

# THE ACQUISITION OF SKILLS BY INMATES IN WORK PROGRAMMES AT THE CENTRAL PRISON, MADRAS

N. PRABHA UNNITHAN AND M. Z. KHAN\*

The present paper attempts to bring out, in relation to the acquisition of work skills, the comparative role of personal background of the inmates and the nature of work assigned to them at the Central Prison, Madras. Among personal factors, only educational status and vice-level have been seen to be significant. In contrast, a number of work-related variables like mode of assignment, working conditions, acceptance and utility of work, willingness to switch work and others have shown discernible correspondence. That the nature of work assignment has a greater relevance to the acquisition of work skills than personal factors is in evidence here.

Mr. N. Prabha Unnithan is an ICSSR — Research Fellow in the Department of Criminology, University of Saugar, Sagar, 470 003. Dr. M. Z. Khan is the Head of the Research Division of National Institute of Social Defence, R. K. Puram, New Delhi-110 022.

## *Introduction*

Despite the gradual shift (see Teeters, 1969; Conrad, 1973) at the conceptual and, in certain countries, at the operational levels from institutional correction to non-institutional forms of correction, the relevance of work programmes has remained unaffected. As a matter of fact, in the newer programmes directed at the reformation and rehabilitation of persons who have come into conflict with law, the significance of 'work' has increased considerably.

The emphasis on work programmes is not without justification. Germane to the issue is, however, the question: Do the inmates acquire work skills? Many contend that they are lethargic, malingerers or 'un-teachable', because of incapacity, illiteracy and other personal factors. It would be, nonetheless, unrealistic to presume that only personal factors are a barrier in the acquisition of work skills. Even after including such subtle personal factors like aptitude, interest and capability, there are many other factors which should not be lost sight of (see Khan and Unnithan, 1978). A work programme to be effective needs to be aligned not only to individual personality-needs but also to the market demands in the community. Training environment is

equally important. Work place, equipment, instructors and the quality of instruction — all would have a bearing on the acquisition of skills and achievement by (the subjects). In this respect, the importance of incentives can scarcely be overemphasised (see Unnithan and Khan, 1978). Made available formally or informally, as punishment or reward, in material or non-material form, incentives play a critical role in the acquisition-process. A perusal of literature on the subject leads one to identify two streams of thought. The first attaches importance to the background of the subjects in learning skills. In relation to prison settings, Fox (1952) lists overage, poor physique, temperamental unsuitability and the short terms of a vast majority of prisoners as factors responsible for the insufficient acquisition of skills. Pillai (1959) adds to this the 'cultural backwardness' of offenders, particularly in developing countries. The other view holds that the real problem is not the personal inadequacy of the subjects but the general work environment of correctional institutions and the nature of work assigned to them. It is observed, for example, that the low productivity associated with the inmates of prisons is due, in general, "to the inhibitory and inimical climate of work" (Raj, 1970). Further, "work which

\* The authors wish to emphasise that the article has been written in their personal capacity and reflects their own views.

is unaligned to personality-needs, monotonous in character and/or irrelevant to the economy outside — as many of the trades (in correctional institutions) unmistakably are — is bound to dilute interest and generate indifference or even aversion" (Khan and Unnithan, 1978). Indeed, these two divergent emphases have given rise to a controversy relating to work programmes or prison labour which remains, as yet, unresolved.

### *Present Paper*

In relation to a correctional institution, the present paper attempts to look into the controversy — whether the acquisition of work skills is linked more with the personal characteristics of inmates or with the nature of work assigned to them in the institution. The usefulness of work programmes is such that it would be lost on few inmates. There is every reason for the inmates to come out of their lethargy, to take advantage of the situation and acquire work skills — taught as part of the institutional programme. Nevertheless, if the inmates have not been able to come up, it could be attributed to certain underlying reasons. In view of this, the objective of the present paper is two-fold: First, to ascertain whether the inmates have been able to acquire or improve skills in the work assigned to them and, secondly, to determine the relative importance of the personal factors of the inmates and of the nature of work assigned to them in the acquisition of work skills. This should aid in developing a better understanding of the institution and the inmates. Further, it is likely to have implications for the implementation of work programmes at the institutional level.

Keeping these issues in view, the present paper proceeds on the hypothesis, "In the acquisition of work skills by inmates, the nature of the work assigned to them in the

institution is more important than their personal background". As outlined earlier a number of inmate-attributes are brought up in relation to their participation in vocational training programmes and their productivity. Attention has been paid to the inmates working in 'industries' in the Central Prison, Madras. From a list of 853 such inmates (all males) a simple random sample of 105 inmates has been drawn. At the same time, all the vocational instructors, numbering thirteen, have been included in the sample. The role of the vocational staff has been however limited to assessing the level of acquisition of work skills by the inmates under their charge. In the light of the hypothesis, an interview-schedule encompassing the areas of study delineated earlier has been developed. Further, it has been rendered into Tamil, pretested and standardised in both form and manner of administration.

In order to secure an estimate of the level of acquisition of work skills by the inmates, a ten-point continuum carrying the following instructions was given to the vocational instructors for each inmate: "The acquisition of skills in the trades in the institution may be represented on a 10-point scale on which an untrained, unskilled and fresh inmate is represented by 0: and, on the other hand, an inmate who is fully trained and possibly as skilled in the trade as the instructor himself, by numeral 10. Then —

<u>I</u>										
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

- (i) Where would you place this inmate at the time of this entry; and
- (ii) Where would you place him now?

The data for the present study have been collected during the early months of 1976

(interviews completed, inmates, 95 and vocational staff, 13). Most of the items relating to the inmates' background and some relating to the nature of their work have been cross-checked with their 'history tickets'. The data thus collected have been brought to bear on the hypothesis. Towards this, they have been sifted, classified and statistically analysed. With regard to the acquisition of work skills, the difference between the position on the continuum of a given inmate at the time of his entry and at the time of data-collection as indicated by the concerned instructor has been taken as his score which has been grouped into low, medium and high levels of acquisition of work skills. This study variable has been cross-tabulated. Towards drawing statistical inferences, measures like proportions, percentages, ratios, chi-square and contingency coefficient (see Snedecor and Cochran, 1968) have been used. Further, in order to ascertain the nature and extent of relationship between the study variable and other variables, the statistic of rank-correlation (tau) has been used (see Siegel, 1956).

### Findings

Before proceeding further, we may have a closer look at the distribution of the study variable (see Table 1.01), namely, the acquisition of work skills. As would be seen a little later, a vast majority of the inmates have been rated either medium (40.0%) or high (24.3%) in this regard, and a little over one-third of them have been rated as low. Is this position entirely unusual? This apart, this kind of distribution of the inmates in respect of their level of acquisition of work skills may be examined in relation to their personal factors and their work assignment along with related issues.

*Personal Factors:* While discussing a

learning process like acquisition of work skills, it is difficult to ignore the age factor. Not only is the amount of learning large in the early stages of life but it tends also to level off from a certain point of age. Is age of the inmates related to their acquisition of work skills? On going through Table 1.01 it would be found that about three-fourths of them are below

TABLE 1.01

SHOWING AGE OF THE INMATES AND THEIR LEVEL OF ACQUISITION OF WORK SKILLS

Acquisition Level	Age				Total
	18-24 yrs.	25-34 yrs.	35-44 yrs.	45 yrs. and above	
Low	06	16	07	05	34
Medium	11	18	06	03	38
High	05	15	01	02	23
<b>Total</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>95</b>

$\chi^2 = 5.68046$ ;  $df = 6$ ;  $C = 0.23753$ ;

$0.30 < p < 0.50$ ;  $\tau = -0.11346$ ;  $p < 0.05$ .

thirtyfive years of age, the median being 27.7 years. Apparently, as the majority of the inmates cannot be regarded even as middle-aged, they cannot be presumed to have reached the level-off stage in the general learning process. Besides, a mild trend is seen, indicating that the younger inmates have been able to acquire more work skills than their older counterparts ( $\tau = -0.11$ ). However, this is not supported by the statistical values, the probability associated with chi-square, contingency coefficient and rank-correlation is much higher than the acceptable level.

The First United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and Treatment of Offenders (1955) is explicitly in favour of work by the inmates "subject to their physical and mental fitness". Prison Manuals of all the states provide for thorough and

periodical medical check-up of the inmates. While coding the physical fitness of the sampled inmates, their history-tickets have been consulted. Attention has been paid to medical problems or disabilities which may directly or indirectly affect the inmates' capacity to learn and work.

Table 1.02 shows that nearly half of the inmates do not suffer any medical disability which may be expected to hinder their participation in the work-programmes.

TABLE 1.02

SHOWING PHYSICAL FITNESS OF THE INMATES AND THEIR LEVEL OF ACQUISITION OF WORK SKILLS

Acquisition Level	Physical fitness			Total
	No disabilities	Minor or medium disabilities	Major disabilities	
Low	18	09	07	34
Medium	14	15	09	38
High	13	08	02	23
<b>Total</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>93</b>

$\chi^2 = 3.91195$ ;  $df = 4$ ;  $C = 0.19887$ ;  
 $0.30 < p < 0.50$ ;  $\tau = -0.05405$ ;  $p < 0.22$ .

At the same time about one-fifth of them are seen to have major medical disabilities. Has physical fitness of the inmates any relation to their acquisition of work skills? The values of chi-square, contingency coefficient and rank-correlation are insignificant. Apparently physical fitness has no direct linkage with the acquisition of work skills.

Formal education received by the inmates, as an aid to adaptation to changed conditions and to adoption of new work skills, has been looked into. As reported earlier (Khan and Unnithan, 1978) the

literacy rate among the inmates is high (40.77%) in Tamil Nadu and still higher (see Table 1.03) in the Central Prison, Madras (72.6%). What is more, nearly half of the inmates have had schooling up to secondary stage or beyond. That education facilitates the acquisition of work skills is

TABLE 1.03

SHOWING EDUCATIONAL STATUS OF THE INMATES AND THEIR LEVEL OF ACQUISITION OF WORK SKILLS

Acquisition Level	Educational status				Total
	Illite-rate	Primary School	Secondary School	Secondary School leaving certificate and above	
Low	14	10	09	01	34
Medium	08	09	13	08	38
High	04	04	12	03	23
<b>Total</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>95</b>

$\chi^2 = 11.09429$ ;  $df = 6$ ;  $C = 0.32337$ ;  
 $0.05 < p < 0.10$ ;  $\tau = 0.21206$ ;  $p < 0.001$ .

brought out by the data. The distribution is found to be significant ( $p < 0.10$ ). Whereas the less educated are over-represented in the category of low acquisition of skills, the better educated are over-represented in the category of high acquisition. The two variables also show a good deal of correspondence ( $C=0.323$ ) and correlation ( $\tau=0.22$ ).

The work experience which an inmate may have had before his entry into the institution would undoubtedly equip him for the acquisition of work skills. However only a very small proportion of the inmates (9%) are found (Table 1.04) to have had work experience which can be related to their present assignment.

TABLE 1.04

SHOWING PRIOR WORK EXPERIENCE OF THE INMATES  
AND THEIR ACQUISITION OF WORK SKILLS

Acquisition Level	Prior work experience		Total
	Unrelated to institutional assignment	Related to institutional assignment	
Low	31	03	34
Medium	35	03	38
High	20	03	23
Total	86	09	95

$\chi^2 = 0.49309$ ;  $df = 2$ ;  $C = 0.07186$ ;  
 $0.70 < p < 0.80$ ;  $\tau = 0.06825$ ;  $p < 0.16$ .

The rest of them are found to possess either unrelated or insignificant experience. This position hardly augurs well for the acquisition of work skills. Nonetheless, when the former is examined in relation to the latter, the resulting distribution is found to be rather unexpected. The representation of those who have had prior work experience is found to be identical in the three categories of acquisition level. The insignificant statistical values suggest that the variables are more or less independent.

It is hardly debatable that the nature of offence for which one is committed to an institution is by itself an important personal factor, and some attention needs to be paid to various offender-typologies. First of all, the phenomenon of recidivism may be looked into. Those inmates who have been violating law persistently and have been committed to institutions more than once may have an involvement different from (those who have been committed to an institution for the first time. A perusal of Table 1.05 would reveal that 63.15 per cent of the inmates are first offenders. Does this have any bearing on the acquisition of work skills? The distribution of

the data as well as the statistics suggests no such trend.

TABLE 1.05

SHOWING OFFENDER-TYPE OF THE INMATES AND  
THEIR LEVEL OF ACQUISITION OF WORK SKILLS

Acquisition Level	Offender-type		Total
	First-offender	Recidivist	
Low	25	09	34
Medium	20	18	38
High	15	08	23
Total	60	35	95

$\chi^2 = 3.80212$ ;  $df = 2$ ;  $C = 0.19617$ ;  
 $0.10 < p < 0.20$ ;  $\tau = 0.06648$   $p < 0.17$

Further, an attempt has been made to look into one more offender-typology: individual/group offender (Table 1.06). Although

TABLE 1.06

SHOWING OFFENDER-TYPE OF THE INMATES AND  
THEIR LEVEL OF ACQUISITION OF WORK SKILLS

Acquisition Level	Offender-type		Total
	Individual	Group	
Low	23	11	34
Medium	23	15	38
High	15	08	23
Total	61	34	95

$\chi^2 = 0.24188$ ;  $df = 2$ ;  $C = 0.05046$ ;  
 $0.80 < p < 0.90$ ;  $\tau = 0.02068$ ;  $p < 0.39$ .

a vast majority of the inmates are individual offenders, the typology by itself shows no correspondence with the study variable, namely, the acquisition of work skills.

While on this we may also look into the general nature of offence for which the inmates have been sentenced (Table 1.07). It would be noticed that majority of the inmates have been sentenced for property offence. Nevertheless the proportion of those who are in for murder or other offences against the person is no less significant. This may be mainly due to chance sampling. This apart, the nature of offence is seen to vary significantly with the study variable ( $p < 0.02$ ). It is found that the inmates who are in for murder or other offences against person have been able to acquire work skill better than those for other offences. A fair degree of association between the two variables is also in evidence.

TABLE 1.07

SHOWING OFFENCE COMMITTED BY THE INMATES AND THEIR LEVEL OF ACQUISITION OF WORK SKILLS

Acquisition Level	Offence				Total
	Murder	Other offences against person	Property offences	Prohibition offences	
Low	04	02	17	11	34
Medium	07	02	21	08	38
High	10	04	07	02	23
Total	21	08	45	21	95

$\chi^2 = 16.10871$ ;  $df = 6$ ;  $C = 0.36471$ ;  
 $0.01 < p < 0.02$ .

A little delineation of the particulars regarding the imprisonment of the inmates would not be out of place here. From Table 1.08, it will be seen that majority of the inmates are short-termers. The length of sentence of about two-thirds of them is less than five years. The length of sentence of the inmates may now be examined in relation to their acquisition of work

TABLE 1.08

SHOWING LENGTH OF SENTENCE OF THE INMATES AND THEIR LEVEL OF ACQUISITION OF WORK SKILLS

Acquisition Level	Length of sentence				Total
	Below 1 year	1-4 years	5-9 years	10 years and above	
Low	14	14	02	04	34
Medium	12	14	05	07	38
High	05	04	05	09	23
Total	31	32	12	20	95

$\chi^2 = 11.78233$ ;  $df = 6$ ;  $C = 0.33217$ ;  
 $0.05 < p < 0.10$ ;  $\tau = 0.09692$ ;  $p < 0.08$ .

skills. The data show significant variations and the relatively large value of contingency coefficient also suggests a linkage between the two variables. This is, however, only mildly supported by the statistic of rank-correlation. Further, along this line of analysis, the length of the term already served by the inmates in the institution has been analysed (see Table 1.09).

TABLE 1.09

SHOWING TERM SERVED BY THE INMATES AND THEIR LEVEL OF ACQUISITION OF WORK SKILLS

Acquisition Level	Term served			Total
	Below 1 year	1-5 years	5 years and above	
Low	22	09	03	34
Medium	19	12	07	38
High	07	08	08	23
Total	48	29	18	95

$\chi^2 = 9.29678$ ;  $df = 4$ ;  $C = 0.29856$ ;  
 $0.05 < p < 0.10$ ;  $\tau = 0.26173$ ;  $p < 0.0009$ .

More than half the inmates are relatively

newcomers in that they have put in less than one year in the institution, and only a small proportion of them has been in the institution for five years or more. That those who have been in the institution and perhaps on vocational training for a longer period have an opportunity to move up in the acquisition of work skills, is brought out by the statistics.

In discussing personal attributes of the inmates, a small but relevant consideration would be the vice-level among the inmates. In this the focus has been on the use of drugs. Notwithstanding the 'Jail Manual', various intoxicants reportedly do manage to reach inmates clandestinely. A composite variable, vice-level, has been developed by coding the use of alcohol, cannabis, opium and other intoxicants. A glance at Table 1.10 would show that more than half of the inmates rate high in this regard.

TABLE 1.10

SHOWING VICE-LEVEL OF THE INMATES AND THEIR LEVEL OF ACQUISITION OF WORK SKILLS

Acquisition Level	Vice Level			Total
	Low	Medium	High	
Low	02	14	18	34
Medium	05	08	25	38
High	06	11	06	23
<b>Total</b>	13	33	49	95

$\chi^2 = 12.75662$ ;  $df = 4$ ;  $C = 0.34407$ ;  
 $0.01 < p < 0.02$ ;  $\tau = -0.17779$ ;  $p < 0.005$ .

Those who are low on the vice level account for a very small proportion of the inmates. The data have been analysed in relation to the acquisition of work skills. The distribution is found to be significant. Those who are high in respect of vice-level are over-represented in the category

of low acquisition of skills. In sharp contrast, those who are low on vice-level are over-represented in high acquisition of work skills. The trend of the data indicates that the two are interconnected ( $C=0.344$ ). While the relatively larger value of rank-correlation reinforces this contention, its negative value indicates that the two variables are inversely related.

*Nature of work:* As already outlined, the work assigned to an inmate and related issues are likely to affect his acquisition of work skills. In this connection, we may first have a look at the vocational trades available at the Central Prison, Madras. There are in the institution, mainly six vocational trades (see Table 2.01). Some of these trades, it would be seen, are interesting (Tailoring, Printing Press etc.) while others are monotonous (Tagmaking, phenyl-making etc.) The inmates have been assigned to these trades mostly in accordance with the manpower requirements of those units. For instance, the printing press operating in the institution is a branch of the Government Press to which the services of inmates are provided as assistance to about fifty regular employees. The number of inmates assigned to the press fluctuates with the order-book.

For satisfactorily participating in the vocational trades, the inmates are entitled to a number of incentives: (a) additional remission of sentence of two days per months for hard work, and (b) bidis at the rate of one and a half bidi per working day issued weekly. There is no wage-earning scheme for the inmates. Part of the present study reported earlier (Unnithan and Khan, 1978) has found the incentives deficient in content and in operation.

At this juncture, a word on the overall approach and method employed to train inmates in different trades would not be out of place. Aimed at endowing the inmates with relevant trade skills, voca-

tional training needs to be based on specific job analyses as well as tested and standardised training principles. It needs to utilise modern methods like group discussion and visuals including illustrated manuals and films as also techniques like 'vestibule school' (Anastasi, 1964). Baraiz (1967) emphasises pre-employment and general shop-training in similar situations. Besides, there should be "coordination between production and class-room vocational study" (Taft, 1956). What is the position in this regard at the Central Prison, Madras? Notwithstanding the 'tasks' to be completed in one day by an inmate, laid down in the Prison Manual (1894) the idea of job-analysis appears to have attracted nobody's attention. As a matter of fact, little systematic effort (instructor inmate ratio, 1:66) to train inmates in the vocational trades is in evidence.

Against this backdrop we may now turn to examine the relation between the acquisition of work skills and work assigned to inmates and related issues. Table 2.01

making have been rated low, and those engaged in Printing Press as low and medium. Does this indicate lack of opportunity for the inmates to learn? In any case, the distribution of the data in the rest of the trades is far from being indicative of any discernible trend ( $p < 0.2$ ).

Next, an attempt has been made to examine the study variable in relation to the mode of assignment — whether the work

TABLE 2.02

SHOWING MODE OF ASSIGNMENT OF INMATES TO WORK PROGRAMMES AND THEIR LEVEL OF ACQUISITION OF WORK SKILLS

Acquisition Level	Mode of assignment			Total
	Self-chosen	Assigned		
Low	04	30		34
Medium	08	30		38
High	10	13		23
<b>Total</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>73</b>		<b>95</b>

$\chi^2 = 9.14987$ ;  $df = 2$ ;  $C = 0.29640$ ;  $0.01 < p < 0.02$ ;  
 $\tau = -0.22811$ ;  $p < 0.0004$ .

TABLE 2.01

SHOWING WORK ASSIGNMENT OF THE INMATES AND THEIR LEVEL OF ACQUISITION OF WORK SKILLS

Acquisition Level	Work assignment						Total
	Carpentry	Tag-making	Printing press	Tailoring	Paper-making	Phenyl-making	
Low	10	05	09	05	03	02	34
Medium	12	10	09	04	03	—	38
High	11	05	—	05	02	—	23
<b>Total</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>08</b>	<b>02</b>	<b>95</b>

$\chi^2 = 13.94128$ ;  $df = 10$ ;  $C = 0.35733$ ;  $0.10 < p < 0.20$

brings out information on the trades assigned to the inmates in relation to acquisition of work skills by them. It would be noticed that the two inmates engaged in phenyl-

being done by the inmates is of their own choice or has been allotted to them (Table 2.02). More than three-fourths of the inmates have been assigned to trades. In the

category of high acquisition of work skills, the proportion of the inmates who have themselves chosen the work is more than that of those who have been allotted the work. The two variables appear to be closely related. Further, the negative as well as the large value of rank-correlation underlines the trend that acquisition of skill decreases with (arbitrary?) assignment.

In terms of space, ventilation and cleanliness, (the institution offers working conditions which appear to be somewhat indifferent. Table 2.03 brings out that an overwhelming majority of the inmates is not satisfied with the conditions under which they work. This response pattern shows highly significant variations with the acquisition of work skills.

TABLE 2.03

SHOWING OPINION OF THE INMATES REGARDING WORKING CONDITIONS AND THEIR LEVEL OF ACQUISITION OF WORK SKILLS

Acquisition Level	Opinion			Total
	Unsatisfactory	Satisfactory with some inadequacies	Satisfactory	
Low	27	02	05	34
Medium	17	09	12	38
High	02	03	18	23
<b>Total</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>95</b>

$\chi^2 = 35.90483$ ;  $df = 4$ ;  $C = 0.52434$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ;  $\tau = 0.40575$ ;  $p < 0.00001$ .

There is in evidence an unmistakable trend that the two variables are interlinked; this is further confirmed by the positive and large value of rank-correlation.

Do the inmates accept work programmes in general? Although the inmates *have* to participate in a particular work programme, the uptake would probably tend to maximise if they appreciate the

significance and the role of these. This is notwithstanding the fact that most of them had no hand in the selection of the trade they are engaged in. Table 2.04 shows that more than 83% of the inmates are able to get at the significance of work programmes.

TABLE 2.04

SHOWING RESPONSE OF THE INMATES TO THE QUESTION, "IN GENERAL, DO YOU FEEL INMATES SHOULD PARTICIPATE IN WORK PROGRAMME?" AND THEIR LEVEL OF ACQUISITION OF WORK SKILLS

Acquisition Level	Response		Total
	No	Yes	
Low	23	11	34
Medium	35	03	38
High	21	02	23
<b>Total</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>95</b>

$\chi^2 = 9.20737$ ;  $df = 2$ ;  $C = 0.29725$ ;  $0.01 < p < 0.02$ ;  $\tau = 0.14596$ ;  $p < 0.02$

Nearly three-fourths of the inmates who do not look with favour at work have low acquisition levels. In contrast, only about one-fourth of the inmates who feel otherwise are seen in this category. The statistical association between the two variables is also relatively large.

This line has been pursued further by assessing the opinion of the inmates as to the utility of their work assignment. This stimulus aims to encompass the economic-rehabilitative aspects after release. It follows that the vocational trade which is aligned to the market demands outside the prison would appear, to an inmate, more useful. Table 2.05 brings out interesting details. More than 61% of them find the work they are doing useful, and only about 23% of them feel the opposite. This response-pattern, when cross-tabulated with the

acquisition level, shows highly significant differences. The large value of contingency coefficient as also that of rank-correlation strongly suggests that the inmates who have given a positive response in this regard also tend to be 'achievers'.

TABLE 2.05

SHOWING OPINION OF THE INMATES ON THE UTILITY OF THEIR WORK ASSIGNMENT AND THEIR LEVEL OF ACHIEVEMENT OF WORK SKILLS

Acquisition Level	Opinion			Total
	Not useful	Don't know	Useful	
Low	17	02	15	34
Medium	02	11	25	38
High	02	03	18	23
<b>Total</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>95</b>

$\chi^2=26.53939$ ;  $df=4$ ;  $C=0.46729$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ;  $\tau=0.13383$ ;  $p < 0.03$ .

In keeping with this theme, an attempt has been made to ascertain the liking/dislike of inmates for the work they are doing in the institution (see Table 2.06). While more than 24% express dislike, double this proportion show a liking in this respect. On being analysed in terms of the acquisition level, this response-pattern brings out highly significant statistics. The two variables also show a good deal of correspondence ( $C=0.467$ ). However, the value of rank-correlation is far from being significant. On the basis of these statistics, it can be safely inferred that the acquisition of work skills in a given trade is related to a liking for it.

Towards further ascertaining the liking/dislike of the inmates for the work they are doing, their willingness to change it for some other trade available in the institution has been ascertained (Table 2.07).

TABLE 2.06

SHOWING RESPONSE OF THE INMATES TO THE QUESTION, "WITH REGARD TO YOUR PRESENT WORK ASSIGNMENT, DO YOU LIKE IT?" AND THEIR LEVEL OF ACQUISITION OF WORK SKILLS

Acquisition Level	Response			Total
	Dislike	Indifferent	Like	
Low	03	20	11	34
Medium	13	02	23	38
High	02	09	12	23
<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>95</b>

$\chi^2=26.50713$ ;  $df=4$ ;  $C=0.46707$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ;  $\tau=0.04112$ ;  $p < 0.28$ .

The majority of them wants to continue with what they have been doing. Has it a linkage with the acquisition level? As shown by various statistics, the inmates who do not wish to change their work are relatively greater achievers than those who want to change.

TABLE 2.07

SHOWING WHETHER INMATES WOULD LIKE TO CHANGE THEIR PRESENT WORK ASSIGNMENT AND THEIR LEVEL OF ACQUISITION OF WORK SKILLS

Acquisition Level	Response		Total
	Yes	No	
Low	21	13	34
Medium	14	24	38
High	09	14	23
<b>Total</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>95</b>

$\chi^2=5.33725$ ;  $df=2$ ;  $C=0.23042$ ;  $0.05 < p < 0.10$ ;  $\tau=0.14153$ ;  $p < 0.02$ .

As a corollary, the opinion of the inmates has been ascertained as to whether they would like to continue with the vocational trade they are pursuing in the institution—on their release. It is worth noticing (see Table 2.08) that nearly three-fourths

TABLE 2.08

SHOWING WHETHER INMATES WISH TO CONTINUE IN THE TRADE THEY ARE LEARNING IN THE INSTITUTION AFTER RELEASE, AND THEIR LEVEL OF ACQUISITION OF WORK SKILLS

Acquisition Level	Response		Total
	No	Yes	
Low	26	08	34
Medium	31	07	38
High	14	09	23
<b>Total</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>95</b>

$\chi^2 = 3.40195$ ;  $df = 2$ ;  $C = 0.18594$ ;  $0.10 < p < 0.20$ ;  $\tau = 0.07003$ ;  $p < 0.16$ .

of the inmates do not intend to follow the trade they are on in the institution. In view of the apparent dissonance between the available vocational trades in the institution and outside occupational patterns in the community, this kind of inmate response is far from being surprising. The variable has been examined in relation to the acquisition level. A mild trend is seen indicating that the inmates who respond in the affirmative are greater achievers.

### Conclusions

While the importance of work programmes in the social reclamation of those who come in conflict with law is agreed upon in principle, several reservations are expressed with regard to their implementation. Concerning institutional settings, these reservations tend to polarise around per-

sonal background of inmates and the nature of work assigned to them. The present paper has set out to analyse and compare the two in relation to the acquisition of work skills by inmates at the Central Prison, Madras.

At the outset, the question needs to be answered whether the inmates are able to acquire work skills. The data show that about two-thirds of the inmates have been rated by their vocational instructors as medium or high 'achievers'. That about 36 per cent of the inmates are low achievers can hardly be regarded as unusual. It would, therefore, be justifiable to infer that the inmates are able to acquire and improve skills in the work assigned to them in the institution.

Towards assessing the importance of the personal background of the inmates in the acquisition of work skills, a number of factors have been brought under analysis. The factor of age shows a negative correlation with the study variable. For obvious reasons, the aged are slow on the uptake. But the median age of 27.7 years, suggests that most inmates are young enough to learn and acquire work skills.

Nearly half of the inmates are physically fit and only a small proportion of them is afflicted with major medical disabilities. However, what is germane to the issue is that physical fitness shows little relation to the acquisition of work skills. In regard to educational status, the inmates appear to be well off, in that about half of them have had schooling up to the higher secondary level. What is more, this variable shows a significant degree of correlation with the study variable. Perhaps, as general preparation for life, education has aided them in acquiring work skills. In sharp contrast, prior relevant work experience which is found in fewer cases has shown little relation in this regard (see also, Home Office Research Unit, 1978).

Assuming the criminal act and related aspects to be part of general behaviour, attention has been paid to several relevant issues. About 37% of the inmates are recidivists, and an equal proportion group-offenders. Neither are however significant in the present context. On the other hand, offence, length of sentence and term-served bring out significant statistical results. Are they not inter-connected? Perhaps, they represent some kind of a 'time-syndrome'. In other words, the inmates who have been committed to the institution for serious offences, who are undergoing relatively long sentences and who have completed many years in the institution are likely to acquire more work skills than others. Nevertheless, the relevance of this time-syndrome to the study variable is at best debatable.

The use of intoxicants by the inmates has also been looked into. Interestingly nearly half of the respondents have medium or high vice-level. This has also shown highly significant variations and an inverse relationship with the study variable.

While discussing the nature of work programmes, attention has been paid to the availability of vocational trades, incentives and training methods. Needless to say, all of these leave much to be desired. Interestingly and surprisingly, work assignment itself shows few significant variations with the study variable. Does this signify lack of enthusiasm on the part of inmates irrespective of the trade they are pursuing? Or, else, does this indicate a constricting vocational choice?

It has been observed that out of five inmates, four have had no hand in choosing their trade. Perhaps, their allotment has been governed by the manpower requirements of different units. In any case, this has been seen to influence noticeably the acquisition of work skills. Indication is that the acquisition of work skills markedly decreases with the arbitrary assignment of

the inmates in different vocational trades (see Johnson, 1967). The study variable has shown highly significant variations with the view of the inmates concerning the working conditions. Nearly half of them have been dissatisfied in this regard. The two variables have shown a high degree of correspondence as well as covariation. Perhaps working conditions relating to a vocational trade are by themselves an important motivating factor.

The data further reveal that more than 83 per cent of the inmates are aware of the role and significance of work programmes, and feel that the inmates should participate in them. This apart, this connects up well with the study variable. Also the rank-correlation is positive and significant. Do they find it useful? Three inmates out of five find it useful. The value of rank-correlation, though positive, is comparatively smaller than in the earlier case. In the same context an attempt has been made to inquire into the liking of the inmates for their work assignment. In terms of the study variable the distribution is highly significant. Nonetheless the value of rank-correlation though positive is entirely insignificant. If we pay attention to acceptance and usefulness of, and liking for, the work assignment on the part of the inmates, some kind of scaling-down effect would be seen. Most inmates appear to recognise the significance of work programmes, but fewer find them useful and still fewer like them. This downward trend is also reflected in the decreasing values of correlation.

Proceeding along this line further, an attempt has been made to ascertain as to how many inmates wish to change their work. The inmates are divided on the issue. This has also shown an appreciable degree of covariation with the study variable. The statistic of rank-correlation suggests that those who wish to stay on their assignment tend to be better achievers. Lastly, the

rehabilitative role of the vocational trades has been explored. Only one-fourth of the inmates state that they would continue to pursue the trade they have learnt in the institution. That the values of chi-square, contingency coefficient and rank-correlation are insignificant goes to show that this variable has little connection with the study variable. Incidentally, this also hints at the feeble rehabilitative role the work programmes may be having. This may be due to the lack of alignment between the vocational trades and community manpower needs.

To recapitulate, in the acquisition of work skills by the inmates, only a few personal factors like educational background (positive) and vice-level (negative) appear to be important. Therefore, if training in skills and diligence is the job of correction, then, in the words of Jones, "We are not entitled to put forward prisoners' shortcomings as an excuse for doing

nothing about them" (1956).

On the other hand, a whole range of factors associated with the nature of the work assigned are found to be important. Interestingly, the work assignment itself shows scant relation to the acquisition level. This may, among other things, be due to the dissonance between the work assigned and the personality needs of the inmates. This is what the examination of other work-related factors brings out. The mode of assignment, the working conditions, the acceptance and the perceived usefulness of work programmes and the willingness to change the assignment;— all have a bearing on the acquisition of work skills. Keeping this in view it would be justifiable to conclude that, in acquiring work skills, both personal background of the inmates and the nature of work assigned are significant. But the nature of work is, the data are unequivocal, more important than the personal background of the inmates. The hypothesis is thus amply substantiated.

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