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INVESTIGATING THE FACTORS THAT DRIVE PRISONERS TO PURSUE FURTHER STUDIES THROUGH DISTANCE E-LEARNING MODE

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Abstract

The study aimed to explore the motivating factors driving incarcerated individuals to pursue further education through distance e-learning while in prison. The central argument of the paper posits that despite the challenging living conditions within correctional facilities, inmates exhibit a strong motivation to continue their education. Conducted within a prison setting in Namibia, this qualitative research employed interviews as the primary method of data collection, operating within an interpretive paradigm. The taped interviews were transcribed with great attention to detail by a skilled transcriber. The author was then given the transcripts to interpret. Thematic analysis was employed to derive insights from the data. Within the context of Namibia's evolving legal framework, notable shifts have been observed in the approach to prison services, transitioning from punitive measures towards rehabilitation and community reintegration. The government of the Republic of Namibia has demonstrated a significant commitment to inmate rehabilitation by facilitating access to distance education programs through e-learning platforms, as evidenced by the study findings. According to the perspectives shared by certain inmates, incarceration presents them with opportunities for personal growth and development. However, pursuing education while in prison, particularly through remote means, can pose considerable challenges. The desires of inmates, intermittent assistance received, and constraints faced in pursuing education suggest occasional resistance from prison administrations, leading to alternative suggestions. At times, logistical issues such as resource availability may be cited as reasons for limitations in educational opportunities, necessitating negotiations with relevant authorities for access to learning facilities.

Keywords: E-learning, prison, student, studying

Introduction

The study aimed to investigate the factors that drive incarcerated individuals to pursue higher education through remote E-Learning while in prison. The report argues that prison walls cannot hinder the education of inmates who are dedicated to their studies, even in the face of harsh living conditions. The study was conducted within a correctional facility located in Namibia.

The educational

Factors that Motivate Prisoners to Study in a Distance E-Learning Mode:

Adu-Boahen (2024) highlighted the pivotal role of empathy in fostering the personal growth, cultural awareness, and engagement of youth participating in distance e-learning programs. Empathy entails both the capacity and willingness to forge connections with others, with motivation, social norms, and mindsets identified as significant factors influencing its development within prison settings. The ability to comprehend previous events by adopting empathic perspectives is hindered by emotional reactions that clash with present values, causing inmates to depend on their current emotional condition for interpretation. Developing empathy involves acquiring learnable skills such as contextualization, awareness of one's positionality, establishing personal connections, and exercising historical imagination. Integrating empathy into the daily lives of prisoners holds the potential to cultivate citizenship competencies essential for their reintegration into society upon release (Adu-Boahen, 2024).

Prison education programs encompass a variety of activities, including educational courses, utilization of prison libraries, participation in prison work, sociocultural engagements, sports initiatives, and vocational training (Croux, Brosens et al., 2019). Despite the importance of ensuring equal rights for all prisoners in terms of educational access, limited research addresses both the motivations and barriers influencing participation in prison programs, further underscoring the need for comprehensive investigation in this area (Croux, Brosens et al., 2019).

Elements such as honesty, demonstrated through trustworthiness in actions; respect, manifested in courteous and polite treatment; neutrality, reflected in consistent and unbiased decision-making; and participation or voice, wherein prisoners are afforded opportunities to express themselves, all contribute to the motivation of inmates to participate in educational activities (Van Hall, Van der Laan et al., 2024).

Diseth, Eikeland et al. (2008) uncovered challenges faced by inmates engaging in prison education, including issues pertaining to the learning environment and individual learning impediments. Despite encountering difficulties, the study revealed that inmates generally expressed satisfaction with the quality of education, demonstrated high levels of motivation, and employed suitable learning strategies. However, a significant portion of participants encountered obstacles such as limited access to computer equipment and disruptions caused by security protocols within the prison environment. McMurrin, Theodosi, et al. (2008) identified various motivating factors driving prisoners to pursue education, ranging from aspirations for a better lifestyle and acquiring vocational skills to seeking improved family relationships and enhanced physical well-being. Additionally, inmates exhibited anti-criminal motivations, including endeavors to desist from criminal activities, enhance self-discipline, secure employment, attain stable housing, overcome substance abuse issues, and cultivate new leisure interests.

Panitsides and Moussiou (2019) assert the widespread prevalence of prison education programs globally, emphasizing their potential benefits at both individual and societal levels. While the origins of prison education can be traced back to religious instruction in the 1800s, it wasn't until the 1930s that it began to be recognized for its rehabilitative role and its potential impact on reducing recidivism rates.

Currently, in Europe, almost all countries offer education within their prisons to varying degrees, although the specific nature and style of instruction can differ significantly. Panitsides and Moussiou (2019) propose that the incorporation of training and education programs for prisoners should be a prominent aspect of the legal framework in every nation, as well as in international agreements and guidelines. Prison convicts are entitled to the same educational rights as regular citizens in certain countries. While incarcerated, prisoners experience seclusion from the external world, separation from their loved ones, loss of personal privacy and independence, and are required to comply with the regulations imposed by prison officials, which can result in psychological stress. The mental well-being of the convicts in question is adversely affected by the combined strain exerted by both internal and external factors (Rahmi & Nurmalasari, 2024). Incarcerated individuals are driven by aspirations that improve their quality of life, such as boosting their standard of living, acquiring professional expertise, fostering positive familial connections, developing new abilities, and attaining physical fitness and well-being. Prisoner education is a valuable tool for fostering motivation and cultivating a good, goal-oriented mindset (McMurrin, Theodosi et al., 2008).

The primary concern for convicts in their jail experience is the quality of their living conditions and the availability of material possessions. The aspects of prison life that are most significant and impactful are the prisoners' experience, the connections between staff and prisoners, the fairness, safety, order, humanity, trust, and opportunity for personal growth inside the prison environment. The quality of prisons should align with the purposes of correction, custody, and humanitarianism. This includes providing support, maintaining control and clarity, ensuring legality and safety, promoting productivity and hopefulness, as well as upholding principles of respect and fairness. Furthermore, the dimensions of 'harmony', 'security', and 'professionalism' are essential components that should be incorporated into the 'moral performance' of prisons (Auty & Liebling, 2024).

Delaere et al. (2013) contend that e-learning empowers prisoners to exercise their entitlement to education by affording them the opportunity to finish incomplete educational programs or engage in further vocational or advanced training during their incarceration. Distance education institutes have a role in promoting the social reintegration of offenders by providing educational possibilities. Delivering education to prisoners can improve their academic skills during their time in prison, and it is a strategy that can positively influence their conduct. Education has the potential to enhance persons' capacity to sustain paid job after being released from incarceration and to cease their involvement in unlawful behaviors. Moreover, education bestows importance upon the absence of their freedom, increases the probability of obtaining employment after being released, and fosters mental wellness. Participating in prison education can be a strategic approach to promote the social reintegration of convicts (Delaere et al., 2013).

In their study, Kaiser, Piquer et al. (2024) found that prison-based programs have been effective in reducing recidivism rates and promoting successful reintegration into society. Participation in correctional programs has

also been linked to reduced misconduct within correctional facilities. Nevertheless, programs may not always be regularly available, and even when they are, some prisoners may lack the motivation or inclination to participate in them. Prisoners' involvement in educational programs can boost their sense of control, self-worth, and open up possibilities for personal growth and improvement. For instance, their participation in sports programs while in prison can help alleviate inmates' stress, depression, and anxiety, while also enhancing their psychological well-being. The interpretation of training academy socialization, learning, and knowledge can be influenced by two main categories of attitudes: the pre-existing attitudes of inmates towards rehabilitation and punitiveness. The attitudes and behaviors of convicts are impacted by factors both within and outside the prison environment. Prisoners' punitive and rehabilitative perspectives are influenced by and connected to different results, such as the nature of their interactions with wardens and their preparedness for release (Burton, Jonson et al., 2024).

Manger et al. (2013) discovered multiple individual and societal advantages associated with enhancing convicts' educational drive and educational attainment. While in jail, individuals may be inclined to pursue education due to the inherent worth of knowledge, their own reintegration into society, potential employment opportunities in the future, the desire to escape the monotonous routines of prison life, or simply to be in the company of others. The motivation to participate in an educational program in prison appears to be primarily influenced by instructional factors that are seldom applicable in non-prison settings. Certain motivations for pursuing education are specific to the prison environment. These motivations arise from a desire to break free from the monotonous routine of prison life or, conversely, to equip oneself for life after release. In order to avoid engaging in prison employment or adhering to prison routines, prisoners have the option to pursue education. Certain groups of inmates may engage in studying to evade certain features of prison life rather than pursuing education as an independent activity. According to Manger, Eikeland et al. (2013), convicts with higher levels of education viewed education as a means of effectively navigating life in jail.

Engaging in prison education programs enhances the effective operation of the jail by reducing aggression and misconduct among participating convicts. Additionally, research has shown that education programs lead to lower rates of repeat offenses, often known as recidivism (Halimi, Brosens et al. 2017). Education not only enhances the chances of successful reintegration into society after release, but it also plays a crucial part in the daily lives of inmates. Participation in educational programmes by inmates is associated with reduced rates of recidivism compared to those who do not participate. According to Panitsides and Moussiou (2019), implementing adult academic and vocational correctional education programs resulted in a decrease in disciplinary infractions while incarcerated. Additionally, these programs have the potential to enhance career prospects and encourage continued education following release. Kaiser, Piquer et al. (2024) discovered that prisoners were driven to engage in prison education programs in order to achieve their individual objectives. Furthermore, it was shown that there was variation in the offenders' levels of motivation to engage in educational programs.

Novel technologies enable the exploration of new avenues for process development and the enhancement of productivity. Implementing contemporary technologies offers novel approaches to functioning, particularly in the context of personalized services, specifically for juvenile delinquents. The pervasive adoption of IT-based services has profoundly transformed society and revolutionized the manner in which public authorities engage with citizens, transitioning from traditional paper-based bureaucracy to online services (Siikarla, 2023). Previously, convicts who were disadvantaged in terms of education were more driven to break away from prison routines rather than pursue education, while recognizing its worth upon release and rehabilitation in society. Prisoners who are highly motivated participate in and successfully complete vocational education and training programs. These programs enhance their technical skills, self-esteem, and overall set of general skills. As a result, these motivated prisoners are inclined to pursue online studies to prepare for the future and improve their ability to adapt to life after release (Manger, Hetland, et al. 2023).

Prisoners find studying to be a motivating coping mechanism for reducing stress. Therefore, strategies focused on altering the situation, such as problem-solving coping and planning strategies, as well as strategies aimed at changing one's perception of prison situations, such as acceptance and positive reappraisal strategies, are linked to increased well-being (Ávila1 & Sanjuán, 2018). In Nordic prisons, the average age of prisoners who are studying while incarcerated is in their thirties, providing a broader perspective on the topic. Iceland has the lowest average age of prisoners, at thirty-one, while Finland and Sweden have the highest average age, at thirty-six. Prison sentence lengths differ to some extent throughout the five Nordic countries. In Iceland and Sweden, the proportion of inmates serving terms shorter than three months was only four percent. In Finland, this figure was 9.5 percent, in Denmark it was 12.6 percent, and in Norway it was 24.3 percent. In four of the countries, over 20% of the population experienced incarceration for a duration of five years or more. The numbers provided correspond to the countries of Sweden (21.4%), Iceland (23%), Finland (22%), and Denmark (23.1%, which encompasses persons serving indeterminate length sentences as well as the general population). In Norway,

however, a notable 15.6% of incarcerated individuals were serving sentences exceeding a duration of five years (Eikeland, Manger et al. 2009).

Purpose

The purpose of the study was to examine the factors that motivate convicts to further their studies in a distance E-Learning mode while in prison. The paper's central claim is that, despite their severe living conditions, inmates are motivated to further their studies.

Objective

Examining the motivations behind prisoners' pursuit of further education through distance e-learning mode.

Question

The question that the study investigated was "What are the motivating factors that influence prisoners to engage in further education through distance e-learning mode while incarcerated??"

Method

Data collection

The study was qualitative in nature, employing a methodological approach grounded in interviews to gather data while adhering to an interpretive paradigm. To ensure accuracy, a proficient transcriber meticulously transcribed the tape-recorded interviews verbatim. Subsequently, the author was provided with the transcripts to interpret, facilitating a thorough analysis of the qualitative data collected. This methodological rigor aimed to capture the nuanced perspectives and experiences of incarcerated individuals regarding their motivations for engaging in further education through distance e-learning while in prison.

Data analysis

Following the transcription of the voice-recorded interviews, the transcripts were passed to a qualified professional translator proficient in the relevant languages. The translator meticulously translated the data verbatim, ensuring an accurate representation of the participants' responses. Subsequently, thematic analysis was employed to derive key themes and patterns from the questions posed during the interviews. This analytical approach facilitated the identification and interpretation of recurring ideas, motivations, and challenges expressed by the incarcerated individuals regarding their participation in distance e-learning programs while in prison. Through this method, a comprehensive understanding of the factors motivating prisoners to further their studies in a distance e-learning mode was elucidated.

Findings

The findings are presented exactly as transcribed from the voice recordings, utilizing the first-person pronoun "I" to anonymize the identities of the prisoner participants.

"I came across a certain magazine here where I read a gentleman, an old man who was 72 years, South African, who obtained a certificate and then he was making a party which his grandchildren like, so I thought, me I am here in prison, so this time I have to use it to study in order that when I go outside, I want to be a business man. What motivated me because of the circumstances, I find myself because I do other modules studying which we are allowed to do, on the distance. So then also according to my uncle who was also in incarceration, he did his study via distance module. When I came into prison when I was sentenced, I did not have any other education outside, so I only completed grade 12, I only matriculated. So as a way of giving myself hope, I decided I must study but now to do it on distance mode is the only mode which is able to afford to us in the prison. The person who motivated me was Dr XXXX, and also Dr XXXX that inspired me to take up my studies. I had an interest of becoming one of the people in the society who can get insight in the light of education within the society. So, I think while I am in prison let me further my studies. It is just the circumstances that I find myself and the motivation from other friends. As a human being I thought like I have to continue my studies, so the best way to do it was while I am in custody, the best was to do it through e-learning. I saw it as an opportunity while I am in custody, just for me to improve my life and become a better person. What motivated me because I saw a lot of people where they are here, then I decided for me also I had to follow the footsteps of them so that once I exit this prison, I have to be the breadwinner of the family on my own. I was convicted, I have started, the interest in my case it is where I came to, that is how I was interested to further my studies. The fact that I was incarcerated, and I was sentenced to 17 years in prison. I have decided when they give me the opportunity to further my studies, by enrolling at a university".

Discussion- Conclusions

"I came across a certain magazine here where I read a gentleman, an old man who was 72 years, South African, who obtained a certificate and then he was making a party which his grandchildren like, so I thought, me I am here in prison, so this time I have to use it to study in order that when I go outside, I want to be a business man".

This notion finds support in the work of McMurran, Theodosi, et al. (2008), who observed that prisoners are driven by various life-enhancing aspirations, including the desire for an improved lifestyle, gaining vocational skills, fostering positive family relationships, and enhancing their overall health and well-being. In addition, prisoners are driven by anti-criminal goals, such as decreasing the likelihood of reoffending, improving their self-control, finding career prospects, gaining stable housing, overcoming substance abuse problems, rebuilding their social support systems, and developing new recreational interests. Panitsides and Moussiou (2019) contend that prison education programs, regardless of their specific objectives, are prevalent worldwide due to their potential benefits at both individual and societal levels. Additionally, Delaere, De Caluwé et al. (2013) argue that e-learning initiatives empower prisoners to exercise their right to education, enabling them to complete unfinished academic programs or pursue additional vocational and advanced training opportunities during their incarceration. By offering educational pathways, distance education institutions serve as catalysts for the social reintegration of inmates, effectively reducing recidivism rates.

Prisoners engage in educational activities in correctional facilities to address the educational deficiencies they faced before entering prison. Through access to educational resources and opportunities, incarcerated individuals seek to enhance their personal development, acquire valuable skills, and improve their prospects for successful reintegration into society.

"What motivated me because of the circumstances, I find myself because I do other modules studying which we are allowed to do, on the distance. So then also according to my uncle who was also in incarceration, he did his study via distance module".

The findings were confirmed by Delaere, De Caluwé et al. (2013), who emphasized the significance of e-learning in upholding prisoners' right to education. Through e-learning platforms, inmates have the opportunity to complete unfinished educational programs or undertake additional vocational or advanced training during their time in incarceration. Distance education institutions play a pivotal role in providing these educational avenues, serving as a vital stepping stone towards the social reintegration of prisoners.

Furthermore, prison education initiatives have been shown to effectively facilitate social reintegration and mitigate recidivism rates. Inmates are motivated to engage in educational pursuits within correctional facilities as they seek to address educational deficiencies that were not addressed prior to their incarceration. These initiatives provide them with a chance to make up for lost educational opportunities and equip themselves with the skills necessary for successful reentry into society.

"When I came into prison when I was sentenced, I did not have any other education outside, so I only completed grade 12, I only matriculated. So as a way of giving myself hope, I decided I must study but now to do it on distance mode is the only mode which is able to afford to us in the prison".

This conclusion was corroborated by Ávila and Sanjuán (2018), who discovered that engaging in academic pursuits serves as a coping mechanism for prisoners to alleviate stress. Consequently, strategies geared towards altering the circumstances, such as problem-solving coping techniques (e.g., active coping and planning strategies), as well as modifying perceptions of prison environments, such as positive cognitive restructuring coping methods (e.g., acceptance and positive reappraisal strategies), are linked to enhanced well-being among inmates.

"The person who motivated me was Dr XXXX, and also Dr XXXX that inspired me to take up my studies".

Manger, et al. (2013) provided evidence that raising convicts' educational motivation and level of schooling yields several individual and societal advantages. During their incarceration, prisoners may be motivated to seek education for several reasons, such as the intrinsic value of information, their eventual reintegration into society, potential work prospects, the desire to break free from the repetitive routines of prison life, or just to engage in social interactions with fellow inmates. Certain motivations for pursuing education are specific to the prison environment. These motivations arise from a desire to break free from the monotonous life in jail or, conversely, to equip oneself for life after release. In order to avoid engaging in prison employment or adhering to prison routines, prisoners have the option to pursue education.

"I had an interest of becoming one of the people in the society who can get insight in the light of education within the society. So, I think while I am in prison let me further my studies".

The pervasive adoption of IT-based services has profoundly transformed society and revolutionized the manner in which public authorities engage with citizens, transitioning from traditional paper-based bureaucracy to online services (Siikarla, 2023). Previously, prisoners who were disadvantaged in terms of education were more

motivated to break free from prison routines rather than being driven by a desire for education itself. Factors like as the societal impact of education after release and rehabilitation contributed to this motivation. Prisoners who are highly motivated participate in and successfully complete vocational education and training programs that enhance their technical skills, self-esteem, and overall set of general skills. This motivates prisoners to pursue online studies, with the intention of preparing for the future and improving their ability to adapt to life after release (Manger, Hetland et al. 2023).

“It is just the circumstances that I find myself and the motivation from other friends”.

Adu-Boahen (2024) has provided evidence that empathy is essential for the personal growth, cultural understanding, and engagement of convicts in remote e-learning. Empathy is an acquirable ability that encompasses the understanding of different contexts, awareness of one's own position in relation to others, establishing personal connections, and the ability to imagine historical perspectives. The cultivation of empathy in the daily lives of prisoners has the potential to facilitate the development of citizenship abilities upon their release from jail. Kaiser, Piquer et al. (2024) discovered that prisoners were driven to engage in prison education programs in order to achieve their individual objectives. Additionally, it was shown that there was variation in the offenders' levels of motivation to engage in educational programs.

“As a human being I thought like I have to continue my studies, so the best way to do it was while I am in custody, the best was to do it through e-learning”.

According to Panitsides and Moussiou (2019), implementing adult academic and vocational correctional education programs resulted in a decrease in disciplinary infractions while incarcerated. Additionally, these programs may enhance career prospects and encourage individuals to continue their education after being released.

“I saw it as an opportunity while I am in custody, just for me to improve my life and become a better person”.

According to McMurrin, Theodosi, et al. (2008), inmates are driven by aspirations that improve their quality of life, such as desiring a better lifestyle, acquiring work experience, cultivating strong family ties, developing skills, and improving their physical fitness and health. Prisoners are driven to engage in studying due to their anti-criminal objectives, which encompass ceasing criminal behavior, enhancing self-discipline, securing and maintaining employment, obtaining stable housing, abstaining from substance abuse, altering social support systems, and discovering new recreational activities. Panitsides and Moussiou (2019) argue that prison education programs are widespread worldwide, regardless of their intended aim, due to their potential benefits at both individual and social levels.

“What motivated me because I saw a lot of people where they are here, then I decided for me also I had to follow the footsteps of them so that once I exit this prison, I have to be the breadwinner of the family on my own”.

Prisoners who are highly motivated participate in and successfully complete vocational education and training programs that enhance their technical skills, self-confidence, and overall set of transferable skills. This motivation encourages prisoners to pursue online studies, with the aim of preparing for the future and improving their ability to adapt to life after release (Manger, Hetland, et al. 2023).

“I was convicted, I have started, the interest in my case it is where I came to, that is how I was interested to further my studies”.

Prisoners find motivation in studying as a coping mechanism to alleviate stress. Therefore, strategies focused on altering the situation, such as problem-solving coping and planning strategies, as well as strategies aimed at changing one's perception of prison situations, such as positive cognitive restructuring coping involving acceptance and positive reappraisal strategies, are linked to increased well-being (Ávila1 & Sanjuán, 2018).

“The fact that I was incarcerated, and I was sentenced to 17 years in prison. I have decided when they give me the opportunity to further my studies, by enrolling at a university”.

These findings align with the study conducted by Eikeland, Manger et al. (2009), which revealed that sentence length for inmates differs to some extent throughout the five Nordic countries. In Iceland and Sweden, the proportion of inmates serving terms shorter than three months was only four percent. In Finland, this figure was 9.5 percent, in Denmark it was 12.6 percent, and in Norway it was 24.3 percent. In four of the countries, more than 20% of the population served sentences of five years or longer. The percentages mentioned pertain to Sweden (21.4%), Iceland (23%), Finland (22%), and Denmark (23.1%, which includes individuals incarcerated with indeterminate sentences). In Norway, however, a notable 15.6% of incarcerated individuals were serving sentences exceeding a duration of five years (Eikeland, Manger et al. 2009).

In conclusion, this study delved into the factors motivating prisoners to pursue further education through distance e-learning mode while incarcerated. Through qualitative analysis and thematic interpretation of voice-recorded interviews, a nuanced understanding of the drivers behind inmates' engagement in educational

endeavors within correctional facilities was elucidated. Despite the challenging circumstances of imprisonment, the findings of this research highlight a significant intrinsic motivation among incarcerated individuals to pursue educational opportunities. The willingness of prisoners to overcome barriers and actively engage in distance e-learning programs underscores the importance they place on personal growth and development. Furthermore, the evolving landscape of prison services, particularly in jurisdictions like Namibia, emphasizes the shift towards rehabilitation and reintegration. The commitment of the government to facilitate access to educational resources through e-learning platforms signifies a recognition of the transformative potential of education in the rehabilitation process. Through the exploration of inmates' perspectives and experiences, this study contributes to a broader understanding of the complexities surrounding educational opportunities within correctional settings. It underscores the importance of tailored interventions and support systems to empower incarcerated individuals in their pursuit of further education, ultimately enhancing their prospects for successful reintegration into society upon release. Moving forward, it is imperative to continue advocating for the expansion of educational initiatives within prisons, ensuring equitable access to quality education for all individuals, regardless of their circumstances. By addressing the underlying factors driving prisoners to pursue further studies through distance e-learning mode, policymakers, educators, and stakeholders can work collaboratively to foster a more conducive learning environment within correctional facilities, ultimately promoting positive outcomes for both individuals and society as a whole.

The following is recommended:

1. **Enhance Access to Technology:** Ensure that prisoners have adequate access to computer equipment and internet connectivity within correctional facilities to facilitate participation in distance e-learning programs.
2. **Provide Training and Support:** Offer training sessions to prisoners on how to effectively use e-learning platforms and technology, along with ongoing technical support to address any issues that may arise during their studies.
3. **Foster a Supportive Learning Environment:** Create a conducive learning environment within prisons by implementing supportive measures such as designated study spaces, access to educational resources, and opportunities for peer collaboration.
4. **Address Barriers to Participation:** Identify and address barriers that may hinder prisoners' participation in distance e-learning, such as security protocols, scheduling conflicts, or limited access to educational materials.
5. **Promote Motivation and Engagement:** Develop strategies to enhance prisoners' motivation and engagement in distance e-learning, such as personalized learning plans, recognition of achievements, and opportunities for social interaction and peer support.

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