networks, we observed a significantly closer relationship with their families, especially with their mothers and/or partners, and that the relationships with other members of the family are not that close. The participants said that before they were deprived of their freedom they did not maintain relations of friendship with other people, and that in case these had existed they were not maintained while they were serving their sentence, because they affected their rehabilitation. Support networks are important for everyone, since "you can rely on them both in daily life and in critical situations, and they are fundamentally useful for the development of creative solutions to conflicts and problems" (Arias, Sabatini, Scolni, Tauler, 2020: 3). Therefore, thanks to these support networks the effects of prisonization may be diminished, especially to recover their self-esteem and for containing their emotions. Permanent contact with someone who cares for the person deprived of freedom, either by visiting or by delivering goods periodically, may diminish their deterioration.

In regard to the out-of-prison educational experience, we observed that most participants had partially done basic education studies in regular schools when they were minors. However, factors such as moving from one town to another, economic problems at home, family situations of abuse or violence, and the abuse of illegal drugs or alcohol, had a negative effect on their schooling.

As for their school experience in prison, we identified a minority of participants who had previously studied in prison when they were minors at different prison centers or with programs

of validation of studies, without being able to obtain their certification. Regarding their main motivations to decide to enroll in the school in prison, we observed the desire of improving themselves, improving their behavior within the prison to be eligible for benefits, and most of all taking advantage of their time while deprived of their freedom.

We also confirmed the importance of having spaces directly related to teaching since, besides regularizing their studies, taking part in recreational and interdisciplinary activities throughout the participants' schooling had positive repercussions on their process as students and as persons. Being able to highlight their achievements, encourage and support them in their academic process, is equally significant for them since they acknowledged that they did not have such opportunities when they were children or adolescents, or they did not take advantage of them at that time.

These findings may be compared with those of the studies of Stickle and Schuster (2023), who found similar indicators in contexts of detention in the United States, which showed education as a fundamental milestone for incorporation to society and decreasing subsequent recidivism.

Considering the characteristics of depersonalization defined by Jesús Valverde, we may also conclude that education in contexts of detention helps people deprived of their freedom to reconstruct their identity and autonomy as a means of resistance to the complexity of the context itself, turning the figure of the school into a space that dignifies them as people.

Education in contexts of detention invites us to discover the true value of educating, even when this educational modality becomes a highly complex scenario due not only to political factors but also to sociocultural ones. It is well known that inequalities "condition and lead to a circuit of scarce life opportunities and situations of poverty and exclusion" (Frejtman, Herrera, 2010), so the school in a context of detention has an even more complex task than that of a regular formal school: not only must it support the process of construction of knowledge, but it must also offer the student the tools needed to improve his quality of life, contribute to his social reinsertion, and re-signify his existence (Maldonado, Olmos, 2013).

As for the importance of valuing the attitudinal skill of the teachers, Díaz (2016) remarks that the school plays a fundamental role not only in the acquisition of formal knowledge but also in the general formation of skills that will allow inmates to transform positively their personal and social reality. In this process, the teacher acts as a guide who determines and orientates the actions for the effective achievement of this transformation. The strong link between educational achievement and its results may decrease the probability of recidivism (McCarthy, 2006), and the fact that the people deprived of their freedom receive their education while serving a sentence, accompanied by professionals with the ability to conform with the context, means that analyses like these are crucial (Flores, 2012: 1).

Limitations of the study

Among the limitations we might consider in this study we could mention the size and representativeness of our sample, since it was specific to a prison center and may not show the nationwide perception of the people deprived de freedom, despite not having studies on this subject in the region selected. Access to prison facilities is complex, and requires authorizations that are sometimes not granted in the time frame required. It may also happen that one office authorizes the study and another does not, slowing down the study.

Another limitation could be the context of the prison center selected for research, since some specific conditions, like its characterization and hierarchy, may be different from another prison regime where the results might be generalized if compared with the experiences of other students in Chile.

On the other hand, there are some limitations due to the qualitative approach, which although valuable for its depth regarding the experience of the participants and their own perception, has a limit of what is real and what might be subjective for the participant, since there may sometimes be some memory bias or memories that could be influenced by the questions they must answer.

Projections

With this study we hope to promote the development of educational policies in the country which are inclusive and effective in the different prison centers. By compiling the needs, the educational experiences in prison and the motivations of each participant who shared his experience, we generate a first foundation that will allow others in the future to design educational programs directly related to the context and specific needs of the people deprived of their freedom in the region of Antofagasta, Chile.

With the information provided by the participants we may attest to the importance of having support networks. Hence, in the future we may propose to work with or approach these networks through activities specific to the education conducted in the school, thus fostering the active participation of the students, inspiring their academic success and emotional support when they regularize their studies.

The importance of learning about the educational context of the schools functioning within a prison facility becomes clear, since this is a challenging space due to the needs of the population to be intervened educationally. It is therefore necessary to have a continuous training of the teachers and administrative staff that carry out these functions in these educational centers, so they can provide a good emotional contention for the proper functioning of the school.

Another projection could be that this kind of studies might be the gateway to future research, considering different pedagogical approaches of countries with specific programs of reinsertion and education, as well as being able to verify the impact of education on their rates of recidivism.

The diffusion of this study may contribute to reduce the stigma carried by people deprived of their freedom. Although it is true that they did commit different types of crime, they are serving their sentences, and through the different programs of Gendarmería, among them the subprogram of education, they may acquire the tools and knowledge that will allow for their reinsertion into society.

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