

Liminal Spaces in Prison: From Chaos-making to Structured Boundlessness

Zubaa Akhtar ¹

Zografia Bika ²

James Cornford ³

^{1, 2, 3} Norwich Business School, University of East Anglia, Norwich, UK

Contact Details

Address: Norwich Business School, University of East Anglia, Norwich, United Kingdom, NR4 7TJ

Email: z.akhtar@uea.ac.uk

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Summary

The past decade has seen a rise in literature that explores organisational activities from the perspective of space, but little work has been done in reference to liminal spaces in different settings and contexts. Liminal spaces are spaces on the border of two dominant spaces. The current study contributes to the literature of liminal space in the vocational training setting, specifically in the extreme context of prisons by using a phenomenological case study design. The study conducted 65 face-to-face interviews, triangulated by secondary sources to inform the results. The study's contribution is establishing that the training space is a liminal space, owing to the blurred boundaries, as well as having a structure of its own, independent of the institution's structure. This structure is open-air in nature and inhabits boundlessness that makes the prisoners feel 'human first' while fostering agency.

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1. Introduction

Space has been the focus of organisation studies for a longtime, examined from numerous angles including differential space (Lewis, 2008), relational space (Kellogg, 2009), discursive space (Hardy and Maguire, 2010), free space (Rao & Dutta, 2012), white space (Beyes, & Stevaert, 2013), interstitial space (Furnari, 2014), body space (Riach & Wilson, 2014), liminal space (Shortt, 2015), and experimental space (Bucher & Langley, 2016). Although the past decade has seen a rise in literature that explores organisational activities from the perspective of space, little work has been done in reference to liminal spaces in workspaces (Shortt, 2015).

Liminal spaces can be defined as '*a space that is on the 'border', ...a space 'at the boundary of two dominant spaces, which is not fully part of either'*' (Short, 2015: 1), where liminality' *refers to a phase of potentially creative transitions, in which 'those who go through it are neither one thing nor the other and at the same time both one thing and the other'* (as cited in Garcia-Lorenzo et al., 2018: 376). Permanent liminality is described as a transitional space with no anticipated end (Appau, Ozanne & Klein, 2020). Weinfurtnner, & Seidl (2019) reviewed the literature on organisational spaces and concluded that the literature is fragmented as space, whether isolated and/or interspaces, may not be as distinctive as they seem and may require further work to understand the process of change/transition in terms of space (Murphy & Dowell, 2019). The attempt to understand space in connection to a process, requires defining what kind of space, in what setting, and context (Weinfurtnner & Seidl et al., 2019).

Prison visiting rooms and prison letters have been studied in reference to liminality (Nocente, 2021; Bartlett & Eriksson, 2019; Moran, 2013) but the research in liminal spaces, inside a prison has not been done. Hence the study aims to expand the emerging literature on liminality and liminal spaces in the extreme context of prison-based vocational training programs through a phenomenological case study design. Our research did not aim to study 'change' in its traditional sense of 'before and after', rather it sees the discourse of change as a process that prisoners experience in their identity from being identified as a prisoner first, rather they would be identified as a human being first with the identity of prisoner being second. This is due to the liminality that is provided by the blurred structure of a vocational training space.

The contributions of this study are threefold: (i) classifies the training space as a type of liminal space in the extreme context of prison, (ii) argues that this training liminal space in prison context has blurred boundaries with a structure of its own, contrary to the literature that suggests liminal spaces do not have a structure of their own and follow the structure of the whole institution they are in (Howard-Grenville et al., 2011), and (iii) argues that this training liminal space's open-air structure is an active shaper of the prisoner's agency, not just a fortuitous activity.

2. Background Literature

2.1. Concept of Liminality & Liminal Spaces

Van Gennep (1960) first coined the term 'Liminality' referring to a phase of potentially creative transitions, which is '*a state of ambiguity or in-between-ness*' (Murphy & Dowell, 2019: 2500). Airports (Huang, Xiao & Wang, 2018), Libraries (McGinnis & Kinder, 2021), prison visiting rooms (spaces where prisoners come face-to-face with persons and objects from their lives on the 'outside') (Bartlett & Eriksson, 2019; Moran, 2013), carceral spaces (Jewkes & Laws, 2021), prison letters (letter writing as a bridge that connects the

opacity of the inside with the outside) (Nocente, 2021), and even the pandemic (transition period between ‘before pandemic’ and ‘after pandemic’) (Awdish, 2020), have all been considered liminal spaces.

Liminality has a positive connotation of pinpointing transformation, (Anderson, 2005) also being considered by some worth exploring when looking at processes of change/transition (Murphy & McDowell, 2019). Steyaert, Hjorth & Gartner (2011) prompted the need to explore the liminal conditions where individuals alter their current resources and strategise for future action. Howard-Grenville et al., (2011) reported that cultural changes in organisations initiate from everyday occurrences such as meetings and workshops, symbolised as liminal spaces, which are bracketed places yet connected to the whole organisational structure. Boland (2013) reported that liminality is a dangerous phase as individuals do not exhibit expected behaviours, i.e., they can be at the maximum of their potential or be totally invisible socially speaking. He further commented that full potential is only achieved if social change is accepted and engaged with, if not, then transitions remain meaningless and social structures are not renewed. Essers & Tedmanson (2014) reported that liminal phase is where the current social structure is dissolving for the actors involved, pushing one to act on their own without the help of societal institutions. This is consistent with the classic works of Noble & Walker (1997: 31). They reported that ‘*liminality significantly disrupt[s] one’s internal sense of self or place within a social system*’, triggering reconstruction of one’s identity and context (Beech, 2011).

2.2. Prison-based Education Programs and Vocational training

Prison education programs are expanding globally in the form of informal or formal education from governmental, non-governmental, and even international organisations (Marshall, 2018). These programs, offered for prison reforms and criminal rehabilitation, have been well-studied in western literature (Grosholz et al., 2020), whereas little research has been carried out in developing countries. The programs also include various aspects; Literacy (math, reading, writing, language), Vocational (carpentry, plumbing, painting, etc.), and religious teachings (Sunday schools, Friday prayers, etc.). This research focused on vocational training as there is strong literature on the post-release effectiveness of having an entrepreneurial skill (Nur & Nguyen, 2023; Newton, Day & Giles, et al., 2018; Bouffard, MacKenzie & Hickman, 2000), but the research is limited when it comes to understanding what the prisoners experience while they are inside the prison.

Vocational training teaches workplace skills that prepare an individual for employment in a chosen occupation (Martinez Jr, 2007). This preparation not only pertains to the general knowledge of the specified profession, but also hands-on practical skills, understanding, and implementation in occupational tasks (Ellis, McFadden & Colaric, 2008). Examples include most manual skills such as masonry, carpentry, woodworking, driving, and tailoring. Such training programs make a prisoner skilful as well as facilitate community reintegration post-release (Callan & Gardner, 2007). Prisoners who go through such training may exhibit positive traits such as autonomy, discipline, independence, confidence, and self-reliance (Mohammed & Mohamed, 2015; Howerton et al., 2009).

Prison-based education programs, academic and/or vocational, make up a significant part of the rehabilitation process of the incarcerated individuals. These educational programs equip the prisoners with tools to efficaciously re-enter society, helping them navigate career paths that may allow them to become productive members of society (Costelloe & Langelid, 2011). The stigma and lack of vocational skills often lead to higher rates of re-offending across the globe (Kacperczyk & Rocha, 2021; Smith, 2011). Vocational training imparted in

prisons has been reported to increase social capital (McDaniel et al., 2021), decrease re-offending (Burt, 2014), improve public safety (Steurer, Smith & Tracy, 2001), and positively transform one's identity (Rogers, Corley, & Ashforth, 2017).

This importance of training not only stems from what is being taught, the course curriculum or who teaches what, but is also dependent on the spatial understanding of imprisonment (Jewkes, and Laws, 2021), as well as how the architecture and the built environment shapes one's identity, mood, sense of wellbeing, and feelings (Jewkes, & Moran, 2017; Goldhagen & Gallo, 2017). One aspect of spatial infrastructure, relating to vocational training that our study discusses, is that of understanding how this training space can be considered liminal and has an impact on the prisoner's agency.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. The Pakistani Prison Context

Pakistan initiated its prison reforms after the 'Punjab Jail Reforms Committee' was founded in 1950. There are courses established for the complex needs of offenders to cater the skill gap, but their implementation seems to be a thing of the future. Past research does not directly relate a lack of literacy skills to offending, but rather it relates it to unemployment, self-concept, and social exclusion (Mushtaq et al., 2018). It is pertinent to conduct research in this area as only a handful of academic papers (Akhtar & Golra, 2021; Akhtar, 2020; Kamran, 2019; Mushtaq et al., 2018) have been published. Research in this area becomes even more important considering that the most recent available statistical records of reported crimes in Pakistan from 2020, indicate an increase from 786,339 (2019) to 876,430 (National Police Bureau, 2020). The rejection that those with a criminal record face by the job market and society, leading them to re-offend as a shortcut to earn money for survival (Arifin, Syam & Maladi, 2015), also adds to this importance.

A systematic review of literature on prison reforms among 11 Organisation of Islamic Corporation (OIC) countries, including Pakistan, concludes that prison reforms were approved in the last decade for most OIC states, but their implementation is not where it should be, majorly for three reasons: imprisonment requiring finances from the state for the high costs and maintenance requirements of more humane treatment, social ostracism of ex-prisoners being an unaddressed issue, and overcrowding in prisons further fuelling recidivism (Akhtar & Golra, 2021). The occupancy rate of prisoners in Pakistani prisons against the capacity is 133.7%. Pakistani prisons facing issues like overcrowding, and underfunding, give more importance in to understanding how the space is perceived by the prisoners. Research emerging from these prisons can provide a systemic understanding on the prison setting, enriching global knowledge about the broader efforts of infrastructure and management of the incarceration system, as well as advising policies intended for the protection of this vulnerable population from a non-Western society.

3.2. Case Study Research Design

A qualitative study is conducted to explore the objectives of the research as it uses a context-sensitive approach from the angle of the knower and their interaction with the known to give meaning to the social experience (Creswell & Poth, 2016, Yilmaz, 2013; Patton, 2002). It builds on relativist ontology and a constructivist epistemology, asserting a collaborative approach between the researcher and the participant (Birks & Mills, 2015). Such a research philosophy assumes an inductive approach i.e., a detail-based/ bottom-up analysis to add to the existing knowledge while giving a newer direction (Bryman & Bell), focusing on individual meaning rather than generalisability (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The nature of the study requires a research approach that captures experiences as they are experienced. Phenomenology (Mihalache, 2019; Padilla-Díaz, 2015; Patton, 2002) involves

highlighting how people make sense of their experiences and then transform them into consciousness, both at an individual level and level of shared meaning.

The study adopts a case study design that focuses on exploring vocational training offered to prisoners within a single setting (Eisenhardt, 1989). Such a case study approach was appropriate for the current study as the context was unusual and extreme, showing a clear deviation from everyday occurrences (Yin, 2018). It focuses primarily on theory building i.e., aiming at linking different constructs together to elaborate a process/mechanism, which explains a phenomenon (Eisenhardt, 2021). Our study sample includes prisoners with a similar antecedent, i.e., getting vocational training during their sentence. This antecedent is the same across prisoners, but the focal outcome and the intervening process may vary (Eisenhardt, 2021). The case study method's core feature is to unwind an '*under-explored, yet significant phenomena*' (Eisenhardt, 2021: p.152), especially when the phenomenon and the context have blurred boundaries (Yin, 1981). Yin (2018) suggested that it is useful to adopt a case study approach given the following three conditions; if the research questions pose a 'how', entail 'little or no control over behavioural events', and the 'focus of study is contemporary (as opposed to historical) phenomena – 'case'' (p. 31). The 'individual prisoner' is our unit of analysis in the Pakistani prison case study context that enables us to formulate an emergent theory (Yin, 2018; Patzelt, Williams & Shepherd, 2014; Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). Yin (2018) concurs that the unit of analysis (individual prisoner) is bounded by the 'subject' (phenomena) and the 'context' of the case study (Figure 1). Our case study design has a multi-source evidence basis which includes in-depth interviews with prisoners, ex-prisoners, prison staff, and NGO workers alongside secondary data.

Insert figure 1 Here

a. Case Study Data Collection

Our case study used a purposive sampling technique within the Pakistani prison where 38 face-to-face interviews with prisoners from 3 different prisons were conducted. Inclusion criteria for prisoners were based on the Eisenhardt (2021) concept that the antecedent should be the same across the cases to study the varying focal outcome and the intervening process. The similar antecedent in this study was the prisoners who were imparted vocational training during their sentence time. Demographic information about interviewees' age, gender, ethnicity, literacy, the crime of conviction, time spent in prison, total sentence length, time spent in vocational training, and skill acquired in prison was collected to ensure variation and inclusion of atypical cases in the sample. The interviewees' education was categorized in 5 categories based on the schooling system in Pakistan: (i) No qualification, (ii) Primary education (Grade 1 to 4), (iii) Lower Secondary Education (Grade 5 to 8), (iv) Upper Secondary Education (Grade 9 and 10), and (v) Further Education (Grade 11 and above).

Insert Table 1 here

Additionally, 27 interviews were conducted with key informants including ex-prisoners, prison staff, and NGO workers. There was no set inclusion or exclusion criteria for key informants. Anyone who had contact or involvement with the prisoner's undergoing training was invited to participate as a key informant. The snowball sampling technique was employed, wherein each key informant was asked to recommend other relevant individuals who can contribute valuable insights to the study. This approach allowed for the identification and inclusion of individuals who have direct or indirect involvement with the prisoners and the vocational training program within the prison context.

Insert Table 2 here

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Moreover, secondary data was sought for this case study to aid the understanding of the challenging setting of a prison from three sources: (i) the Pakistani Government issued acts, rules and regulations for governing prisoners and imparting vocational training to them; (ii) International conventions, rules and regulations signed by or of which Pakistan is member, were consulted to look at the research questions from a broader lens, some of which may be equivalent to international law or guidelines, and (iii) National newspaper articles were included to explore the Pakistani prison context from an independent media perspective, one that is not bound by national or international laws, prison authorities, and/or is not potentially coerced.

Insert Table 5 here

Incarcerated prisoners are a protected population due to the potential misuse of the data gathered and the possibility of coercion to participate, hence the study went through an extensive ethical review from the UEA ethics committee (Ethics application ETH2223-2434). The approval from the government of Pakistan was taken through proper channels. The principles of confidentiality, privacy, anonymity, no coercion for participation, and withdrawing whenever decided, were upheld with all participants. Interviews were conducted inside the prisons with incarcerated individuals. The researcher had to go through security clearance at the sites. Official personnel like a Deputy Superintendent (executive) or personnel of an equivalent rank were always accompanying the researcher during the visit inside the prison. This was necessary for the safety of the researcher in case of a compromised situation during the data collection process. Presence of a prison staff member does influence the interviewing process, but it is the only legal route available to access prisoners while keeping the research's own safety at check.

b. Data Analysis

The first step of the data analysis was forming open codes using line-by-line analysis through the interview transcripts of the prisoners and key informants. The researcher sifted through the data to flag words/phrases/expressions for data assemblage. These codes were coalesced while keeping the 'informant terms' into 1st order codes. The researcher used the axial coding process of 'compare and contrast' to reduce the number of codes as suggested by Eisenhardt (2021), and Gioia et al., (2013). These 1st order codes were further condensed into 2nd order codes by using the 'researcher terms'. This process required the 2nd order codes to become themes that closely grouped the 1st order codes, requiring cross-referencing to align, categorize, and stabilize the themes (Charmaz, 2014) while pedantically focusing on subtleties and nuances in the textual data (Williams, & Moser, 2019). The aggregate dimension is a cohesive and meaningful level of abstraction that evolved from the 2nd order codes (Gioia et al., 2013). The researcher used data-framing and thematic specificity (Williams, & Moser, 2019) to bring out the aggregate dimension, crucial for the findings of the study.

4. Findings

Having set out to understand the effect vocational training and spatial infrastructure may have on the prisoner, the study introduces the notion of 'structured boundlessness' to illustrate what is happening inside a Pakistani prison context. We suggest that "Humans first, then prisoners" and "open-air infrastructure" are the main building blocks of what constructs

prisoner agency underpinning their journey from chaos making to structured boundlessness, as discussed in the section below.

a. Humans first, then prisoners

‘Humane’ may not be the first adjective that comes in collective consciousness to describe a ‘prisoner’; however, we found that there is widespread consensus amongst the prisoners under investigation here that they have experienced a change in identity from being labelled as a ‘prisoner’ to identifying as a ‘human’ first. This is expressed through identifying as a skilled worker or a student in training first and being a prisoner second.

‘I think before I learned the skill, people including fellow prisoners, staff, and family friends would view me as nothing but just a prisoner as if I am an animal. Now they view me as a human.’ (S4, 24, NQ, Accessory-making, 25/1.7y¹)

‘They treat everyone well but those who learn a skill, show respect to them (staff), & develop a sense of discipline, are treated as humans first, then prisoners.’ (HA8, 26, NQ, Pottery, 25/11y).

A 36-year-old prisoner, convicted for a major crime had enrolled himself for accessory-making class. For him treating others with respect and abiding by the idea that one should think before one act was a major change in his identity.

‘I used to get into fights all the time when I was outside, in my home. But now that I have gone through this life challenge of being in prison, I now treat everyone with empathy. The skill training required that I was nice to others, or else they would not teach me. And that helped me not to be a chaos-maker anymore.’ (HY3, 36, Secondary, Accessory-making, 25/5y)

While conversing with a prison guard, he also mentioned how there has been a change in how other prisoners interact with him or other staff members. For him, the respect towards the prison authority is no longer associated with the culture of fear that prevails in prisons.

‘I do feel that (prisoners) now interact with us in a more respectful way. The respect before was out of fear and us being an authority but since they have started the training, the respect comes out of treating each other humanly’ (PS7, Prison Guard)

The identity change manifests itself in small nuances such as being referred by one’s name or type of training rather than a prisoner identity number. This is how prison staff and trainers or other prisoners would call upon the trainees. A 32-year-old prisoner spent 21 years of his life in prison and now at the end of his prison sentence, said.

‘Yes. We call each other as electricians or plumbers or whatever the profession is, rather than ‘qaidi number 390’ (by prisoner number ID).’ (HA10, 32, Matriculation, Electrician & Fish-farming, 25/21y)

An ex-prisoner, who spent 14 years in prison and currently works as an electrician, reiterates the same in that being called by his own name instead of using his prisoner number when still in prison, made him feel like a student.

‘It did feel like we were all students including me because they will address us by our names than Prisoner ID no.’ (EP2, 31, Primary, Electrician, 14y)

¹ The attribution of quotes regarding the prisoners interviewed for this study shall be formatted (Unique Identifier, Age, Qualification, Skill, Sentence Length/ Sentence served) herein.

Another ex-prisoner trained as an electrician during his 14 years in prison discusses the being 'human first' effect in broader terms. He talks about how being an electrician gave him a better social standing outside prison and how he was not treated differently for being an ex-prisoner.

'It is better knowing that once I was released from prison, I could support my mother somehow. She did not have to live off other people's expenses. This combined with the skill of being an electrician, people realise I'm not a useless prisoner. So that helps with social acceptance.' (EP8, 32, Secondary, Electrician, 14y)

Prisoners are widely considered a burden on the state with their livelihood being dependent on social security funding (Hirschberger, 2020), with their families falling short on finances as the prisoner might be the missing bread winner of the family. Imparting vocational training not only helped the prisoners to earn both for their family but also for themselves inside the prison. Two prisoners, convicted at the age of 49 and 23 respectively expressed similar views on this so-called 'opportunity to earn'.

'We believe it is important to get this training as I can earn to sustain myself in prison. We can buy laundry soap, shampoo, bath soap, etc. from the money We earn.' (HY1, 57y, Secondary, Cultural craftsmanship, 25/8y)

'This (Training) is important. It helps us to earn for anything we need in prison, and we can send 2,000-3,000 (pkr) back to our family.' (HY4, 33y, Secondary, Embroidery, 25/10y)

The independence that work gives to prisoners was a recurrent theme across all three prison locations in this study. This renewed take on prisoners not giving up but rather finding a way to change their financial situation was stated repeatedly, especially with regards to how important the availability of certified training is. Furthermore, there is clear evidence that the prisoners' literacy or lack thereof did not affect their voluntary enrolment into certified training. A prisoner aged 65 years, who trained in woodwork and had spent the last 22 years of his life in prison with 3 years till release, had no prior education, but talked about the importance of acquiring skills and working once released.

'I don't mind either (employment or business). I can do my own business as well as employment. What is important is to learn a skill and have a certificate or diploma.' (HA15, 65y, NQ, Woodwork, 25/22y)

Ex-prisoners concur that it has also helped them post-release. Two ex-prisoners convicted at the age of 17 and 18 years, were released after they completed their sentence at the age of 37 and 32 respectively. The former was trained in shoemaking and computer basics whereas the latter trained as an electrician. Once outside of the prison, they both found work and used their skills to keep them afloat by running a business while also securing a job.

'They (working conditions) are fine. Once I came out of prison, I was still in contact with the prison staff who used to get the orders for charsada chappal for me. I kept doing that, until I secured a typing and editing job in a local net café.' (EP6, 37y, NQ, Shoemaking & Computer basics, 20y)

'I do small gigs of electrician work here and there and run a small tea stall, outside my house. Sometimes I walk around selling tea from a thermos to people in the city area.' (EP8, 32y, Secondary, Electrician, 14y)

Another recurrent theme in line with work independence was earning a 'halal' livelihood. The word 'halal' is an Arabic word meaning permissible. It is used to describe a

way of earning that is permissible by the guidelines of the Islamic religion. This earning should not be begged, earned with interest or through corrupt means. A person who can earn should not rely on others to give them money to live. One should find a way to work, struggle, and earn a living in the purest way possible. Our data also shows that those who enjoyed religious lessons were also the ones who volunteered for vocational training. Prisoners realised that not sitting idle and finding a way to earn a halal wage is an important part of also embracing the Muslim identity and processing one's criminal past into something more religiously accepted in the present.

'Yes, we like this skill taught to us because it opens the opportunity to earn a 'halal' living wage rather than resorting to getting money by doing crimes or things not endorsed in Islam.' (HA5, 50y, NQ, Woodwork, 25/8.3y)

'The need for such training programs is evident, as they facilitate the acquisition of skills necessary for earning a halal livelihood upon release'. (EP8, 32y, Secondary, Electrician, 14y)

b. Open-air Infrastructure

A major aspect of any kind of educational or training program is the space it is offered in (Hendrix, 2024), such as a classroom for a primary schooler, a workshop room in a corporate office or an anatomy lab for training future doctors. The spatial infrastructure in prison underpins what being in a prison means. A very secure boundary wall, the lack of an option to move in and out, the rules of an institution, and even the use of language i.e. 'inside' a prison, all suggests that the 'prison' is a closed space to fulfil its functionality. In contrast to this, our study shows that the prisons under investigation here offered additionally a bracketed space inside the prison where the training is offered, which represented a liminal space. This liminal space is a neither-nor space (Garcia-Lorenzo et al., 2018) where one is in this space (training) while still not being out of another (prison). The prisoners during interviews were not able to label a term for this 'separate' space. However, they talked extensively about how they felt that this was different from the barracks, how time passed more quickly in there, and the level of busyness they would have.

'The room is not a separate place but while teacher teaches us all, it does not feel the same. It feels like another second place..... It's a part of prison physically speaking but mentally it will feel as if time passes quicker (there). Generally, time in barracks does not pass (quickly). The day is slow but while learning to make Sindhi topi (traditional headwear), it would pass more quickly as if we were in a fast room.' (HY1, 57y, Secondary, Cultural craftsmanship, 25/8y)

This sense of time moving faster even though the room is still in the same barracks is important. The liminality of the space is not dependent on the lack of boundaries and separateness (Shortt, 2015). It is exhibited in how the setting is perceived and how an individual may be part of the same identity, that is a prisoner, yet not the same, that is a student or trainee. A 32-year-old prisoner mentioned how the training was offered in the same barracks where they were locked in, but this setting of a trainer teaching a skill invoked a sense of a separate space being felt, even though not seen.

'I learned to do 'aar ka kaam' in barracks. There was no separate space for it. But working in barracks made barracks better. If that makes sense. Better in sense of time would pass quicker.' (HY7, 32y, Secondary, Embroidery, 25/8y)

Isolation and the idea of being on your own ‘stuck’ inside a prison can easily set in with an invitation for mental health issues and feelings of hopelessness (Strong et al., 2020), but prisoners explained how keeping oneself busy has helped navigate one’s thoughts better. A prisoner of 33 years of age who had spent 10 years inside the prison talked about the need to keep oneself occupied. An ex-prisoner who served a 14-year sentence, reiterated this need of staying busy as well.

‘Within a week of coming to the prison. We would pass all our day in barracks or out in the lawn area. We wanted to occupy ourselves (with something) right away, so the isolation doesn’t get to us.’ (HY4, 33y, Secondary, Embroidery, 25/10y)

‘Once it (training) ended after 3-4 months, I wished it would be longer because it kept us busy. Even though (at a later point), we would be asked to use our skills every now and then, when something electric would break down in prison, but it was the training that kept us busy.’ (EP2, 31y, Primary, Electrician, 14y)

Prisons are a place of closed proximity with high secure walls and the intention of putting a criminal ‘inside’ being connected with the idea of taking one’s freedom away. This however contrasts with the open-air infrastructure which we found was often used for the training, while still being in prison.

‘The tutor used to teach shoemaking in a corridor or under a tree in the open lawn. I know a school classroom is different, but we all used to call it ‘class’. It was refreshing as it was not like a closed locked barrack. I am glad it was not inside a designated classroom in the building. Gave me more time to breathe fresh air.... It did not feel like prison. Like I just said, it was refreshing while (also helped us with) learning and earning. That’s the best deal inside a prison’. (EP7, 38y, NQ, Shoemaking & Accessory-making, 20y)

This recurrent theme of a training space having no walls of its own yet being a separate space, was labelled ‘open-air’ not only by prisoners and ex-prisoners, but also by NGO workers. A trainer who taught tailoring and accessory-making explains how the idea of open-air schools is not new for most people, as government schools in Pakistan have classes outside of classrooms to combat heat when there is no electricity.

‘The training space does not have any boundaries. It’s an open-air lawn, right next to the barracks. But as your question is very intriguing, I do feel it is a separate space from the prison. The prisoners are not new to the idea of open-air schools, and they take it as a classroom.’ (NGO-T6)

Another program manager of an NGO, who was heading the project of vocational training in one of prisons under investigation, also mentions how the open lawns were used to impart training to prisoners.

‘We don’t teach in barracks, but we teach on the lawn in front of it. So, it’s not clear boundaries but also not prison walls.’ (NGO-PM3)

Understanding the meaning of this open-air infrastructure from the way an individual experiences it is not just bound to its perimeters and setting, but also how such a training space led to an expression of community among prisoners. This aspect was evidenced in our interviews through the pronoun ‘we’, which the prisoners used extensively while answering questions about oneself. Upon a repeated request by the interviewer to account for only one’s personal experience, the use of ‘we’ felt like an involuntary lingual response, well embedded in the prisoners’ consciousness. This contrasts with how ‘we’ is not mostly used in informal colloquial of Urdu for self-identification. Hence this difference of pronoun expression was an

interesting finding as linguistics of a place asserts the collective experience of those being there (Yin, Waksalak and Joshi, 2022).

'We used to lack a sense of humanity for each other. We would not care for others. But after spending time, during skill training and working together, we (started to) care for others. When a new prisoner comes who is not financially secure, we would give him 100-200 (pkr) to help him get through the first few days.' (HY4, 33y, Secondary, Embroidery, 25/10y)

The use of 'we' combined with the prisoner's identity while also being in a separate space for training purposes led to developing a new sense of unity and community among prisoners.

'Yes, we have felt a change (after training). Um, a feeling of unity and being in a group is developed because when we see everybody suffering, we understand that everybody's suffering together the same thing, and we try to make it better for everybody. That's when we realise what the cultural saying 'Division and conflict does not make a good society, unity does,' means.' (HAR12, 25y, NQ, Woodwork, 10/8.4y)

This sense of community was not only expressed by prisoners but also ex-prisoners. An ex-prisoner who is currently working as a carpenter after being released at the age of 50 years talked about how he maintained the relationship with others and the answer used 'we' instead of 'me' or 'I'.

'We were all prisoners. We would talk and interact with each other equally unless someone would curse or use foul language against someone, then we would refrain from further interacting with them. Why is that? Sister, a sense of community had to be maintained to keep ourselves at peace in an environment like prison' (EP4, 50y, NQ, Carpentry, 25y)

This discourse of identity change shown through interviews is also testified by the secondary data of this study which includes both official and media articles (see Table 6).

Insert Table 6 here.

In conclusion, the themes of being considered 'humans first, then prisoner' and 'open-air infrastructure' underpin a notion of structured boundlessness which highlight the importance of 'structure' in the liminal training space of prison. The need for an impermeable outer boundary wall is well-established to make an institution such as the prison, but the study's findings discuss the bracketed space that the training offers. This space may or may not have a concrete wall or boundary and is reportedly 'open-air' in its essence, making the prisoner not bounded. This boundlessness has a clear impact on the prisoners' feeling of being treated in a humane way when they are undergoing and/or undergone training.

5. Discussion & Conclusion

Our case study's contribution is three-fold. First, the work contributes by establishing that the training space in a prison context can be classified as a liminal space. Considering a spatial lens in a prison informs the understanding of a space dependent not only on the context of the prison but also the context of the vocational training. The liminal space that the vocational training offers is a transitional space (Petani & Mengis, 2016; Wilhoit & Kisselburgh, 2015; Connellan, 2013) existing out of the established space of prison, maintained by its actors (Richardson and McKenna, 2014) such as prisoners, prison staff, and NGO workers.

Secondly the study describes liminal space not just in terms of the lack of a physical boundary but rather defines it through the structure that the blurred boundary entails. Howard-Grenville et al., (2011) reported that cultural changes in organisations initiate from

everyday occurrences such as meetings and workshops, symbolized as liminal spaces, which are bracketed places yet connected to the whole organisational structure. The current study agrees with this notion and adds that even though liminal spaces are connected to the whole organisational structure i.e. prison in this case, the liminal training space also has a structure of its own. This structure has been repeatedly seen in the findings as being open air. Weinfurter & Seidl et al., (2019) reviewed the concept of spaces in organisation studies and synthesized three defining concepts for space: boundaries, distance, and movement. In terms of this study, the vocational training space may or may not have a physical boundary (Andrews & Shaw, 2008) but has a strong established social boundary (Glackin, 2015) i.e. the open-air structure of the training environment. This boundary marks the identity of its actors (Panayiotou & Kafiridis, 2010), which in the context of the study is identifying as a student or based on a skill such as plumber over being a prisoner. The idea of the distance of a space from a prison is not defined in the Euclidean perspective as the physical distance between two points, rather distance is functional in its nature (Sheppard et al., 2004), i.e. imparting of the vocational training makes the space liminal in nature, giving it a distance from the space of the whole prison. This distance is perceived subjectively (Deza & Deza, 2009), reported by prisoners as being different from the barracks, feeling like a classroom, being in a separate space, and being busy. The movement of a space is a complex concept to grasp in terms of prison but in terms of a liminal space, movement is not apparent, yet has an underlying dynamic nature (Hernes, 2004). The movement under study is not movement by modality such as velocity and direction (Lucas, 2014; Costas, 2013) rather it is a process of change of the phenomena perceived i.e. considered a human first, and prisoner second while moving through the said space (Hirst, 2011; Massey, 2005) of vocational training while still being constantly in the same place (Shortt, 2015) i.e. prison. The movement can also be understood from the reporting of how time passes differently when in this structured yet non-binding space for training. Respondents reported that time passed quicker than usual as they were occupied with the training tasks. This is also a type of movement while still being in the same place physically. Hence, this social boundary coupled with the subjective distance and the movement in terms of processual change experienced, all corresponds to the structured boundlessness that the training prompted, making the training space, a liminal space.

This spatial relation of the prisoner to the training embeds a temporal perspective on the prisoner as well. This structured boundlessness experienced by the prisoner over time spent in the training, impacts the prisoner's agency, as vocational training when approached as a liminal space may give individuals a chance to 'discover themselves' there (Brooker, & Joppe, 2013). Agency in the current context is the change experienced through this permanent liminality (Murphy and McDowell, 2019) via the process of socializing. This training may end after a few months, but the impact it leaves in terms of the prisoner's agency is referred to as 'institutionalisation of liminality' in literature (Johnsen and Sørensen, 2015; Thomassen, 2012). Such type of liminal space will not have an end point in terms of what happens 'after' it, rather a change one is living in. This training gives the prisoner a chance to interact with other like-minded prisoners, carry-out certain activities such as practising the skills, and yield various outcomes such as earning for oneself and family (Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010). This distinctive space acts as a protected space (Rao and Dutta, 2012) for prisoners to learn and exhibit their humanity and achieve work independence which is not possible out of the training in a prison. Patzelt et al. (2014) reported that a personal agency mindset is a prerequisite for making sense of one's past and orienting oneself toward the future. Additionally, these programs allow the individuals to engage with other individuals in everyday interactions (e.g., about business planning) instead of conversations that revolve around their prison life and former crimes, enabling them to feel "human" again (Patzelt et

al., 2014). Even though Patzelt et al.'s work was a study on European prison programs, the current study reports the similar finding in that the training as a space and through time prompts a prisoner's agency. Over the years, numerous studies (Szifris et al., 2018; Pompoco et al., 2017; Brewster, 2014; Cooney, 2012; Haynie & Shepherd, 2011) have assessed the transformative effect of different prison programs on incarcerated individuals that help in developing a positive identity post-release (Rogers et al., 2017), but the current study unveils the change that the prisoner experiences while still in prison. Hence, the study highlights that even though training was offered in an open-air infrastructure unpremeditated due to lack of funding for proper training facilities, the structured boundlessness is essential as it is an active contributor in developing the prisoner's agency, making this the paper's third contribution.

Conclusion

Most prisons across the world have an educational program in place for prisoners in some form or another. The research contributes to such programs from the perspective of space, specifically in terms of liminality and how it supports a prisoner's agency from the perspective of an extreme context. The research discusses that even though the space essentially remains the same, the meaning of the space radically changes for the prisoner, phenomenologically experienced from being a 'chaos-maker' to being considered a human with agency first. This change in the prisoner's agency is prompted by the open-air structure that the vocational training space forms. This structure does not bound the prisoner in the same sense as the prison itself, rather it inculcates a sense of boundlessness within a structure. The prisoner volunteers to be in this training and continues to learn in it and change their agency throughout the process, giving a structure to their lives in the prison. Research has been done post-release or post-training to evaluate the prison vocational programs; the current study did not intend to be an evaluative study for aftereffects or the efficacy of the curriculum. The study intends to contribute to the processual change a prisoner experiences while in prison and supplements the prisoner's reported experience of phenomena through ex-prisoners and other key informants, triangulated through secondary data.

Therefore, our findings imply that policymakers should consider the spatial environment as an active factor when providing training, as it significantly influences the outcomes in terms of fostering agency within the extreme context of prisons. This is not only for the case of Pakistan and prisons rather these findings of the liminal space extend to other contexts of training and learning as well.

Figures and Tables

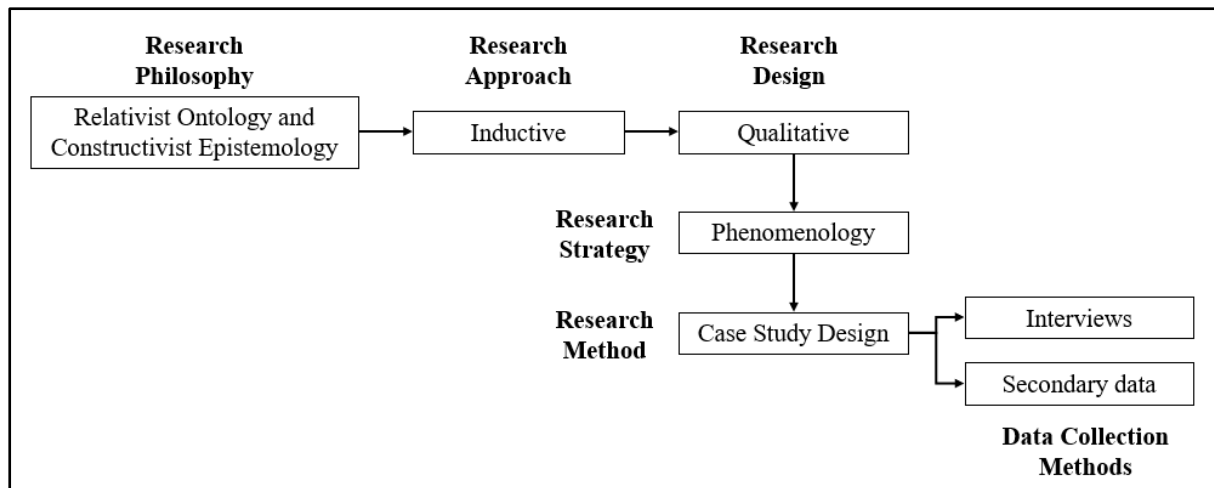


Figure 1. *Research Methodology*

Table 1. Profile of the prisoners

S/no.	Prison	Case no.	Gender	Age	Education	Skill	TT	SL	SS
1	Prison Hyderabad– Province Sindh	HY1	Male	57	Primary	Sindhi Topi	1	25	8
2		HY2	Male	55	NQ	Sindhi Topi	1	25	12
3		HY3	Male	36	L. Secondary	Accessory-making	7	25	5
4		HY4	Male	33	FE	Embroidery	5	25	10
5		HY5	Male	30	Primary	Accessory-making	1.5	25	9
6		HY6	Male	43	NQ	Accessory-making	1	25	7
7		HY7	Male	32	L. Secondary	Embroidery	1	25	8
8		HY8	Male	35	U. Secondary	Embroidery	1	25	9
9		HY9	Male	48	NQ	Accessory-making	7	25	8
10		HY10	Male	33	NQ	Accessory-making	6	25	8
11	Prison Sanghar – Province Sindh	S1	Male	28	Primary	Accessory-making	12	25	4
12		S2	Male	19	U. Secondary	Accessory-making	5	10	0.9
13		S3	Male	27	NQ	Accessory-making	1	25	0.1
14		S4	Male	24	NQ	Accessory-making	15	25	1.7
15		S5	Male	35	NQ	Accessory-making	5	25	1.5
16		S6	Male	26	NQ	Accessory-making	2	14	0.3
17		S7	Male	41	NQ	Accessory-making	12	14	1
18		S8	Male	28	NQ	Accessory-making	8	25	0.8
19		S9 ²	Male	30	NQ	Accessory-making	6	25	2
20	Prison Haripur– Province Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	HA1	Male	45	L. Secondary	Carpentry	3	25	5
21		HA2	Male	27	L. Secondary	Carpentry	3	25	23
22		HA3	Male	39	L. Secondary	Carpentry	1	25	2.8
23		HA4	Male	46	NQ	Woodwork	3	25	2.2
24		HA5	Male	50	NQ	Woodwork	3	25	8.3
25		HA6	Male	38	U. Secondary	Computing, Electrician, Cobbler	2	25	20
26		HA7	Male	42	U. Secondary	Electrician	6	25	18
27		HA8	Male	26	NQ	Pottery	4	25	11
28		HA9	Male	29	NQ	Tailoring	2	25	2.2
29		HA10	Male	32	U. Secondary	Electrician, Fish- farming	6	25	21
30		HA11	Male	41	NQ	Carpentry, Woodwork	3	25	13
31		HA12	Male	25	NQ	Woodwork	3	10	8.4
32		HA13	Male	25	NQ	Furniture making	3	25	5
33		HA14	Male	25	L. Secondary	Electrician	3	25	8
34		HA15	Male	65	NQ	Woodwork	3	25	22
35		HA16	Male	35	FE	Computing	6	25	7
36		HA17	Female	38	NQ	Kraotia Embroidery, Tailoring	3	25	8
37		HA18	Female	30	NQ	Beads Embroidery, Tailoring	2	25	9
38		HA19	Female	30	NQ	Tailoring	2	25	10

Note. TT: Total training time in months, SL: Total sentence length in years, SS: Sentence served so far in years, NQ: No Qualification, L. Secondary: Lower Secondary, U. Secondary: Upper Secondary, FE: Further Education

² Non-Muslim – Christian.

Table 2. Profile of the Ex-prisoners

S/no.	Case no.	Gender	Age at conviction	Age at release	Education	Skill	TT	SL
1	EP1	Male	16	30	Secondary	Electrician	3	14
2	EP2	Male	17	31	Secondary	Electrician	4	14
3	EP3	Male	20	45	Secondary	Carpentry	6	25
4	EP4	Male	25	50	NQ	Carpentry	6	25
5	EP5	Male	52	60	Secondary	Islamic Edu/ MA	-	8
6	EP6	Male	17	37	NQ	Charsada Chappal (Shoe-making), Computer	6	20
7	EP7	Male	18	38	NQ	Charsada chappal (shoe-making), Accessory-making	6	20
8	EP8	Male	18	32	Secondary	Electrician	6	14
9	EP9	Male	19	39	NQ	Charsada Chappal (Shoe-making)	6	20

Note. TT: Total training time in months, SL: Total sentence length in years, NQ: No Qualification

Table 3. Profile of the Prison Staff

S/no.	Case No.	Gender	Rank
1	PS1	Male	Assistant Superintendent Jail
2	PS2	Male	Assistant Superintendent Jail
3	PS3	Male	Deputy Superintendent
4	PS4	Male	In-charge Prison (R)
5	PS5	Male	Junior Assistant Superintendent
6	PS6	Male	Prison Guard
7	PS7	Male	Prison Guard
8	PS8	Male	Assistant Superintendent
9	PS9	Male	Assistant Superintendent

Table 4. Profile of the NGO workers

S/no.	Case No.	Gender	Sub-Category
1	NGO-PM1	Male	Project Manager
2	NGO-PM2	Male	Project Manager
3	NGO-PM3	Male	Project Manager
4	NGO-T1	Male	Trainer
5	NGO-T2	Male	Trainer
6	NGO-T3	Male	Trainer
7	NGO-T4	Male	Trainer
8	NGO-T5	Male	Trainer
9	NGO-T6	Male	Trainer

Secondary Sources Category	Secondary Sources	Relevant Sources
Government - Pakistan Acts, Rules, & Regulations	<i>Pakistan Acts, Rules, & Regulations</i> 1. The Prison Act 1894 2. The Prison Act 1900 3. Pakistan Prison Rules 1978 <i>Provincial Acts</i> 4. The Prisons (Amendment) Act 2020 (Province Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) 5. The Sindh Prisons and Corrections Services Act, 2019. 6. The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Prisons Rules, 2018. <i>Governing Documents</i> 7. The Constitution of Pakistan 8. The Pakistan Penal Code (PPC) 9. Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC)	1. Pakistan Prison Rules 1978 2. The Prisons (Amendment) Act 2020 (Province Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) 3. The Sindh Prisons and Corrections Services Act, 2019. 4. The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Prisons Rules, 2018.
International – Conventions, Rules, & Regulations	1. Beijing rules 2. Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment 3. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. 4. Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. 5. International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination 6. International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights 7. International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights 8. The Bangkok Rules 9. The Nelson Mandela Rules 10. Universal Declaration of Human Rights	1. The Bangkok Rules 2. The Nelson Mandela Rules
Media – National Newspapers	1. Dawn (87 → 37) 2. The News (39 → 14) 3. The Nation (43 → 14) 4. The Frontier Post (0) 5. Daily Times (18 → 4) 6. Pakistan Observer (1) 7. Business Recorder (18 → 6) 8. The Friday Times (7 → 2) 9. The Express Tribune (28 → 8)	1. Dawn (17) 2. The News (11) 3. The Nation (14) 4. Daily Times (4) 5. Pakistan Observer (1) 6. Business Recorder (6) 7. The Express Tribune (8)

Table 5. Secondary Sources

Table 6. The Official and Media Voice – Secondary Data Excerpts

Codes	Secondary Data Types	Secondary data excerpts
1. Being Humane a. Change in Identity – identifying as human, skilled worker, and student before prisoner b. Social standing c. Work independence	Pakistan Prison Acts, Rules, and Regulations	‘The Superintendent should provide suitable labour for every class of prisoners sentenced to rigorous imprisonment confined in the prison. Such labour may be industrial or nonindustrial. While establishing an industry in any prison the following two main objectives shall be kept in view:- (a) Imparting vocational training to the prisoners to enable them to earn respectable livelihood after their release’ (<i>Pakistan prison rules, 1978, Page 276</i>). ‘Raising and maintaining the welfare fund of the prisons, consisting of the profit of sale proceeds of articles, manufactured in prison industry, profit of tuck shops.... To be utilized by the office of Inspector General of Prisons for the welfare of the prisoners and the prison staff and improvement of living and working conditions in prisons and precincts’ (<i>The Prisons (Amendment) Act 2020 (Province Khyber Pakhtunkhwa), Page 2</i>). ‘Where deemed appropriate, the Directorate in consultation with Inspector General will allow reputed and registered NGOs, community-based organisations, and organisations in the private sector identified by the Directorate to enter the prison for the provision of educational, vocational, and other programs for the successful reintegration of prisoners back into society’ (<i>The Sindh Prisons and Corrections Services Act, 2019. Page 245</i>). ‘A prisoner who has money in his account may be allowed to purchase such articles from tuck-shop as permitted under these rules... Any money received for a prisoner from outside or earned in the Prison shall be paid to the Prisoner and if beyond the permitted limit shall be returned to his relatives or friends’ (<i>The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Prisons Rules, 2018; Page 26</i>).
	International Conventions & Rules	‘So far as possible the work provided shall be such as will maintain or increase the prisoners’ ability to earn an honest living after release’ (<i>The Nelson Mandela Rules, Rule 98</i>). ‘Vocational training in useful trades shall be provided for prisoners able to profit thereby and especially for young prisoners’ (<i>The Nelson Mandela Rules, Rule 98 (2)</i>). ‘Under the system, prisoners shall be allowed to spend at least a part of their earnings on approved articles for their own use and to send a part of their earnings to their family’ (<i>The Nelson Mandela Rules, Rule 103 (2)</i>).
	Newspaper Articles	‘Our aim is to help prisoners re-integrate into society as responsible citizens who can support their families and contribute to the nation,’ Special Assistant to the Chief Minister for Prisons Humayun Khan, said’ (<i>Dawn News; CM aide promises facilities to prisoners; December 27, 2024</i>). ‘He emphasised that the primary goal of establishing the reform centre is to provide inmates with modern and higher education, equipping them with essential skills for reintegration into society’ (<i>The news; New education facility established at Shikarpur jail; October 03, 2024</i>). ‘Nagina Mehsud (Superintendent of Mansehra District Prison) highlighted the shift in prison philosophy from mere detention to reformation, stating that vocational training helps inmates return to society as reformed individuals. She expressed hope that the training would enable the inmates to support their families and earn a better living post-release’ (<i>The Nation; Mansehra Jail inmates complete skill training; September 25, 2024</i>). ‘Jails of Sindh are now called as Correctional Facilities, a platform for acquiring skills, trades, and vocational training through which they learn different professions and once they get released from jail, such skill sets can help them generate their own income for basic living... All these services are seeking collaboration from any private or government

organisation to carry out the purpose of making prisoners work with dignity once they are released' (*Daily times; Implementing best practices in Sindh's 'correctional facilities'; August 31, 2021*).

2. Open-air infrastructure	Pakistan Prison Acts, Rules, and Regulations	'Civil prisoners may be allowed to sleep outside their ward or barrack in the open enclosure during summer nights' (<i>Pakistan prison rules, 1978, Page 148</i>).
		'On Sunday and holidays prisoners may be permitted to sit or lie freely but quietly in the yards off their barracks or cells. Association will be allowed only amongst the Prisoners may play games permissible under the rules in their own yards in the afternoons or may take walking exercise' (<i>Pakistan prison rules, 1978, Page 231</i>).
		'On Friday and holidays prisoners may be permitted to sit or lie freely but quietly in the yards off their barracks or cells. Association shall be allowed only amongst the Prisoners may play games permissible under the rules in their own yards in the afternoons or may take walking exercise' (<i>The Sindh Prisons and Corrections Services Act, 2019, Page 189</i>).
	International Conventions & Rules	'Exercise in open air: Every prisoner who is not employed in outdoor work shall have at least one hour of suitable exercise in the open air daily if the weather permits' (<i>The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Prisons Rules, 2018, Page 158</i>).
a. Neither-nor space – translated in terms of being busy, passing of time, and difference from prison barracks		
b. The use of 'we' – expression of equality, unity & community		
	International Conventions & Rules	'Prison authorities shall utilize options such as home leave, open prisons, halfway houses and community-based programmes and services to the maximum possible extent for women prisoners, to ease their transition from prison to liberty, to reduce stigma and to re-establish their contact with their families at the earliest possible stage' (<i>The Bangkok Rules, Rule 45</i>).
		'Every prisoner who is not employed in outdoor work shall have at least one hour of suitable exercise in the open air daily if the weather permits' (<i>The Nelson Mandela Rules, Rule 23</i>).
		'Open prisons, by the very fact that they provide no physical security against escape but rely on the self-discipline of the inmates, provide the conditions most favourable to the rehabilitation of carefully selected prisoners' (<i>The Nelson Mandela Rules, Rule 89 (2)</i>).
	Newspaper articles	'Let us put them not in prisons that are nurseries of crime, but in securely enclosed state farms where steady labour in open-air environment could ensure their physical, emotional and mental health, while accumulating funds to finance their re-entry into civil life' (<i>The Dawn; Prison reforms are needed urgently; April 2, 2024</i>).
		'About the open jail, its former deputy superintendent Zaheer Hussain Hydri said there were only two such detention centres (open jails) in the world; one in France and the other in district Badin which had neither barracks nor a boundary wall, The prisoners were allowed to live with their families in the huts and enjoy with them in the open jail. The prisoners would cultivate crops on the agricultural lands of the jail from which the Sindh government would earn handsome revenue and prisoners would also get compensation in return for their work, he said. He said that it would definitely be positive if the government were to reopen the historical facility' (<i>Govt decides to reopen defunct 'open jail' in Badin; February 3, 2024</i>).
		'The meeting was also told that open-air fitness gyms have been set up in the Peshawar Central Jail while construction of a badminton court at Mardan jail is in progress' (<i>Express Tribune; K-P plans new jails for erstwhile tribal areas; July 24, 2020</i>).

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