

PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENTS REGARDING THE SIGNIFICANCE OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY FOR CASE MANAGERS IN ESTONIAN CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES

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Abstract

Foreign language proficiency among prison staff is of crucial importance in the correctional environment in Estonia. A significant number of inmates in Estonian prisons speaks native languages other than Estonian. This creates a communication barrier, particularly for case managers. The successful rehabilitation and integration of inmates into society hinge on effective communication between prison staff and inmates.

This paper examines the perceptions of students regarding the significance of foreign language proficiency for case managers in effectively fulfilling their professional responsibilities. The key findings are derived from a qualitative study conducted by the author from 2022 to 2023 among students at the Prison Service College of the Estonian Academy of Security Sciences.

The study results highlight several reasons supporting the necessity for case managers to master foreign languages and communicate in a manner understandable to inmates. Foreign language skills among prison staff facilitate cooperation, enhance understanding of the diverse backgrounds and perspectives of inmates, alleviate tensions, and stimulate interest in acquiring the national language of the sentencing jurisdiction, among other benefits.

Analysis shows that case managers' linguistic proficiency plays a vital role in engaging and aiding in the rehabilitation of inmates. It provides essential support for interventions aimed at reducing recidivism. The findings underscore the importance of prioritising foreign language proficiency in the training and professional development of case managers within the Estonian correctional system.

Keywords: *Estonian correctional facilities, case manager, foreign language proficiency, foreign national inmates, resocialisation*

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the essential responsibilities of correctional services is to guide inmates towards compliance with the law, thereby reducing recidivism in society. Achieving this objective requires well-educated and capable officials who receive specialized training, competitive salaries, and a conducive work environment. The mission of the Estonian Prison Service is to promote a law-abiding lifestyle and the full integration of offenders into society, thus creating a safer Estonia (Ministry of Justice, 2023). Based on statistical data as at January 1, 2024, the total population of Estonia is 1,366,491 inhabitants, comprising 925,892 Estonians (67.7%), 306,801 Russians (22.5%), 122,413 individuals of other ethnic nationalities (8.9%), and 10,778 individuals of unknown ethnic origin (0.78%) (Statistics Estonia, 2024).

According to Estonian Prison Service data, the number of inmates in 2023 was 134 per 100,000 inhabitants, representing 0.13% of Estonia's total population. Furthermore, over 50% of individuals serving sentences in Estonian prisons have Russian as their native language (Estonian Prisoners' Register Statistics 2024). Trust relationships and effective communication with foreign inmates in their mother tongue play a crucial role in recognizing the harmful effects of criminal behaviour among foreign offenders and facilitating their transition to becoming a law-abiding member of society. Therefore, proficiency in the foreign (Russian) language is an essential competence in the profile of case manager in Estonian correctional facilities. From a security perspective, proficiency in the Russian language is paramount in Estonia's context. Particularly during Russia's aggression against Ukraine, comprehending the attitudes and perceptions of individuals who speak the aggressor's language as their mother tongue

is crucial. Proficiency in Russian is indispensable to assist, when necessary, individuals, including inmates, who are native Russian speakers, in understanding the impact of aggression on the whole society and to support them in shaping anti-regime attitudes prevalent in Russia.

The aim of the article is to provide an overview of how students – future case managers with experience in resocialising foreign inmates into society – perceive the need for foreign language proficiency in the role of a case manager. The study focuses on students at the Prison Service College of the Estonian Academy of Security Sciences (EASS), who have experience in the resocialisation of foreign inmates. Experiences of this specific target group have not been previously studied to the author's knowledge. However, the problem is relevant, since over half of the inmates are native Russian speakers who return to society after release. Communicating with these inmates in their native language during resocialisation is an important issue from the perspective of internal security.

The article is divided into nine sections. The introduction is followed by an overview addressing the concept of foreign inmates, the impact of language barriers on prisoners, and the importance of effective communication in the resocialisation of foreign inmates. Next, the methodology of the study is explained, and the research findings are presented. This is followed by a discussion of the results and with conclusions.

2. FOREIGN NATIONAL INMATES

It is natural that population migration leads to a rise in the number of offences committed by foreigners, consequently increasing the population of foreign national prisoners in correctional facilities. Challenges related to foreign inmates vary across justice systems and practices in Europe. According to the Annual Penal Statistics of the Council of Europe (Aebi, Cocco & Molnar 2023a), in Europe in 2022, the percentage of foreign national inmates was 25%, comprising 23.9% for males and 21.2% for females, both calculated as a proportion of the total number of inmates including pre-trial offenders. However, this percentage varies significantly across prison administrations (PA). In Eastern European PAs, the proportion is typically lower than 5%, while in Central and Western European ones, it is at least 10%, and in some PAs, it exceeds 40%. Among the latter are Switzerland (70%), Greece (59%), Cyprus (52%), Austria (49%), the PA of Catalonia (48%), Belgium (43%), and four PAs in countries with populations under one million. The lowest percentages of foreign inmates (below 2%) are observed in Romania (1%), Moldova (1.4%), the Republika Srpska in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1.4%), and Latvia (1.8%). This pattern overlaps with the natural movement of European populations since the 2000s – rising populations in the West, South and North, and decreasing populations in the Centre, Southeast, and East of Europe (Aebi, Cocco & Molnar, 2023b).

To achieve a comprehensive understanding of the matter under investigation, it is necessary to define the concept of a foreign national prisoner within the framework of this study. When outlining the terminology (Prisoners' Advice Service, 2024), it is pertinent to emphasise the dual level of defining the concept of 'foreigner' in prison law and practice. Specifically, criminal law delineates this group of prisoners solely based on their absence of Estonian citizenship. This results in an overly broad definition that encompasses all individuals, ignoring the extent of cultural and religious differences. The inadequacy of this approach causes uniform actions being applied to people from neighbouring countries and distant parts of the world (Urbanek, 2021). According to Atabay (2009), the term covers prisoners who have lived for extended periods in the country of imprisonment but have not been naturalised, as well as those who have recently arrived. Within the context of the research, they are the group of individuals who have the right to stay in the country of imprisonment after release. In Estonian prisons, 33% of inmates are classified as having undefined or other citizenship status (Estonian Prisoners' Register Statistics, 2024).

The profile of a foreign inmate encompasses several aspects. The conducted study focuses on the broad definition of the term of 'foreign inmate', concentrating on the cultural background, specifically language. Based on statistics from the Estonian Prison Service, Estonian prisons house inmates with 25 distinct mother tongues. The majority of foreign inmates (50.9%) in the prisons have a Russian cultural heritage. The representation of other languages, such as Romany (0.78%), Latvian (0.68%), Lithuanian

(0.42%), Finnish (0.1%), and Swedish (0.05%), is significantly smaller. Additionally, there is a lesser presence of speakers of widely spoken European languages, such as English (0.1%), Spanish (0.05%), and Italian (0.05%) (Estonian Prisoners' Register Statistics, 2024).

Proficiency in the official language of the country in which the sentences is being served is significant in the profile of a foreign inmate. Foreign national prisoners are a heterogeneous group (Yildiz & Bartlett, 2011). Some speak the language of the detaining country fluently, whereas others cannot speak it at all (Croux et al., 2023a). According to statistical data from the Estonian Prison Service, 57% of foreign inmates have a mother tongue other than the official language of the country. The proficiency of the official (Estonian) language among foreign inmates is as follows: 22.8% do not speak it at all, 39.6% are beginners, 18.2% are independent users, 2.1% are proficient users, and the language proficiency level of 13% of foreign inmates is undefined (Estonian Prisoners' Register Statistics, 2024).

3. THE IMPACT OF LINGUISTIC BARRIERS ON COMMUNICATION WITH FOREIGN NATIONAL INMATES

Prison officials, due to their job responsibilities, have to communicate with inmates, including those whose proficiency in the national language is either non-existent or insufficient for participation in daily prison life. The inadequacy of linguistic competencies leads to various problems for both officials and inmates. Language barriers have also been found to severely complicate criminal justice proceedings and present significant disadvantages to individuals (Aliverti, 2017). Linguistic exclusion not only exacerbates other pains of imprisonment but is also a distinct and separate pain faced by foreign nationals (Kox et al., 2014; Martynowicz, 2018). The problem is perceived and, according to officials, affects their job satisfaction. A crucial aspect of job satisfaction for correctional officers is helping inmates to reintegrate into society. Limited opportunities to work on rehabilitation means that prison officers struggle to find meaning and satisfaction in their work (Brouwer, 2020). A lot of information is lost or distorted in indirect communication. Sometimes, understanding inmate and helping them becomes impossible, generating frustration or even demotivation in the face of the task at hand (Gallez, 2018). Besides maintaining order and safety in the prison, officers normally guide prisoners and prepare them for return into society. For many officers, helping prisoners get their life 'back on track' is an important part of job satisfaction (Mollema & van Ginneken, 2013).

Iversen et al. (2013) highlight the significance of social, cultural, and emotional aspects, alongside others, in communication with foreign inmates. In the social strata, prisoners seem to be placed at the bottom of the ladder. We know that conflicts tend to emerge among those in the lower ranks of society because the most humiliated feel the greatest need to regain self-respect (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2007). Negative stereotypes contribute to an increased social distance between inmates and prison officers, leading inmates to withdraw to their cells to avoid trouble. Having to submit to prison regulations may exacerbate inmates' feelings of humiliation and create an atmosphere where good communication with prison officers is difficult to achieve. Prisoners seem to live in constant stress and fear of being misunderstood (Iversen et al., 2013).

The interpretability of officers' behaviour is expressed by inmates as differences in cultures rather than communication problems. Previous observations have highlighted those disputes between prisoners are often exacerbated by racial and cultural differences, stereotyping, and a lack of communication, making violent outcomes more likely (Edgar & Martin, 2004). Intercultural communication plays a crucial role in the interaction between prison officers and foreign inmates. Communication problems among people from different cultures may also stem from feelings towards out-groups and initial orientations (e.g., perceived potential for conflict, or factors such as the personality of the speaker (Bradby, 2002). The existence of communication problems between foreign inmates and prison officers highlights the need for cross-cultural counselling as part of the education provided by correctional services.

Communication is a complex process, and understanding cultural differences and accepting cultural diversity is the first step in improving communication between foreign inmates and prison officers. Unavoidably, aggressive behaviour may arise in prison settings. In these situations, properly trained staff try to calm the situation and get inmates to listen, understand, trust, believe, and cooperate. This

may be harder to achieve if the inmate and the staff do not have a common language, and stereotypes have developed on both sides. Soothing, explaining, comforting, and assuring become much more difficult when there is no common language. Misunderstandings may, in turn, lead to aggressive gestures and verbal threats. Many inmates seem to live with a feeling of being exposed to linguistic poverty when they are forced to communicate in a foreign language that they do not master. Poor language skills associated with an authoritarian prison system may trigger aggression and anger between foreign inmates and prison officers (Iversen et al., 2013). Communication problems may force prisoners to repeat their message or express it loudly. This can be misunderstood as anger or aggression, and lead to frustration or aggressive violence (Berger, 2001).

Language barriers represent one of the root causes of isolation felt by foreign national prisoners. The absence of a common language hinders foreign prisoners' communication with other prisoners and prison staff, leading to mutual misunderstandings. Language barriers also prevent foreigners' equitable participation in prison activities, since most programmes require communication in the language spoken by the majority in the prison. Prison rules and regulations are often not available in the languages spoken by foreign nationals. Therefore, they may neither understand their rights nor know their obligations. This may lead to the unintended breaking of prison rules, resulting in disciplinary punishments.

Clear and understandable communication between case managers and inmates is crucial in resolving daily issues and maintaining order within correctional facilities. Communication in a mutually understandable language helps prevent conflicts arising from linguistic misunderstandings when giving orders. The cause of conflict may stem from requests made by inmates in a foreign language, which consequently remain unanswered. Foreign inmates feel that the staff is unresponsive to their requests, some of which can be quite important given prisoners' precarious legal statuses (Kruttschnitt, Dirkzwager & Kennedy, 2013). In many prisons, inmates have to make requests in writing to access services or see the director or a doctor, which foreign nationals may not be able to do without assistance. If they do gain access to a doctor or psychologist, they often depend on interpretation, often not available in their language. Other prisoners may help, which is undesirable given the confidentiality necessary for medical and psychological treatment. The reaction may be retreating into isolation, in fear of breaking rules, being unable to assert their rights, or experiencing frustration, which may be reflected in aggressive behaviour (Atabay, 2009). Prisoners who do not share a language with the prison officers find it more complicated to express their needs and exercise their rights. Officers normally largely rely on verbal communication to establish order and maintain safety in the prison, but the cultural and linguistic diversity of the population frequently makes it challenging to establish relationships with prisoners (Brouwer, 2020).

Language barriers have been identified as a major complicating factor in criminal justice proceedings, leading to notable disadvantages for individuals involved. Additionally, the scarcity of opportunities for rehabilitation work poses challenges for prison officers, affecting their job satisfaction. Recognizing the importance of social, cultural, and emotional factors in communication with foreign inmates underscores the complexity of intercultural interactions. Furthermore, clear and effective communication between prison officers and foreign inmates is critical for resolving daily issues and maintaining order within correctional facilities.

4. VITAL ROLE OF CLEAR COMMUNICATION WITH FOREIGN NATIONAL INMATES IN THEIR RESOCIALISATION

In the process of rehabilitating inmates into society, communication is an inevitable part. Interaction with inmates whose proficiency in the national language is either non-existent or insufficient presents various obstacles. Linguistic barriers prevent effective communication with staff members and other prisoners (Brouwer, 2020). Language is a significant aspect of identity, and allowing foreign inmates to express themselves in the language they are most comfortable with and that aligns with their identity is a way of demonstrating respect for them. Prisoners must be able to express themselves in the language they know best or at least understand. If this is not possible, communication must be done via an interpreter (Westrheim & Manger, 2014).

Ethnic minority prisoners must receive and understand important information, as well as help with searching for the information they require (Westheim & Manger, 2014). An essential element lies in the daily interaction between inmates and their case managers, providing the latter with an opportunity to positively impact inmates' reintegration into society through effective communication. Establishing a successful working relationship in this context significantly contributes to the rehabilitation process. Prison officers are key individuals within the criminal justice system. Through their day-to-day contact with prisoners, knowledge of personal circumstances, advocacy, and formation of close working relationships, they have the opportunity to exert significant influence on prisoner rehabilitative efforts (House of Commons Justice Committee, 2009). However, communication problems continue to be a barrier to the rehabilitation of prisoners, extending beyond their inability to integrate with the host society in general to a communication barrier with the prison staff in their new environment. The initiation of communication between the staff and prisoners in the mother tongue of the prisoner may facilitate rehabilitation of the latter group and increase their motivation to learn the language of the host country, leading to an interest in adaptation and integration (Barkan et al., 2011).

Communicating with inmates in a language they understand increases their adaptability upon returning to society after serving the sentence. An individual approach to the resocialisation process ensures better results, making productive communication vital in the rehabilitation of inmates. It is essential to emphasize that inmates' transition into society involves independent management of their lives. Productive communication contributes to good preparation for the release. The better prepared foreign inmates are to live in freedom without breaking the law, the lower the risk of recidivism. When communicating with inmates in a language they understand, the case manager serves as an example to them as a language learner. Official communication in a foreign language increases inmates' motivation to learn the language of the country to which they will return upon release. This represents a rehabilitative measure, which is essential to consider in preparing foreign inmates for societal integration.

5. APPROACHES TO OVERCOMING LINGUISTIC BARRIERS: SUPPORTING RESOCIALISATION OF FOREIGN NATIONAL INMATES

Various studies identify that the challenge of communication with foreign national inmates is tackled diversely across nations, reflecting varied approaches and strategies in addressing linguistic barriers within correctional settings. These diverse approaches highlight the importance of considering cultural, legal, and resource-related factors when designing effective communication interventions in prisons worldwide. Language competence is important for interpersonal success, but, if compromised, it can further stigmatise and marginalise inmates in their interactions with prison officers and the justice system (Snow & Powell, 2004).

As one approach, bilingual inmates are engaged to assist foreign national inmates in overcoming language barriers, thereby facilitating quicker adaptation to the prison environment. The Foreign National Orderlies programme represents a formally organised, peer-based intervention developed for foreign national prisoners in England and Wales. Within this program, trained and paid prisoners undertake the responsibility of facilitating the cultural and linguistic assimilation of foreign nationals. Their duties encompass identifying various needs (such as psychological issues and language impediments), conducting visits, providing information, and, when required, directing these individuals to appropriate prison staff. Additionally, they are tasked with compiling lists of other prisoners willing to act as interpreters, thereby supporting communication and integration efforts (Bhui, 2004; Martínez-Gómez 2014; Croux, 2023b). Peer support can occur informally, without official support or structured organization (Brosens, 2019; Jaffe, 2012). Furthermore, during involvement in prison activities, peers share information (Martynowicz, 2016) and motivate foreign nationals to take part (Croux et al., 2019). Additionally, inmates assist each other by acting as interpreters to overcome language barriers (Martínez-Gómez, 2014). Sometimes, they even acquire languages from each other through mutual learning (Croux et al. 2019).

As one option, foreign national inmates are provided with language training in either the official

language of the country of imprisonment or another widely used language (Dubile et al., 2014; Hales 2015; Gallez, 2018). Improving access to English language education in the criminal justice system plays an important part in supporting those who speak English as a second language over the long term. This should include making language education a standard element of rehabilitation in the community (Hunter et al., 2022). Both approaches enhance their adaptation to the prison environment and facilitate better reintegration upon release.

Another opportunity for providing linguistic support to foreign inmates is through the assistance of officials who are bilingual (Gallez, 2018) or fluent speakers of other languages. Greater ethnic and linguistic diversity of staff in the criminal justice system helps strengthen service capacities for accommodating language needs (Hunter et al., 2022). Prison officials who have undergone specific foreign language training can ensure effective communication and comprehension, promoting a more equitable and accessible prison environment for foreign inmates (Luige, 2019).

The results of a study on eliminating language barriers in European prisons revealed that most of the participants were willing to learn a foreign language (70–80%) and had internet access (65–90%). The vast majority (over 90%) believed that learning a foreign language would facilitate their work. Considering the professional and personal interests of the participants, the preferred languages were in the order of Russian, Spanish, Turkish, Polish and Greek (Barkan, et al. 2011).

Such support mechanisms are essential for overcoming language barriers and safeguarding the rights of foreign national inmates. Crucially, these strategies facilitate their successful transition back into society and foster self-sufficiency. In Estonian correctional facilities, peer-based interventions are currently absent. However, the development and implementation of a support structure to address inmates' rehabilitative needs through peer interactions is worth consideration. The Estonian Prison Service enables foreign national inmates to learn the official language through Estonian language training provided within the prison environment. Additionally, professional training in English and Russian is a mandatory component of the correctional curriculum. The two-pronged approach equips foreign inmates with essential communication skills and facilitates their seamless integration into society.

6. METHODOLOGY

In this study, a qualitative research method was employed to develop a comprehensive picture of the issue under investigation. This method is appropriate as it allows for the collection of data in the field, where participants experience the issue and share their ideas freely (Creswell & Creswell 2018). A survey was conducted, where the formation of the purposive sample was based on the principle that constructing the sample requires identifying information-rich cases and selecting respondents (Patton 1990). Information richness and the researcher's interviewing and analysis skills are more important than the number of respondents (Patton, 1990; Marshall, 1996). Researchers select respondents based on their knowledge, experience, and expertise regarding the phenomenon under study to ensure that the most typical representatives of the population are included. These respondents must meet specific criteria and have experience in the particular field (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018).

The sample of the study was based on specific criteria: experience working in a prison, being a student of specialty of correction, and having completed the internship. Respondents were second and third-year students of the Prison Service College of the EASS (n = 13), who had varying experience in working with foreign national inmates and had completed their internship.

An electronic questionnaire with open-ended questions served as the primary data collection tool, allowing respondents to provide detailed and informative responses (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). The survey provided an opportunity for the respondents to specify and express their perceptions and understanding of the importance of foreign language proficiency in correctional environments as a key competence in the rehabilitation of foreign national inmates. The questions outlined the objective of the study to delve into learners' perceptions of the importance of foreign language proficiency in the work of a case manager within a prison environment. The questionnaire included seven open-ended questions designed to obtain a more or less objective picture of how learners perceive the importance of foreign

language proficiency. The study was conducted from 2022 to 2023.

Study Questions

1. What foreign languages does the case manager use when communicating with foreign inmates?
2. Is foreign language proficiency important in the work of the case manager? Why?
3. In which work situations is foreign language proficiency necessary?
4. How do you feel after communicating with foreign inmates in a language they understand?
5. How does the behaviour of inmates change when you speak to them in a language they understand?
6. Is it necessary to communicate with foreign inmates in a language they understand? Why?
7. What efforts should be done to improve proficiency in professional foreign languages?

Before conducting the survey, participants were briefed on the content and purpose of the study, as well as the ethical requirements, which are based on the principles of voluntariness and confidentiality. These ethical requirements include obtaining consent and ensuring informed participation. The data analysis method used was qualitative content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon 2005). The collected and analysed dataset enabled making qualitative generalisations and conclusions about the studied issue.

7. RESULTS

The aim of this article is to outline students' perspectives, specifically future case managers experienced in reintegrating foreign national inmates into society, regarding the importance of foreign language proficiency in the role of a case manager. The findings are structured in alignment with the research questions, facilitating the attainment of the study's objective. Identified issues relevant to the foreign language proficiency of case managers in communication with foreigners were categorised into three main themes: (a) the significance and communication needs of foreign language proficiency in the work of case managers, (b) the impact of communication on interactions with foreign national inmates, and (c) the importance of multilingual communication and language enhancement approaches in correctional facilities.

a. Significance and communication needs of foreign language proficiency in the work of case managers

All participants in the study emphasised that case managers predominantly utilise the Russian language in their interactions with foreign inmates, reflecting the linguistic landscape of the correctional environment. However, they also noted occasional instances where communication in English is necessary, particularly with younger inmates. Additionally, while less common, case managers pointed out the need for proficiency in languages such as Finnish, Ukrainian, German, and Italian to accommodate the diverse linguistic backgrounds of the population they serve.

In addition to the national language, various foreign languages can be heard in Estonian prisons. People come from diverse backgrounds, and their native languages differ significantly from our national language. For instance, Italian, German, Romanian, Bulgarian, Ukrainian, English, and Russian are languages commonly encountered in Estonian prisons. English is the most widely used language globally and speaking it with foreign inmates is often necessary. However, in Estonian prisons, there is a greater need for the Russian language due to the presence of an aggressor country Russia as our neighbour. A significant percentage of the population in Estonia consists of Russians. Therefore, besides the official language, the Russian language can also be heard in Estonian prisons. Consequently, the most essential language for communication with inmates is Russian. (R12)

In my future work, I will mostly need to use the Russian language, although occasionally English may also be beneficial, especially with younger inmates. As case management entails various responsibilities, language proficiency is undoubtedly necessary. It helps in understanding inmates and genuinely assisting them, which is the primary goal of the work I aspire to do. (R5)

Discussing the role of foreign language in a case manager's work, respondents highlighted the importance of foreign language skills in gathering information and ensuring the well-being of foreign inmates. They stressed that understanding cultural characteristics and nuances in the Russian-speaking context can facilitate the establishment of trust with inmates and enhance comprehension of their needs. Linguistic proficiency of officers was seen to elevate their authority and garner respect among foreign national prisoners. Proficiency in a foreign language was noted to facilitate the building trust with inmates and smoother interactions, thereby preventing communication misunderstandings. Respondents also pointed out that foreign language proficiency aids in resolving conflicts and understanding inter-inmate conversations, helping to maintain order and prevent conflict situations. They perceived that foreign language proficiency ensures prison officers a comprehensive understanding of the subjects discussed among foreign inmates, which enables to prevent disorders. Additionally, it helps avoid manipulation risk.

Proficiency in the Russian language greatly assists me in my work, and I sincerely wish to master it at a high level to simplify my job and enhance my assertiveness. Additionally, knowledge of the Russian language is beneficial when people speak behind your back, assuming you do not understand; however, in reality, you comprehend and can respond appropriately. (R4)

Participants identified various work situations where foreign language skills were essential. These included addressing daily issues such as physical and mental health concerns, conducting risk assessments, introducing resocialisation activities, and facilitating motivational interviews. Additionally, foreign language proficiency was deemed valuable for explaining documents and ensuring that inmates understand their rights in this context.

b. Impact of communication on interactions with foreign national inmates

According to the responses, participants outlined the positive emotional and behavioural effects experienced after effectively communicating with foreign inmates in a language they understand. Respondents pointed out feelings of satisfaction, pride, and accomplishment after successfully communicating with foreign inmates in their language. They described feeling more relaxed and confident, as well as experiencing a sense of fulfilment in fulfilling their role in the resocialisation process. Additionally, participants noted expressions of gratitude from the inmates for making the effort to communicate with them.

Some respondents expressed concerns about their ability to perform their job effectively when faced with language barriers. Sometimes case managers felt insecure and worried about whether the official messages would be comprehended by the inmates they were communicating with. According to the participants' responses, this uncertainty leads to feelings of embarrassment due to inadequate language proficiency, as foreign inmates may perceive the case manager as susceptible to manipulation or harassment. Participants pointed out experiencing unpleasant emotions and discomfort due to their insufficient proficiency in the Russian language. This discomfort was compounded by a sense of guilt for not being proficient enough. The lack of foreign language vocabulary evoked frustration among respondents, as they struggled to convey themselves effectively. This frustration was exacerbated by a perceived restriction imposed by the language barrier, hindering communication and mutual understanding. Participants faced challenges in explaining certain concepts or obtaining necessary information due to language barriers. This resulted in frustration and hindered their ability to perform their duties efficiently. There was a prevalent fear among respondents of making mistakes in their communication due to language limitations, further contributing to their discomfort and unease.

In situations where I am unable to express my thoughts in the Russian language, I feel uncomfortable and somewhat guilty for not knowing the Russian language well. Later, I reflect and realize that I should not feel guilty, rather the inmate who does not know the Estonian language should. When I speak to an inmate in my imperfect Russian language, the inmate is generally calm, listens, and sometimes even corrects me. They become more accommodating and even try to say words in the Estonian language. Once, when I could not remember a word in the Russian language, the inmate told me to say it in Estonian instead. When communicating in a foreign language, people are more open and tend to express themselves more freely. (R7)

Respondents emphasised that when communicated with in their language, inmates exhibited increased cooperation, friendliness, and trust towards the case managers. They felt understood and appreciated, leading to a more positive attitude and willingness to engage in conversation. Inmates became calmer, more open, and willing to discuss details of their situations. Moreover, they demonstrated respect and appreciation for the case managers' language efforts, often attempting to speak Estonian themselves.

Certainly, inmates' behaviour and mood changes when approached in the Russian language, even if it is not spoken perfectly; they feel that you genuinely want them to understand you. Some may argue that inmates need us more than we need them – that if they want something, they should try to speak in the Estonian language. However, I still want to master Russian myself because the work of a case manager should be based on mutual cooperation, as our job is to assist and reintegrate them into society. Moreover, it would not be a problem to figure something out together, using both the Estonian and Russian languages. (R18)

Participants pointed out situations where failure to successfully communicate with inmates in their language, they become somewhat angry and disengage from communication. There are also individuals who are obstinate and refuse to speak the national language under any circumstances – even when they are proficient – and demand word-for-word translation during document presentations.

c. Importance of multilingual communication and language enhancement approaches in correctional facilities

Some respondents emphasised the importance of communicating with inmates in a language they understand. They argued that doing so enhances authority in the eyes of the inmate, facilitates the provision of information, and helps establish rapport and prevent conflict situations. Others expressed concerns about communicating exclusively in the inmate's language, fearing that it may discourage them from learning the official language of the country where they are serving their sentence. They suggested using translation services when necessary. However, the majority of respondents advocated for bilingual communication, specifically in Estonian and Russian. They believed that this approach motivates inmates to learn the official language of the country. Additionally, they stressed the importance of inmates acquiring language skills to successfully reintegrate into society upon release.

When establishing a new contact, it is always crucial to understand whether the inmate communicates and comprehends solely in the Russian language out of principle or genuinely does not know another language. Therefore, it is important to initially make a few concessions and determine what kind of linguistic communicator you are dealing with during the contact creation process. Showing that you are willing to accommodate, if the person genuinely needs it, generally sets a positive example. This approach has generally provided me with good feedback: when people see that I am trying to understand their language, they often reciprocate, and our conversations have been linguistically comprehensible thereafter, regardless of whether we use one language, or the other, or a mix. (R1)

Participants also highlighted the significance of regular and consistent language learning efforts. They emphasised the value of dedicating time each day to language practice, whether through self-study or formal instruction. Many respondents underscored the benefits of practicing language skills in correctional environments. They suggested seeking opportunities to use foreign languages in work-related tasks and interactions to reinforce learning and improve proficiency.

To better learn the Russian language or any other foreign language, one must be in a foreign language environment or practice the language regularly. Sitting in a classroom does not expose you to real-life situations. Being in a language environment makes people more at ease. When speaking Russian in the prison, the vocabulary is quite repetitive, and if you introduce documents to inmates in the Russian language many times over, the vocabulary starts to repeat and stick. (R8)

Self-directed learning was deemed essential for language improvement. Participants pointed out the importance of learning at one's own pace using appropriate materials and methods. They recommended incorporating a variety of resources, such as textbooks, online courses, and language exchange programs. Building confidence in communication was identified as a critical factor in language improvement. Respondents suggested engaging in conversations with native speakers, participating in

language clubs or discussion groups, and taking on challenging speaking tasks to enhance confidence levels. Understanding the cultural context associated with the language was considered essential for language proficiency. Participants stressed the importance of immersing oneself in the culture of the target language to gain a deeper understanding of its nuances and improve communication effectiveness.

8. DISCUSSION

This study examined students' perceptions of the importance of foreign language proficiency for case managers in fulfilling their professional responsibilities.

The study findings underscore the critical role of foreign language proficiency for case managers in prison environments. It enables them to navigate diverse work situations, communicate effectively with foreign inmates, and ensure the smooth functioning of the prison environment. The results of the study align with previous research, indicating that language barriers present significant disadvantages to individuals (Aliverti, 2017). Linguistic exclusion not only intensifies other hardships of imprisonment but also presents a unique and separate challenge for foreign nationals (Kox et al., 2014; Martynowicz, 2018). The study revealed that proficiency in a foreign language helps case managers understand the cultural context of foreign inmates, thereby enhancing comprehension of their needs. Inmates perceive the interpretability of officers' behaviour as cultural differences rather than mere communication issues (Edgar & Martin, 2004). Language proficiency enables the reduction of misunderstandings stemming from cultural differences and provides the opportunity to understand communication among foreign inmates, which is a crucial aspect from the perspective of ensuring order in correctional facilities.

Indeed, the study findings highlight the beneficial emotional impact of communicating with foreign inmates in their language on both case managers and inmates. This form of communication enhances mutual understanding, cooperation, and trust, ultimately contributing to a more positive and productive prison environment. Communicating with inmates in a language they do not comprehend complicates the establishment of a positive atmosphere, leading to stress and anxiety for both parties due to the fear of being misunderstood (Iversen et al., 2013).

Prison officers, crucial figures within the criminal justice system, have the potential to significantly impact prisoner rehabilitation efforts through their daily interactions with inmates, understanding of personal circumstances, advocacy, and development of close working relationships (House of Commons Justice Committee, 2009). Study participants highlighted that case managers feel they are fulfilling their role comprehensively in the resocialisation process of foreign inmates when communicating with them in their own language.

The study findings underscore the significant impact of language barriers on job performance, emotional well-being, and overall experience among participants in cross-cultural communication settings. Participants asserted that in situations where they could not convey the message, they experienced unpleasant emotions and frustration due to inadequate language skills, which affected their job satisfaction. Other studies also indicate that the restricted possibilities for engaging in rehabilitation activities lead prison officers to face challenges in finding purpose and satisfaction in their work (Brouwer, 2020).

Assisting prisoners in readjusting to civilian life is often regarded as a significant aspect contributing to the job satisfaction of correctional officers (Molleman & van Ginneken, 2013). Participants in the study noted that when communicating with inmates in their language, the latter felt understood, demonstrated respect, and attempted to speak with the case manager in the national language. In situations where communication occurred in the national language that the inmates did not understand, they became angry and aggressive. This is consistent with previous research findings. Communication problems may force prisoners to repeat their message, or express it loudly. This can be misunderstood as anger or aggression, and lead to frustration or aggressive violence (Berger, 2001).

The findings show that effective communication with foreign inmates in a language they understand is crucial for fostering positive relationships and preventing conflicts in prison environment. Communicating with foreign inmates in a language they understand provides mutual trust and

understanding, which are essential for effective resocialisation. However, concerns were raised that communicating with inmates in their native language reduces their motivation to learn the language of the country where they are serving the sentence. This creates certain difficulties for inmates in managing their life independently upon release.

Generally, the majority of the study participants support bilingual communication, involving communication in both the official language and the inmate's native language. Initiating communication between the staff and inmates in the prisoner's native language may enhance their rehabilitation, boost their motivation to learn the language of the host country, and foster interest in adaptation and integration (Barkan et al., 2011).

The study findings also underscore the multifaceted nature of language learning and highlight the importance of adopting a holistic approach. Strategies such as regular practice, practical application in professional environment, independent learning, and cultural immersion are all integral to improving proficiency in professional foreign languages.

9. CONCLUSIONS

This study emphasizes the pivotal role of foreign language proficiency for case managers in Estonian correctional facilities, highlighting its significance in facilitating effective communication with foreign inmates. The findings reveal that language skills not only help case managers understand and meet the cultural and communicational needs of inmates but also contribute to the overall safety and order of prison environments. Effective communication fosters mutual respect, understanding, and cooperation, thereby supporting inmate rehabilitation and easing their reintegration into society. The research further suggests that bilingual communication strategies enhance both the staff's job satisfaction and the inmates' compliance and adaptation, underscoring the profound impact of linguistic competence on the effectiveness of correctional management and rehabilitation processes. Case managers' foreign language proficiency is a key competence in the rehabilitation process of foreign inmates. Effective communication enables prison officials to aid foreign inmates in recognizing the need for changes in their lives and supports them in the planning and execution of these changes. This interaction fosters a shift in inmates' perspectives, ultimately encouraging a law-abiding lifestyle upon release.

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