



Web-based training in opinions of students from Norwegian and Polish prison service

Knut Andersen, Marcin Strzelec, Sven-Erik Skotte

CONTACT: Knut Andersen, Correctional Service of Norway Staff Academy, Lillestrom, Norway,
E-mail: knut.andersen@krus.no
Marcin Strzelec, PhD, Central Training Center of Prison Service, Kalisz, Poland,
E-mail: mstrzelec@ebrexnet.com
Sven-Erik Skotte, Correctional Service of Norway Staff Academy, Lillestrom, Norway,
E-mail: sven-erik.skotte@krus.no

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Abstract:

The article describes essential observations and research analysis which resulted from joint actions between educators of penitentiary training centers in Poland and Norway. This is a summary of the report *The effects of bilateral cooperation between Polish and Norwegian penitentiary education centers* (Andersen et al., 2015). Training schemes in the prison services touch very peculiar areas of education, where there are not many researches describing this subject, and even fewer comparisons describing tasks and training models of two penitentiary systems.

Thus this paper presents the research which is probably being the only one joint attempt of examining two systems of trainings for prison service in Poland and Norway. The general conclusion resulting from the researched material is that the use of e-learning in Norwegian penitentiary system trainings is backed up by greater experience which is obviously noticeable, while the respondents of both penitentiary institutions have the same and decent views about blended-learning.

The shortcut of report „The effects of bilateral cooperation between Polish and Norwegian penitentiary education centers” (Andersen et al., 2015).

1. Introduction

It is fair enough to say that almost every discipline of life has progressed and that the beginning of 21st century brings technological and social changes we have to face. This flow of modernity has not left alone the penitentiary services and their mandatory roles in the society. The changes are visible in the staff model and actions they take. It is worth to note that the changes within the institution do not always come together with their clients. As we have not seen any drastic increase in the number of prisoners committing different types of crime ie. murder, physical and criminal violence one must say that the global amount of inmates augmented. The factors that contributed to this are well known as there has been more organized, gang, drug related crime, followed by fraud, global terrorism, and cybercrime. It is an uneasy situation, and calls among the society seem to be fully justified. However, the query remains the same – are prison services equipped in necessary tools and knowledge to rehabilitate the present inmates to work and exist outside, among everyday people, problems and challenges? The answer to this question may vary from country to country, depending on attitude and approach of political decisive bodies. However, one thing seems to be sure, that any effective work requires preparation, unceasing training, adaptation of forms and methods of training and evaluation. This must be done with respect to human rights, dignity and rely on assumptions of Life Long Learning with the use of technological advancement.



2. Polish and Norwegian collaboration in the penitentiary area

The established partnership between Polish Prison Service and the Norwegian Penitentiary Service enabled the implementation of the program *Improvement of Correctional Services including non-custodial sanctions*, which puts strong emphasis on the improvement of prison system with respect to international human rights. The Ministry of Justice, The Central Board of Prison Service and the Central Training Center of Prison Service execute the program by means of pre-defined projects, of which activities include improvement of prison service staff competences with the impact on the frequent usage of the alternative methods related to imprisonment. December 6, 2012 was the turning point in the Polish and Norwegian prison service, as the Agreement on the Program was signed by Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (NMFA) and National Focal Point (NFP). Both sides agreed with the funding of *Improvement of Correctional Services including non-custodial sanctions* program.

In the response to the Agreement mentioned above, The Central Training Center of Prison Service in Kalisz (COSSW) presented its own project and joined the whole program introducing its equal partner, the Correctional Service of Norway Staff Academy in Oslo (KRUS). This was possible due to the bilateral Agreement signed in Warsaw on 19th of February 2013 between COSSW and KRUS, which defined the principles and responsibilities of mutual cooperation. That contract resulted in the implementation of the entire project entitled *Strengthening of equipment and modernization of the training system for prison staff within vocational prison staff trainings* which focused on the exchange of knowledge, sharing experiences and best practices. COSSW cooperated with the Norwegian Partner also on the basis of four smaller projects financed from the Bilateral Cooperation Fund. Such a thorough cooperation endorsed detailed look at the specificity of training carried out in Poland and in Norway and led to many contrastive studies depicting policy of each partner. Methodical approach used while looking at models of training and its organization proved to be very productive, as it made space to enrich an individual system of training and professional development, specifying additional fields of collaboration, exchange of experiences and sharing knowledge. These four smaller projects allowed also thematic, mutual study visits which were dedicated to:

- preventive measures, methods of self-defense in training and intervention techniques, and efficient solving of difficult situations excluding the use of physical force;
- ways of identifying stress and its impact on the implementation of tasks by the Prison Service officers, and minimizing the effects of stress and job burnout;
- methods of training for officers and employees of the Prison Service;
- use of information systems enhancing the system and organization of training.

3. The education of prison staff in Poland and Norway – common and contrasting points

The role of The Central Training Centre of Prison Service is to deliver training, and practical development for its staff. This is possible by means of different types of training: base camp, directed self-study, electronic distance learning, and a combination of these forms. The Director General of Prison Service supervises the COSSW and its functioning in the area of training. The Correctional Service Staff Academy of Norway, on the other hand, also provides training for entire prison service staff, but pays more attention to workshops within the penitentiary units. It is worth noting that the institution is also in charge of research, its dissemination and serves as the main competence center for penitentiary personnel.

Although the two institutions aim at professional training of penitentiary personnel, the difference in training between them is clear and visible. Norwegian candidate for the officer has to follow the three-year training program, during which he gains the primary competences, which in turn are developed and exercised by officer mentors working in the particular penitentiary unit and tutors – representing the teachers. Three year training includes also one year long internship in the unit outlined by KRUS, where the future officer gets more practice and confronts his or her knowledge in the real situations. In contrast to Polish prison workers, the Norwegian officers, after training, are prepared to fulfil the duties and work in every area of prison environment, whereas in Poland there is a special training for staff to cover medicine, finance, quartermaster, security. It's a great advantage of the Norwegian system, as the training focuses more on the foundations of



penitentiary work, but also gives possibility to penetrate and understand other important issues. It should be noted that the system doesn't recognize the ranks and specialties, and the staff needed to cover jobs beyond the scope of the officer is simply employed from the outside. This happens to medical personnel, psychologists, and office workers. Such an approach lets the officers fully cooperate, understand the needs and responsibilities, exercise the knowledge while taking decisions respecting the authority of each other. The management is clear and there are hardly any situations in which the impasse in decision making would depreciate the officer's work.

The Polish legal and structural conditions do not allow to follow such a model, but it is possible to adapt certain solutions to vocational training so that it would be easier for officers to cooperate and understand work duties in every penitentiary section, thus making a part of vocational training as unitary where interdisciplinary skills and knowledge together with teamwork could be acquired. The unitary training would constitute then a base for further development regarding sections, ranks and specializations. In fact, Polish Prison Service in cooperation with Norwegian Penitentiary Service, has already implemented a new model of vocational training, with its unitary part, and specialized training. This approach to teaching resembles modular teaching, which developed in Poland and serves mainly in vocational schools. Therefore, it seems wise enough to use good strategies of modular teaching, confront them with the Norwegian style of staff training and implement the essence in Polish staff training. A great constraint arises here from the discrepancies in the training time, leaving Poland behind, but thanks to the notions of modular training and Norwegian experience, the idea to increase the number of practical tasks, active approach to teaching, consulting the acquired knowledge with tutors and mentors from the penitentiary units seem to fill up the hole in the time training. The newly implemented initial training is responding to some extent to this assumption.

4. The content, range and strategy of joint actions

One of the advantages of bilateral cooperation between KRUS and COSSW was acquiring comprehensive knowledge about the functioning of both penitentiary systems with a thorough look at the staff training in Poland and Norway. The activities planned to meet the assumptions of cooperation were set in relation to information and multimedia technology, focusing at e-learning as the form of support in the training. Moreover, the opinions of e-learning students might be an interesting factor, corresponding to the project overall activities. Working meetings and written correspondence naturally allowed to fulfill this assignment. This in turn translated into organization and implementation of eight meetings within module 2 of Project No. 6 and Bilateral Cooperation Fund according to the project schedule.

The research carried out by the two institutions could be applied in both countries, with the consideration of the complete educational system. Despite KRUS being the only training institution and COSSW being the leader in officer training, it was enough to catch the core points accompanied by the entire variety in training, in relation to the project. The early common studies of similarities and differences in both penitentiary systems allowed to pose elementary questions concerning e-learning philosophy in both schools. Therefore, researchers wanted to know whether the students had similar experiences in training by means of e-learning, which kinds of pros and cons of e-learning are important for students, which instruments of the platform gain popularity and are helpful, and finally how they assess effects of training implemented through distant method of education.

The verification and speculation on the possible answers was made in the preceding discussions between the two partners. The reason Norwegian students would see more advantages in e-learning systems could have an origin in early access to them as school system in Norway uses distant learning more often. Thus the presence of e-learning, considered as a stable element, in Norwegian base camp training, would surely be given extra points. In contrast, Polish adepts could express their anxiety about this approach to teaching, but may highly score here the access to offered resources, pdf-scripts, booklets etc. as it reminds the classroom/subject based teaching in which theoretical studies and testing are the primary points of concern.

To find empiric answers to the questions, beyond the speculations made, the project participants decided to carry out a survey questioning the specific groups of trainees in Poland and Norway. The form and the content of the questionnaire was worked out in cooperation with subject institutional bodies and project teams. The fourteen closed questions and one open were supposed to give the assessment on the quality in training,



compare opinions and show contrasting and common areas of training of Polish and Norwegian students. This set of questions collected the information on socio-demographic data, experience in distant education, pluses and minuses of distant learning, resources available on the e-platforms, subjective views, and self-evaluation. Before launching the proper questionnaire, both sides carried out a pre-questionnaire in order to assure understanding and accuracy, to different group of people. Their task was to depict any unclear, or imprecise phrasing, and make comment on the draft of the questionnaire.

The selection of four target groups (two teams from each country) was based on similarities in training approach, methods of e-learning, age, experience, knowledge base. Polish COSSW groups were represented by candidates to the first officer rank, under base camp training, (COSSW Sta.) and self-directed study (COSSW E-lear.). Norwegian groups were represented by KRUS first and third semester students (KRUS 1sem/3sem).

5. The survey outputs

The survey proved to be a very descriptive starting point for analysis in terms of similarities and differences between students of both schools, and the training they are in.

The first outstanding difference arises from the question concerning e-learning experience. 80% of COSSW Sta. had never had any experience with distant education while nearly half of Norwegians had used e-learning techniques more the once. The question confirms the expected prediction about the use of e-learning in Norwegian schooling system in general.

Another question confirms the differences in organization of training as in Poland it is not possible to use e-platform on daily basis, during classes, while 25% and 30% of KRUS students log on their platform while in school. 100% of KRUS students use the platform during working hours, whilst none of the Polish respondents ever used this tool in working hours. Norwegian training system treats their students as officially employed and paid by KRUS – therefore their attending KRUS school, prison internships, apprenticeships outside Norway are seen as regular job. Polish students, on the contrary, do not perceive training time in the center as working hours ie. service in the penitentiary unit. This might be the reason why this question scored none on the Polish side.

Another query revealed the place of platform usage. KRUS 1sem. students use the platform in the training center only. It may suggest that the number of tasks on the platform, the students are charged with, is enough to be explored while staying inside the center. It is worth noting here that independent work outside work place ties the relation to lifelong learning idea and self-study.

Question concerning the usage frequency of the platform also exhibited some discrepancies and common characteristics. KRUS 1sem. group use the learning platform most frequently whereas COSSW Sta. least. It possibly happens due to the fact that for KRUS 1sem. the platform is a new, obligatory tool they need to get accustomed with. COSWW Sta. group is probably less obliged on the platform while attending the stationary training course in COSSW center. COSSW E-lear. and KRUS 3sem. spent considerably the same average amount of time. It may suggest that they have more or less the same number of tasks to be exercised using the platform.

Students were also asked about the most important drawbacks when it comes to e-learning. The first, outstanding disadvantage here is the lack of contact either with the teacher or other students. The question scored approximately 4.4 points among KRUS 1 sem. and COSSW Sta. KRUS 3 sem. and COSSW E-lear. were also not left behind in their scoring. Generally speaking, it can be assumed that lack of contact in this type of education was often highlighted by respondents, having in mind the fact that contact does not apply to the primary assumptions of e-learning in general.

On the other hand, when students were asked about communication tools implemented on the platforms – they were of little importance to them. Norwegian students rated low the possibilities of chat and forum offered by their platform. It could be explained by the fact that being all the time with other students in the training center or penitentiary unit, eliminates the need to contact them remotely via the platform. The contrary situation was seen in the results of COSSW E-lear. group where discussion forum was appreciated. The explanation of this choice could also be simple as they were the only trained group with no direct contact with other trainees or teachers. Perhaps the possibility to attend the discussion forum, which in turn is being moderated and supervised by teachers, offers at least the frames of teaching environment to which they were used



to. One might judge here the low rating of communication tools due to their low usefulness in the e-learning process, but has to remember that their low score could have originated probably from lack of skills and usage experience of the final user.

The question about the disadvantages also revealed other drawbacks of e-learning. What is more, they are better seen on the Polish site. Polish students mentioned technology related problems i.e. necessity of hardware, limited Internet access, failing new technology. All in all, no matter the disadvantages of e-learning it has to be clarified here that the ratio of disadvantages to advantages is fairly low, which and suggests that students take advantage of e-learning in their education. The signaled drawbacks result from the manner of this method and social differences.

The e-learning platforms offer also resources and activities which can be used in the process of e-learning course and learning process in general. The most popular resources for Polish groups were the written scripts uploaded on the platform (COSSW Sta. 4.9 and COSSW E-lear. 5.0) and self-test which offer the possibility to revise and give fast feedback. The Norwegians voted for the calendar tools as the most useful platform resource.

Finally, all the training participants were asked about the organization of training and the efficacy of training by means of e-learning. More than a half of participants from three groups i.e. COSSW Sta., KRUS 1. sem and KRUS 3 sem. pointed at traditional training as the most effective one, which in turn is followed by mixed form of training (COSSW Sta. – 33%, KRUS 1 sem. 45%, KRUS 3 sem. 44%). It has to be noted here that these groups have already benefited from the mixed form of training. COSSW E-lear., however, highlighted mixed training as the most effective form of education (61%). 31 % of trainees voted for traditional model training, and surprisingly 8% chose e-learning as the most effective training approach. It must be said here that COSSW E-lear. used the platform the most intensively and had almost no or little contact with the teacher. This may indicate that a reliable forms of assessment of learning and their effectiveness are associated with their good understanding, as well as the rejection of prejudice and habits.

6. Conclusion

To sum up, the survey conducted on Polish and Norwegian trainees, and the professional, bilateral cooperation between the Central Training Center of Prison Service and the Correctional Service of Norway Staff Academy, allowed the project teams to draw conclusions on purposefulness of the whole project and the position of e-learning in both academies. It goes without saying that the Norwegian trainings within the learning platform prove their accuracy, experience and lifelong learning factor. On the other hand, Polish approach to e-learning is heading the right direction, as it has been seen in the questionnaire.

Undoubtedly, comparing two different institutions, with a varied organization of trainings, different types of vocational needs, seems to be unmeasurable. However, the educational processes of learning, philosophy of the service, finally the needs of the society stay at the same level of expectations. Therefore, combining e-learning with base camp training seems to be a good direction to orient the training this way. In fact, such trainings are already run in both institutions, proving the correctness of decision makers.

The survey is a good foundation and the first attempt of detailed analysis when it comes to training, as it can be examined by individuals in favor of further suggestions, changes, or more expanded research.

The project and its goals overtook the preset interests, funding a new and already proved directions of the adult education expansion, where there is a high need for professional approach. It was possible to achieve such understanding of the project by numerous bilateral visits, internships, seminars, staff and student exchanges.

Moreover, the modifications of the Polish system of training into modular, problem based approach is another contribution of the implemented project.

All in all, the project activities not only supported the exchange of knowledge, best practices, experience, but also proved the purposefulness of the joint survey, which openly set directions for further cooperation between the two institutions. The value of the project, its expectations, and interdisciplinary approach were noticed and emphasized during the closing conference in Kalisz, during which both sides expressed their readiness for further development activities in the frames of already well-established, mutual cooperation.

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