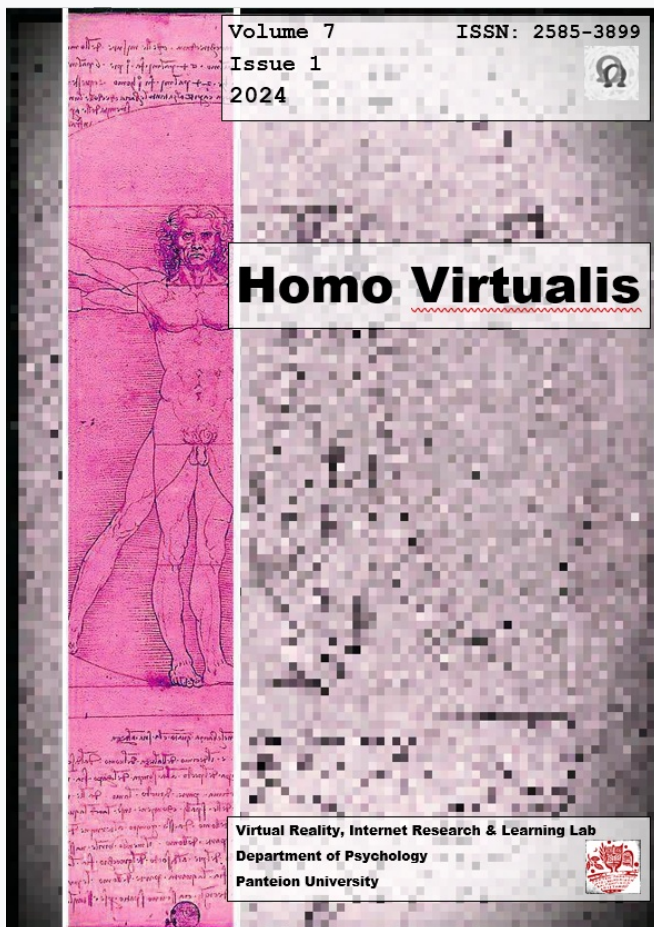


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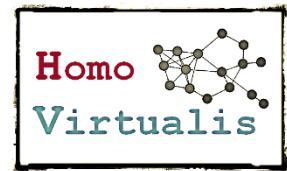
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## **The views of educators on the utilisation of information and communication technologies in controlled educational environments: The example of therapeutic communities**

**Aikaterini Ntaflou <sup>1</sup>, Konstantinos Malafantis <sup>2</sup>**

**Abstract:** Reintegration of individuals into the community constitutes an official strategic aim for correctional facilities. It methodically addresses the factors that contribute to the recurrence of delinquent behaviour while simultaneously reinforcing those that will aid in the stability of this integration. From this perspective, incarcerated individuals need to be educated on how society and the state operate. A crucial part of this education, not as a privilege but as a necessity for reintegration into a world where technological advancements affect the structure and functions of social systems, is familiarisation with Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). For this reason, educators who undertake the task of educating delinquent individuals have an exceptionally challenging job. They strive to prepare individuals who are already disadvantaged in various aspects of their lives for their return to society, in highly restrictive environments, both in terms of educational and technological infrastructure. This research is part of a postdoctoral study on education and reintegration. It focuses on the views of educators who teach in therapeutic reintegration communities regarding utilising information and communication technologies in the education provided in these structures. The method of interviews was used with a total of 8 educators teaching in therapeutic communities in Greece.

**Keywords:** Therapeutic communities, information and communication technologies, educators, correctional facilities

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## Introduction

Social reintegration is a central objective of correctional policy. It is variously defined as either the support provided to offenders during their reintegration into society after imprisonment or the number of alternative options pursued instead of incarceration. For those sentenced to confinement, it includes programs both within correctional facilities and continuing interventions after release. A key component of these interventions is the specialised services designed to help inmates live without engaging in delinquent behaviour after their release. Achieving this goal in practice is neither self-evident nor easily attainable. This realisation has led in recent years to the design of interventions based on the 'continuity of care' both within and outside prison (Stöver & Thane, 2011). This approach, known for many years as "throughcare" (Maguire & Raynor, 1997), addresses the individualised and varied issues faced by incarcerated individuals (Borzycki, 2005).

By emphasising the multifactorial context of delinquent behaviour, various and diverse issues that individuals may have faced throughout their lives are distinguished: issues such as a history of social isolation and marginalisation, physical or emotional abuse, underemployment or unemployment are common. This situation appears to be exacerbated by poor skills and professional qualifications: low levels of formal education, illiteracy, and limited access to services contribute to the profile of delinquent individuals. Very often, however, this profile includes health problems or mental illnesses, as well as addictions to substances and drugs. All these challenging aspects of people's lives are considered obstacles to any social reintegration program. They are also regarded as potential 'risk factors' because appropriate therapeutic interventions can reduce or alter these risk factors (Harper & Chitty, 2004).

In any case, the correctional framework must address these 'risk factors'. Specifically, through therapeutic services, it attempts to emphasise cognitive skills and attitudes and to achieve rehabilitation from drugs and alcohol through appropriate education and mental health programs. 'Therapy' in this context includes addressing the typical needs of offenders and their challenges to prepare them adequately to face them. This is also why the types of reintegration programs generally vary, and therapy can take many forms.

The most common approaches include individual or group counselling, individual or group therapy, family therapy, case management, or a mixed form. Similarly, some programs are of low, moderate, or high intensity and may be voluntary or mandatory according to court orders. They sometimes focus on a single aspect (e.g., substance abuse), while others may target various educational or professional aspects (e.g., housing, social support, and employment) as well as life skills. The setting in which these services are provided can also vary and may or may not include imprisonment as it is often the community or a non-correctional facility (e.g., community services or treatment centres outside prison) that is chosen as the base.

These services are designed with the goal of mental health treatment and continuous care. This is achieved within a supportive environment (before and after treatment), which includes the assistance of trained staff and controlled rehab from substances and alcohol. To accomplish this, specialised educational programs are often available.

One can identify three main types of therapeutic reintegration programs:

- **Institutional Programs:** Institutional programs aim at education, mental health care, substance abuse treatment, vocational training, counselling, and guidance for offenders (Travis, 2000). They tend to focus on a number of dynamic risk factors and the needs of offenders. A key disadvantage of these programs is their voluntary nature, which leaves room for uncertainty and insufficient participation in the programs.
- **Supervision Programs:** These programs focus on monitoring the progress of 'low-risk' offenders after their release. According to the literature (Maruna & LeBel, 2002; Papanozzi & Gendreau, 2005), such interventions have generally been unsuccessful in promoting reintegration and reducing recidivism rates. Thus, the question "Does offender supervision work?" must be considered with the understanding that it often targets a population that may not significantly benefit from supervision alone (Papanozzi & Gendreau, 2005). In contrast, data indicate that access to individual and group counselling and skill development for high-risk offenders resulted in lower recidivism rates compared to high-risk offenders who did not receive treatment (Finn & Muirhead-Steves, 2002). This finding suggests that supervision, in the absence of therapy and skill development, is not an effective intervention strategy for the offender population.
- **Assistance Programs:** These programs are designed to offer support to individuals with mental illnesses. Mental health issues are often linked with critical reintegration challenges such as social isolation, housing, and employment (Hartwell & Orr, 1999). These challenges, especially for vulnerable individuals with mental illnesses, require continuous community care (Griffiths, 2004; Hartwell & Orr, 2004). In the community, this continuity is managed through an interdisciplinary approach in two directions: psychiatric treatment and social policy (involving social services for housing, nutrition, benefits, and vocational training).

Each therapeutic intervention aims to stabilise the condition and enhance the individual's independent functioning. To achieve this, the goal is to ensure stable structures in the individual's daily life and develop strong bonds with the staff of the therapeutic community and their family. This approach satisfies the need for social support and manages the individual's impulses. Particularly for young offenders, mental health needs or issues with alcohol and drug abuse require a multimodal

approach centred on the individual, their family, and their peer group (Harrington & Bailey, 2005).

It becomes clear that a "one size fits all" approach does not work. "*Dependent offenders are caught in a vicious cycle. If the treatment they receive in prison for their addiction is not maintained upon their return to the community, the chances are that they will relapse and start offending again to satisfy their drug use needs. Failure to access appropriate support services in the community can result in offenders returning to prison repeatedly, as the cycle of criminality perpetuates*" (Burrows et al., 2001, p. 1). This cycle is closely related to their criminal behaviour upon entering prison (Grant et al., 2004).

Therefore, interventions "through care" refer to the treatment and support offered to offenders and require adequate information exchange between staff (treatment and supervision) (Motiuk, Belcourt & Bonta, 1995; Wilson et al., 2000), sufficient coordination of services (Tarling, Davison, & Clarke, 2004), and community involvement (Brazzell, 2007). In this sense, each therapeutic intervention focuses on specific target groups and particular challenges. It relies on methods that involve assessing the needs and risk factors of offenders and engages the individuals themselves in the process (Andrews & Bonta, 1998), educating them in 'Self-Management and Recovery Training' (SMART). These interventions must be carried out comprehensively, addressing the interconnected challenges. They require the coordination of all involved entities, with clearly defined roles and responsibilities.

### **Therapeutic communities (TCs) in correctional environments**

The model of therapeutic communities (TCs) in correctional environments has a long history. It involves creating a community aimed at enhancing rehabilitation and learning opportunities for dependent offenders. According to the relevant literature, "*what distinguishes the T.C. from other therapeutic approaches is the deliberate use of peer community to facilitate social and psychological change in individuals*" (De Leon, 1994, p.22). Several elements that ensure the therapeutic aspect in the correctional environment are at the core of their function. These elements include:

- A strict work environment as a crucial factor in harnessing the group's dynamics and energy (De Leon, 1994).
- Controlled structure and daily routine ensuring that each community member is addressed through appropriate challenges, rewards, and goal setting (Yates, 2011).
- Recognition and utilisation of individuals' strengths (work skills, creative and artistic abilities, friends and family) in their treatment (Yates, 2015).
- Intentional sharing of personal vulnerability (experiences and emotions) among peers (De Leon, 1994).

- System of group meetings supporting the free expression of emotions such as sorrow, fear, or anger arising from daily work programs as a mechanism of empowerment, pressure lever, and emotional release (Yates, 2011).

In this sense, therapeutic communities aim at coordinated actions seeking to change behaviour, encouraging individuals to fully participate in each process of this effort. Therefore, a central element of therapeutic communities is the recognition of individual responsibility in its members, more as a "self-help learning" approach for individual restoration. Both staff and members are considered part of this process. For this reason, treatment includes a community that is organisationally autonomous and largely self-sustaining, with tasks such as cleaning, cooking, and minor building repairs being undertaken by community members (Mullen et al., 2019).

In these communities, it is equally important, along with the previous elements, to instil a sense of safety and ownership. This is achieved through the active participation of community members in decision-making processes involved in its daily operation. Therefore, it is crucial for every therapeutic community to operate based on autonomy. This presupposes that prison regulations and national legislation allow it, and in turn, empower the correctional authority to provide the required service with the participation of a suitable and experienced team of personnel, ideally including both correctional officers and staff experienced in treatment.

Education, as part of the therapeutic community, is designed to help incarcerated individuals first manage their dependencies and seek sobriety while serving their sentence. However, its scope is much broader than mere abstinence from substance use and alcohol. With the goal of participants acquiring the appropriate tools and skills to successfully reintegrate, education for incarcerated individuals participating in therapeutic communities focuses on specific weaknesses as well as general skills. The primary focus is on initiating two fundamental components for each participant:

- i. A treatment plan to address their physical, psychological, emotional, and social issues, in addition to substance use.
- ii. Gradually replacing antisocial behaviours with positive alternatives to reduce the likelihood of relapse and increase healthy coping mechanisms.

Finally, what distinguishes the TC from other treatment approaches (and other communities) is the purposive use of the community as the primary method for facilitating social and psychological change in individuals. Community as method means integrating people and practices under a common perspective and purpose to teach individuals to use the community to learn about and change themselves. Thus, all activities are designed to produce therapeutic and educational change in the individual participants, and all participants are mediators of these therapeutic and educational changes.

### *Creating a Therapeutic Contract*

KETHEA in ACTION, NGO in special consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and one of the principal implementation bodies of the Greek national strategy on drugs, is part of the largest Greek network of addiction treatment, rehabilitation and social reintegration services. KETHEA in ACTION offers its services within community, prison and residential settings, and has the capacity to respond to clients with diverse needs, at every stage of their recovery. All services are provided free of charge. KETHEA in ACTION also runs school and community-based prevention and early intervention programmes and is a key research and professional training organization in the field of addiction in Greece.

The Therapeutic Communities of KETHEA in ACTION operate in specially allocated spaces, with a daily program that includes treatment, education and professional training. According to the framework of Principles of Therapeutic Intervention (Prochaska, et.al. 1994) at KETHEA IN ACTION: Addiction is a complex phenomenon with biological, social, psychological, ideological, cultural, economic and other parameters. Every addict has their own story, their own personality, their own path to substances, and their own unique family and social environment. He lives a lifestyle shaped by his non-free will (due to his addiction to substances), which is not expressed in just one certain type of behavior. That's why mental addiction isn't just limited to stopping use and modifying addictive behavior. It revolves around the causes and all those aggravating circumstances in the family and social environment, which, combined with his individual characteristics, pushed the person at some critical moment in his life, to turn to substances and eventually become dependent on them. In order to achieve the above objective, it is necessary to adopt a socially acceptable value system, shared by all staff, which is promoted to the group of members.

## **Methodology**

### *Data Collection*

New technologies offer extensive capabilities for increasing the effectiveness of educators (Tinker & Xie, 2008; Zacharia, 2007). But what could the use of ICT mean as part of the educational process within the environment of therapeutic communities? We know from relevant studies (Champion & Edgar, 2016; Devi & McGarry, 2013) about various but central issues of information technology (technical, legal, and policy-related) that include who should have access to information, how access should be supported, and how digital information should be used. Beyond these aspects concerning existing legislation or policy perspectives, the central question remains: *'Does the educator adapt the educational process, and if so, how, by incorporating the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) in therapeutic communities?'* To address this question, the following research questions were formulated:

### *Research Questions:*

Q1: Information and communication technologies in education within therapeutic communities are significant for teachers.

Q2: Education within therapeutic communities is not supported by the organisational regulatory and educational framework with the corresponding resources in Information and Communication Technologies (ICT).

A key issue for the research was investigating the possibilities of supporting the educational process (use of digital programs for partial or complete conduct of lessons, digital teaching material, etc.). As each teacher combines their personal knowledge and skills (personal capabilities) with the existing and available intellectual resources and those provided by the educational unit, it was deemed useful to also explore personal perceptions of the use of ICT in this restrictive environment. Equally important for the research proved to be the entire set of technologies that support the educational process: computers, digital books, distance learning capabilities, and electronic classrooms. Therefore, this study attempted to identify teachers' views on the use of technologies in therapeutic communities, equally seeking the opportunities they have to make this choice.

### *Participants*

The research involved a total of 8 secondary education teachers from different correctional facilities during the academic year 2023-2024. Specifically, the research was conducted over 2 weeks in November 2023. Of the 8 participants, 3 teachers work at the Korydallos Correctional Facility and 5 at the Eleonas Thiva Women's Prison. Among the participants, 3 are men and 5 are women. Considering the age of the participants, it was found that the age range was 41 and above.

### *Interview Question Guide*

During the research, structured interviews were conducted with the teachers of therapeutic communities in correctional facilities using a question guide, ensuring all necessary measures for the anonymity of the participants. Informed consent, in the context of research, is described as a 'voluntary choice ... based on sufficient information and adequate understanding of both the proposed research and the implications of participating in it' (NHMRC, 2018). So, participants had been informed that they can refuse to answer questions or can withdraw from the study at any time, including during the interview itself. The guide consisted of 24 questions across the following domains:

- Socio-demographic data
- Teaching and technological experience
- Availability and access to technological options and pedagogical approaches
- Needs and evaluation of services
- Experiences with disabilities in the therapeutic community

- Evaluations of the use of technology in the therapeutic community and its usefulness for reintegration.

The interview form included the following detailed questions:

- 
1. What is your gender?  
\_\_\_\_\_
  2. Including the current school year, how many years have you been teaching?  
\_\_\_\_\_
  3. What is your age  
\_\_\_\_\_
  4. How often do you use a computer, tablet, or mobile phone outside of professional activities?  
\_\_\_\_\_
  5. How many school hours do you teach in total per week?  
\_\_\_\_\_
  6. Do you have advanced knowledge of applications (e.g., word processing, complex relational databases, virtual learning environments)?  
\_\_\_\_\_
  7. Do you have advanced knowledge of using certain equipment (e.g., interactive whiteboard, laptop)?  
\_\_\_\_\_
  8. What pedagogical approaches do you generally use in teaching your subjects?  
\_\_\_\_\_
  9. How many years have you been teaching incarcerated students?  
\_\_\_\_\_
  10. Do you have incarcerated students with disabilities (hearing/visual) in your classes?  
\_\_\_\_\_
  11. Do you have incarcerated students with ADHD in your classes?  
\_\_\_\_\_
  12. Do these disorders or disabilities affect your teaching, and if so, how?  
\_\_\_\_\_
  13. How often do you use the following types of computer technologies to teach and communicate with incarcerated students?
    - Email:  
\_\_\_\_\_
    - Digital books  
\_\_\_\_\_
    - Web links  
\_\_\_\_\_
    - Social networks:  
\_\_\_\_\_
    - Instant messaging (Google Talk, Skype):  
\_\_\_\_\_
    - Discussion forums:  
\_\_\_\_\_
    - Other  
\_\_\_\_\_
  14. Which of the following technologies do you believe are most connected with incarcerated students and why?
    - Digital books/notes  
\_\_\_\_\_
    - Web links  
\_\_\_\_\_
    - Videos  
\_\_\_\_\_
-

- 
- Computer for teaching
- 
- Computer in a computer lab
- 
- Smartboard
- 
- Email
- 
- Instant messaging (Google Talk, Skype)
- 
- Presentation software (PowerPoint)
- 
- Online conferencing (Skype, Adobe Connect)

15. Which of the following technologies do you believe can best assist teachers of incarcerated students, and why?

- Digital books/notes
- 
- Computer for teaching
- 
- Smartboard
- 
- Email
- 
- Instant messaging (Google Talk, Skype)
- 
- Presentation software (PowerPoint)
- 
- Online conferencing (Skype, Adobe Connect)
- 
- Other

16. Which aspect of technologies do you believe is most helpful for the education of incarcerated students, and why?

- Speed
- 
- Ease of use
- 
- Immediacy
- 
- Interactivity
- 
- Remote access
- 
- Other (please specify):

17. Have you had any negative experiences using computer technology with incarcerated students? If so, what were they?

---

18. Is there any type of computer technology you would like to use in your classes with incarcerated students? If so, what is preventing you from using it?

---

19. Which of the following assessments best describes your opinion on how helpful the current use of technology is in the education of incarcerated students?

- Very
- 
- Somewhat

- 
- Not at all

---

  - Insufficient as currently implemented

---

  - More digital tools are needed

---

  - Other

20. How much do you agree with the following statement? The use of technology in education helps to...

- Encourage inmate participation

---

- Improve the lessons

---

- Make knowledge more comprehensible

---

- Equip inmates with digital skills

---

- Boost inmates' confidence for their reintegration

---

- Improve access

---

- Other

21. Are you satisfied with the extent to which technology is utilised in the education of incarcerated students?

22. On a scale of 1-10 (1 = not at all, 10 = completely), please rate how strongly you believe the reintegration of young inmates is connected to digital education:

1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - 8 - 9 - 10

23. What would you change in the education of young inmates?

24. Do you have anything else to add?

---

### **Data analysis - Research Limitations**

Given that the research approach is qualitative, every interpretation in the content analysis aims to understand the current state of technology utilisation from the perspective of teachers' personal opinions and to interpret the findings for improving the education of incarcerated students. This is achieved by analysing the opinions of the relevant stakeholders to formulate improvement suggestions at the end, even though generalisation is not possible. A fundamental principle of the research is that incarcerated students need a variety of skills to understand, integrate, and function in modern society, which has integrated technology into all its structures. The interpretation of the results was conducted according to the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (Lee et al., 2003), which includes the study of the influences of technology on the education-related motivations of incarcerated students.

In correctional facilities as well as their therapeutic communities, it is important to investigate the available technologies, the way users have embraced them, and their

ultimate impact on the provision of education. According to the relevant literature (Davis, 1989), the Technology Acceptance Model provides utility based on two factors: Perceived Usefulness (PU) and Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU). The first seeks the extent of performance based on individual use of technology, and the second is the belief of an individual regarding the usability of a technology (Davis, 1989). For the current research, the Technology Acceptance Model was chosen because teachers and incarcerated students use the available technologies in an environment that is restrictive by definition.

## **Results**

The results showed that the group of educators consisted of experienced teachers with 21-30 years of teaching experience. Specifically, in the education of incarcerated individuals, all educators have 10 years of prior experience. They mostly teach more than 21 hours per week and possess advanced knowledge in both computer applications (such as word processing, complex relational databases, and virtual learning environments) and the use of certain equipment (such as interactive whiteboards and laptops). Although they understood new technologies and their relevance to information in the educational environment, they did not frequently use them in their lectures. By analysing their teaching methods, we concluded that the teachers primarily used videos and online conferences (e.g., Skype, Adobe Connect) in their lesson delivery. These technologies, along with email, online links, and instant messaging (e.g., Google Talk, Skype), appeared to serve more as supportive tools in structuring their lessons, particularly in terms of the content they wanted to share with their students.

The development of these "networked" learning environments, organised along the axis of "student-intermediary-teacher," where modern information technologies function as intermediaries, achieves a non-linear structuring of educational material. This, in turn, allows the teacher (and the participant) to choose an "individual path." However, the creation of an educational methodology involves the necessary regulatory, organisational, and educational resources that determine the outcome of the process. In this context, the general restrictive educational framework plays a significant role. Although teachers almost exclusively believe that digital books/notes, computers for teaching, smart boards, and presentation software (PowerPoint) could greatly assist them in their work as educators of incarcerated students, they do not have the opportunity to use them.

This raises the question of presenting modern educational content in two aspects: the updated educational content itself and the updated practice of delivering this content. Teachers consider information and communication technologies (ICT) to be highly relevant to the education of incarcerated participants, due to their specific characteristics: speed, ease of use, and, most importantly, immediacy, interactivity, and remote access. However, the conditions for developing and using new methods of

education and familiarising participants with a range of innovative teaching and learning technologies are very significant for therapeutic communities. In this regard, teachers were asked, "Is there any type of computer technology you would like to use in your classes with incarcerated participants? If so, what prevents you from doing so?" Their responses clearly indicated that controlled and not immediate access to the internet, as well as insufficient resources (a computer lab in a separate room and the absence of an interactive whiteboard), are primary obstacles in their work.

The essential elements of the TC are organized into four areas: its perspective, treatment approach, program model, and the treatment process. The TC's basic social learning model has been amplified with a variety of additional services: family, educational, vocational, medical, and mental health. The TC can be distinguished from other major drug treatment modalities in two fundamental ways. First, the TC offers a systematic treatment approach that is guided by an explicit perspective on the drug use disorder, the person, recovery and right living. Second, the primary "therapist" and teacher in the TC is the community itself, which consists of the social environment, peers, and staff who, as role models of successful personal change, serve as guides in the recovery process. Thus, the community is both context in which change occurs and method for facilitating change. Vocational and education deficits are marked. Individuals are encouraged and trained to assume personal responsibility for their present reality and their future destiny. The ideological and psychological views of TC perspective are integrated into its teachings and methods to achieve its main social and psychological goals. The social and psychological goals of the TC shape its treatment regime as well as define several broad assumptions concerning its view of recovery. Change in the TC can be understood as a passage through stages of incremental learning.

Thus, while therapeutic communities strive to reshape the behaviour of delinquent individuals, disadvantaged learning environments with inadequate structures can be a drawback in implementing their therapeutic and educational methods. This may partly explain why the pedagogical approaches chosen by teachers during their instruction are mainly traditional direct teaching, individualised and differentiated instruction, or collaborative learning, and less frequently project-based learning, problem-solving, or peer teaching.

Another explanation for this choice might be the fact that their work in therapeutic communities requires and necessitates unique and extremely important face-to-face communication, which is considered more effective in education within correctional settings compared to remote and digital learning. Beyond the existing fact that inmates are not allowed to have mobile phones or computers to utilise digital technologies in their education, the teachers in the study believe that face-to-face classroom teaching reaches the participants in therapeutic communities more successfully.

Therefore, the acceptance of technology among teachers of incarcerated individuals is extremely important. However, it appears to differ in its impact within the therapeutic context. We believe that the integration of ICT in education within therapeutic communities is a crucial component of the TC model. Within the framework of TCs, the use of complementary methods to address issues arising from the high dependency of the group may help mitigate the individual weaknesses of its members. Relevant studies support this view (Zoukis, 2016), indicating that technology has played a decisive role in enhancing education in prisons. The suggested blended learning approach, which combines traditional teaching methods with supplementary technological methods, is particularly effective according to the author.

## **Discussion**

Incarceration is an inherently isolating experience. This alone constitutes an extremely challenging transition that has been highlighted as a significant stress factor for incarcerated individuals. Any worsening of their access in time, means, and methods of communication strips the incarcerated individual of the support network that is vital for their successful reintegration, including the educational resources they receive. The utilisation of ICT in the education provided in restrictive environments emphasises the function of modern society as one of information, communication, and systems. In any case, the pedagogical process is placed at the heart of the reintegration process. It is precisely for this reason that every effort must be defined by its main goal, which, in this case, is none other than preparing individuals to reintegrate into society. Based on this, two things are important to reiterate:

- a. Reintegration essentially involves setting a new direction in the lives of certain individuals, with better conditions than those that led them to criminal behaviours and dependencies.
- b. Creating conditions for reintegration requires a holistic and continuous focus on a range of issues and is achieved at various stages.

Therefore, creating an educational environment within a modern framework in therapeutic communities is neither a luxury nor a concession. It serves as a guarantee of the active interaction between the realm of information, the educational environment, and the world for which some individuals are being prepared. Hence, it must be reflected both as part of general education and in the training of the educators themselves. In the international literature, recommendations focus on the development of innovative teaching and learning techniques (Sogunro, 2015), as well as on aligning the objectives and means of the information process to improve the effectiveness of the educational process (Hrastinski et al., 2010; Çoban & Goksu, 2022). Part of these recommendations includes the development of open-type educational institutions (Xie & Ke, 2011; Wigfield & Wentzel, 2007).

Relevant studies present arguments for the additional benefits. On one hand, the research emphasises that technologies (including various forms of distance education) significantly increase students' motivation to study different subjects. On the other hand, opposing research highlights that distance education is not as effective as face-to-face education. The main reason for this view is the reduced student participation and poor motivation for using asynchronous education (Altun et al., 2021). Specifically, for participants in therapeutic communities, these views carry additional weight due to dependencies that, according to educators, hinder students' ability to concentrate (Tichavsky et al., 2015).

In any case, motivation is a powerful personal factor and an essential variable for learning outcomes. Therefore, any research indicating various and different issues related to participants performance and how it changes with the choice of learning method (Alkhudiry & Alahdal, 2021) must be taken seriously. Current research indicates that the use of technology in therapeutic communities is desired by educators and utilised in various ways. We believe that the flexibility of this usage is essential and must be institutionally supported. This is because every educational environment is dynamically defined by its primary parameters, which are the teaching staff and the unique needs of the diverse class population. Specific references from related studies have been made regarding the use of technologies such as:

- Podcasting: The technology of podcasting allows educators to record part of their lectures and enables incarcerated students to listen to them at any time. According to McHugh (2022), podcasts provide access to individuals who do not have it otherwise. In the face of inherent inequalities in correctional facilities (Barkworth, Thaler & Howard, 2023), any element that enhances the educational capabilities of its educators should be considered part of a holistic approach to therapy and reintegration. In line with this view, Torres (2017) believes that incarcerated students can benefit from podcasting, as the stress of incarceration can regularly prevent them from actively participating. This view is supported by studies (Armstrong, 2020) that show incarcerated students using podcasts collaborate more easily and consistently on their assignments.
- Online Courses - Mobile Telephony: Open and distance education is a growing option of interest in society as it allows for the management of geographical and other limitations through technology. In correctional education, this management as Online Learning faces serious challenges (Armstrong, 2020), despite modern methods of controlling both access and the use of the data employed (Mufarreh, et al., 2022).

Moreover, any attempt to use mobile phones (under security parameters) contradicts prevailing educational norms. However, utilising this technology (with necessary security protocols) can enable educators to direct incarcerated students to specific

pages, assignments, and audio resources that cannot be included in the in-person teaching hour (Hopkins & Farley, 2014). It also allows incarcerated individuals, according to McDougall et al. (2017), to adopt 'self-directed therapy,' motivating them to acquire essential living and self-management skills within the community (Kerr & Willis, 2018). Whether distance education, with its various adaptations, is as effective as face-to-face teaching and whether it will continue to dominate education are two widely discussed topics (Bonk, 2020; Rapanta, 2020). In any case, it seems that blended interventions in a therapeutic community, utilising technological resources among other tools, are essential responses from the system toward incarcerated individuals, necessary for reintegration.

### **Concluding thoughts**

Most participants did not know what a serious game was before watching the video or discussing its concept with the interviewer, but during the interview they ended up imagining their own SG and their practical design elements. The fact that participants were able envisaged ideal culturally-tailored SGs in such a short period of time, shows that educators can be very creative and aware of their students' multicultural needs, and are able to provide useful materials to build inclusive classrooms. According to Avdiu et al. (2022), gamification in education is an effective tool towards the creation of inclusive classrooms, since students gain common positive experiences and realize that they are all equal learners.

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Most participants did not know what a serious game was before watching the video or discussing its concept with the interviewer, but during the interview they ended up imagining their own SG and their practical design elements. The fact that participants were able envisaged ideal culturally-tailored SGs in such a short period of time, shows that educators can be very creative and aware of their students' multicultural needs, and are able to provide useful materials to build inclusive classrooms. According to Avdiu et al. (2022), gamification in education is an effective tool towards the creation of inclusive classrooms, since students gain common positive experiences and realize that they are all equal learners.

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