Enhancing Police Training: A Literature Review of Best Practices and Innovations

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ABSTRACT

This literature review explored best practices and advancements in police training to enhance the effectiveness of law enforcement agencies. It viewed police training as a professional development process within organizations, differentiating between initial and ongoing training, both essential for providing officers with necessary skills. The philosophy behind police training emphasizes developing critical thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making abilities. Effective professional training is crucial for organisational success, fostering excellence, accountability, and public trust. A comprehensive literature search was conducted using various databases and resources, including library databases (Criminal Justice Abstracts, PsychINFO, and PubMed), Google Scholar, library search tools, professional journals, and government reports. The review examined the training process, including needs assessment, program design, and implementation. Successful training methods incorporated adult learning strategies, scenario-based exercises, and ongoing evaluation. By synthesizing current research, this study provides valuable insights for policymakers, trainers, and law enforcement agencies seeking to improve training programs and officer performance.

Keywords: Police training, professional development, best practices, innovations, law enforcement.

INTRODUCTION

Most people believe that education in policing is not necessary since they describe policing as a craft or trade which should only utilise on-the-job training (Steineider et al, 2012). Some scholars have criticised this thinking and consider policing as equally important as any other profession. They argued that any profession requires continuous learning, training, and education; as such, Bradley (2009a) encouraged deep learning, which can equip learners for the exigencies and uncertainties of police work in the 21st century. In recent years, professionalism has become a critical discourse (Martin and Wooff, 2020) for the development of police. In fact, formal higher education which can only be done through off-the-job training, is now a norm within police organisations across the world in response to the demands of 21st-century policing. The selection of pedagogy should be considered critical in the development of any profession for better outcomes. The changing nature of policing and the complexity of police work is becoming an integral part of police studies discourse (Gordner and Shain, 2011; Ramshaw and Soppitt, 2018). Under normal circumstances, having a higher education qualification and continuous training in a profession of policing should translate to a more significant impact on police officers' knowledge and appreciation of people's values (Paterson, 2016; Brown, 2018). For this reason, professional academic education programmes should be seen as a vital tool for the development of police (Christopher, 2015).

Conceptualising Training in the police

Considering the permanent and unavoidable changes in the immediate environment of police organisations, training is the only way police can learn new skills and practices that can allow the smooth adoption of the new practices to fit the new environments in which police operate. However, the achievement of success in police training will depend on several factors that help the knowledge and skills to perform a specific activity be acquired (Reid, 1996).

Training is a broad concept that many authors have attempted to define. Adarkwa (2001) tried to sum it up when he referred to training as a total of all planned activities that aim to fulfil the challenges in the individual or group of employees concerning their knowledge and skills in an attempt to fit in a changed environment. De Silva (1997) noted that training is meant to transfer information and knowledge from the source (trainer) to the trainees (employees). It is worth noting that training should be considered along with the organisation's education polices and systems meant for human development. It is therefore, from this point, that every police organisation should have a well-defined, structured training curriculum (Mensah 2018). More importantly, consideration should be on the pedagogy that would be used in the process of training and learning.

Employee training is necessary when there is a noted deficiency in performance. Training can therefore be termed as an ongoing process to help employees perform a particular work much better from the day they start working. Donnelly Dalal-Clayton, and Hughes (1998) refer to training as a process designed to improve employees' skills and competencies to do a certain job. Being referred to a process, effective training is supposed to follow a well-defined criterion, and with the support of the right pedagogical.

The Process of Professional Training Within Organisations

Training in organizations is not a single event but a process that takes some steps as described below.

Defining professional training and its phases

Borrowing the words of Noe (2017), she defined professional training as a planned learning experience designed to equip employees with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to perform their jobs effectively. Emilia (1999:162) was more focused on sustainability when he defined it as "a learning/instructive process by which employees acquire theoretical and practical knowledge, new abilities or techniques that improve the efficiency level of their performance". Terms such as vocational training and professional development sometimes come to replace professional training. However, Chisu (2002:354) to differentiate the two terms has the following to say, "Personnel vocational training consists of the sum of the actions used by employees to acquire within an organised setup an array of knowledge, skills, certain manners and behaviours that are required for several specific tasks for the company and professional development is said to consists of several actions by which employees, who followed certain programs hold in the company, improve their skills, knowledge, aptitudes, manners, behaviours and working techniques for which they are already qualified, all to achieve a superior level of their goals and tasks". Chisu (2002) definition of training splits the lengthy process of professional training into two phases of (a) initial training and (b) continuous training.

Initial training

This is what Chisu (2002) referred to as Vocational training. According to Rosea and Varzaru (2005), the purpose of this training is to assist new employees in obtaining the qualification that would give them the possibility of practising a job or taking up some positions in the organisation. Under police, this involves the basic training given to the new police recruits. Initial training in police is when recruits get into the process of acquiring the necessary skills and instilling the appropriate behaviour needed for police work.

Continuous training

Chisu (2002) referred to this phase as Professional development. This is a training which is offered to the already employees of an organisation who have taken up certain positions in the structure of the organisation. This phase

of training consists of engaging in various skill improvements/specialisation courses. Police organisations have seen this being undertaken in various police academies, including Regional updating centres and seminars. The main purpose of this phase is enrichment and consolidation of the already acquired basic knowledge and of the work habits from the initial training (vocational training).

The philosophy of Police training

Organisations around the world initiate training programmes for several different reasons, as noted by Currie (2004). However, the chief among the motives is the need to respond to challenges created by the changes in different environments of the organisation which include technology, social, economic, legal and political. As the changes occur in all or any of the environments, organisations need to adapt and this can be through equipping and advancing the knowledge, skills and capabilities of the employees through training. The entry into police training starts with the administrative process of selecting the police recruits. According to Alder (1996), Machold and Fishell (2005), Wang, Shan and Piel (2005), human resources department is responsible for the processes of recruiting and selecting of applicants to be trained as police officers. This process is a very important pre-requisite stage into the police professional process. Reid (1996) recommended a classroom training of newly recruited police officers for a reasonable period, which according to her recommendation, should not be less than four months. Further to the initial classroom training, she suggested that police officers should be exposed to in-service (on the job/attachment) training which would also act as incentives to encourage and motivate fully serving officers as they pursue higher education in policing.

Following Currier's (2004) observation, the training of police officers, especially in developing countries, is done in preparation to react to current socio-economic trends in the economy. These changes usually have an effect of increasing the crime rate and new modus operandi. It has been noted that police institutions can only enhance the capabilities of police personnel if it invests in police professional training. This is the only way in which the police service can gain new skills and knowledge that would respond to the new policing environments. The importance of the process of training is to have the right and appropriate pedagogical skills, which would make it easier to transfer the skills to the job. Cox (1996) noted that high performance in police requires that personnel are well selected for the job, well trained with the right type and level of education.

## Importance of professional training in an organisation

For any organisation to remain competitive, it should ensure that the level of the services or products provided needs to be maintained at least at a satisfactory level or even more. It has been proven that employees' professional training is an important activity that needs to be taken and supported at the managerial level of an organisation. Professional training has the effect of improving organisational employees, and more so, it assists employees to readjust to the permanent changes that are unavoidable in certain adjacent environments to that organisation

Although State Police Organisations are non-profit making, the services they provide to the citizens should be continuously improved to maintain a satisfactory level and remain competitive in terms of the services provided. This has therefore made police managers to gain more interest in permanently providing education and training to their organisations' personnel. When well implemented, the education and training ensure a proper execution of professional tasks ending with higher-level performance. This is supported by the words of Kratcoski and Das (2007:4) when they said,

"Education was viewed as developing the ability to conceptualise and expand the theoretical and analytic learning process, while training involved gaining the skills needed to accomplish the immediate tasks and goals of police operations".

According to the above explanation, the goals of the organisation are easily accomplished if the education and training is effective.

Figure 1: Training and its components
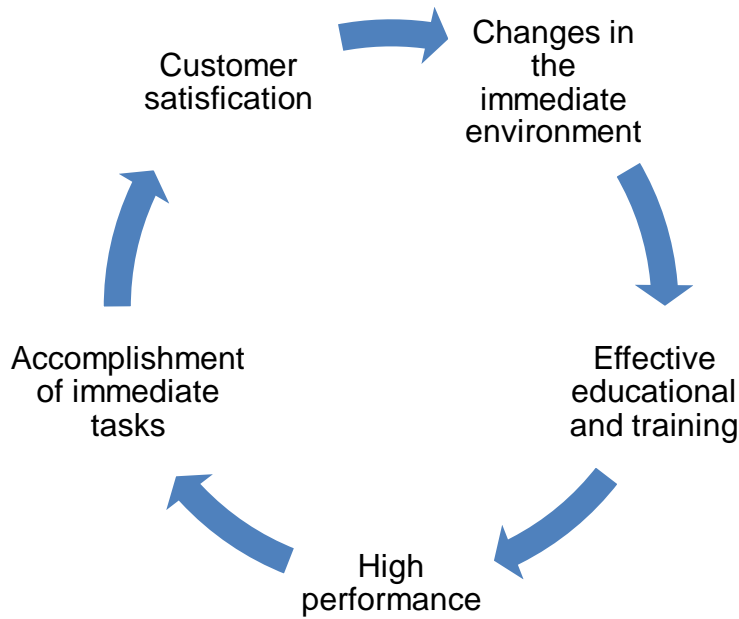
Source: author (2025)

Education and training are shown as independent variables in the equation of organisational performance. The concentration of the police managers should be on the determination of the most effective and efficient strategies in terms of implementation of training programmes for the organisation's personnel (Udrea, 2014). Professional training can be improved by redefining it from a pedagogical and organisational point of view.

The process of professional training

Professional training is not done haphazardly; instead, it is a vigorous approach which follows some stages. In fact, it is a system which consists of a detailed planning that is stage-oriented and all these are meant to ensure an efficient implementation of training.

Figure 2: Cyclic approach of training program

Source: Panisoara and Panisoara (2010)

Although there might be several approaches to explain the stages involved in professional training programmes, the cyclic approach by Panisoara and Panisoara (2010) is the commonly used approach to summarise the phases. As per fig 2 above, this approach consists of four stages:

Analysis and identification of training needs

Training can be costly to an organisation if done unnecessarily. It should be not done for the sake of doing it, instead, It is should be only done when there is a need to do so for the benefit of the whole organisation. Sanduri (2022), defined training need as "an identified gap between actual performance and desired performance or between current abilities and job requirements that can be closed by initiating training of personnel. Putting it in mathematically, Training need (gap) = desired performance – (minus) actual performance. Training is necessary only when the desired is greater than the actual and the amount of the gap determine the urgency of training.

This gap or difference is usual caused or extended by the increasing changes in either external or internal environment. Analysis and identification of training needs can be done using various or combination of methods and techniques which include questionnaires, employee interviews, SWOT and PESTEL analysis, error diagrams, assessment reports and many more. Panisoara and Panisoara (2010) picked that the analysis and identification of training needs can be done at an organisational level where the need is compared with the availability of resources to sustain the training program, at departmental level where department targets are set and finally at individual level where individuals with training needs are identified and their suitable methods are matched. The identification of the training needs will trigger the designing of suitable training programme which should address and close the gap identified.

Designing the training programme

This stage is concerned about setting of targets (objectives), training programme content, methods and means. In coming up with the programme targets, the objective is to close the gap between the actual performance and desired performance. It is however, encouraged to set SMART targets after taking into consideration other factors such as availability of resources. The training content should be adequate to address the need identified. The content delivered should make the trainee perform as desired. This stage should also layout the methodology and means of delivering the content to the trainees. The method chosen should promote effective communication to encourage sustainability of the programme.

Implementation of the training program

This is the actual training of the learners. The training method of the programme can be either on-the job or off-the job as recommended by Emilia, State and Tuclea. Of course, the method would depend on other factors including the resources, the significance of the need, time involved and others.

Result assessment and trainee support

According to the professional training programme by Panisoara and Panisoara (2010), this stage sounds to be the final phase of the programme. However, this can be formed prior, during or after the programme implementation. This stage involves the evaluation of the program. It can be done in a several ways such as getting trainees' reaction, observing the behaviour change at work or monitoring the productivity levels including quality to see if they are satisfactory (Kumer, 2011). As initially stated, the training programme can be assessed at organisation or members' level. For organisation, the benefit can be on the improvement of the services/products it provides using the acquired experience at work. It is also observed that members (trainees) can benefit from the training by increase on the level of satisfaction or an increase in the chances of being promoted

Professional training in the police system

Although professional training can be cut across any type of organisation/sector, however, police organisations are specialised institutions of the State which require special attention in terms of its training programmes. The speciality of police is deduced from their special tasks such as defending fundamental rights and liberties of the

citizens, defending private and public property, crime prevention, detection and management more so, ensuring public law and order. State police is therefore, focused on engaging into actions in the interest of all citizens and community. The existence of any police is on supporting the institutions' operations by enforcing the country's legal framework. It is not in dispute that for police to achieve these above stated aims, its personnel need a proper and effective professional training which is aimed at acquiring specialised notions in theory and practice as well as a set of skills that essential for fulfilling work tasks.

Initial/Vocational training of the police personnel

Anyone who joins police would have to go through a police selection process which consists of recruiting candidates who satisfy/meet pre-determined conditions related to physical and mental health and more so, candidates should pass several assessment tests about theoretical knowledge and physical skills. Regions and countries might have different professional criteria, but of importance is for the recruiting candidates to satisfy the requirements as demanded by the organisation (Kratcoski and Das, 2007).

All the successful police candidates are then enrolled into police academy for initial police professional training where they are equipped with basic police skills. The training period may differ country by country but the contemporary police academies around the world consider for at least one year inclusive of theoretical and practical training (Kratcoski and Das, 2007). Despite the differences on the training periods among the States, however, the studies have established that curricula of the basic police training courses are similar especially as they include an overview of the types of information and skills any police officers would have to perform effectively.

Professional development or continuous training of police personnel.

By definition this is a training given to people already in the positions within the police organisation. Unlike in the initial training, this type of training in police system aims at consolidating specialised knowledge of the police offer. The initial training equip police recruits with general knowledge on the police. However, the professional development as a second phase of training in the police system expand this general knowledge as well as maintaining police officers' skills and their specific work abilities at a high level. Baker (2011) noted that professional development has the effect of increasing employees as they engage in solving specific missions. Sometimes the professional development training is decentralised in police units. In some cases, there might be specialised police education institutions mandated for continuous training of personnel. Effective training offers various aspects such development, specialisation, management and career advancement courses (Kratcoski and Das, 2007).

Kratcoski and Das (2007) noted that professional development training aims at both theoretical and practical aspects. The theoretical aspect enables trainees to assimilate useful professional knowledge while the other part concentrate on practising the tactical police techniques, the skills on how to use police weapons and the physical qualities.

In most countries where professional development training has been delegated to departments, didactical strategies in use involves training methods such as lectures, debates, role-play, discussion and case studies, activities for individuals and group study and employing digital or printed material. Programme planning/designing should consider that the trainees are adult individuals who had accumulated certain knowledge and experience from the initial training, they are now more of goal-oriented, and they are more practical and require respect (Knowles, 2011). This was also discovered by Nodde (2009) in his study that assessed the effectiveness of the andragogic methodology of training police officers when he noted that this approach (andragogical) brought better results as compared to other methods in acquiring aptitudes and skills. More so, trainees were found to prefer this method due to the emphasis on learning through experience and collaboration (Nodde, 2009).

Of course, there are some positives associated with traditional method/model of teaching and learning, however, this method has been criticised for being linear, prescriptive and autocratic nature inhibits recruits and its overall efficacy. Androgogical which is the adult-oriented method, according to Nodde (2009 is viewed as more holistic,

integrative, collegial, collaborative and responsive approach to training. This method as noted by Haerfield, Clarke and Sheeban (2012) serves the needs and interests of the police recruits, the police organisation and the changing society. The importance is also on employing certain methods and means of teaching. Effective training also depends on the selecting of trainers that would be considered as qualified on the information conveyance.

Training Methods in Police Service

The success of any organisational training program is hinged on the training method used (Armstrong, 2001). There is therefore a need to do monitoring and evaluation on the training to check the extent to which it is achieving the desired results (objectives). Worth to note is that, no one method is adequate for all types of training. Some special approaches maybe more suitable for particular groups of trainees or training for special occupations. Armstrong (2001) noticed that different methods are suitable for such groups like graduates, students and technicians. Armstrong (2001) further categorised training into basic training, general training and specialised training.

Figure 3: Phases of police training (Armstrong 2001)
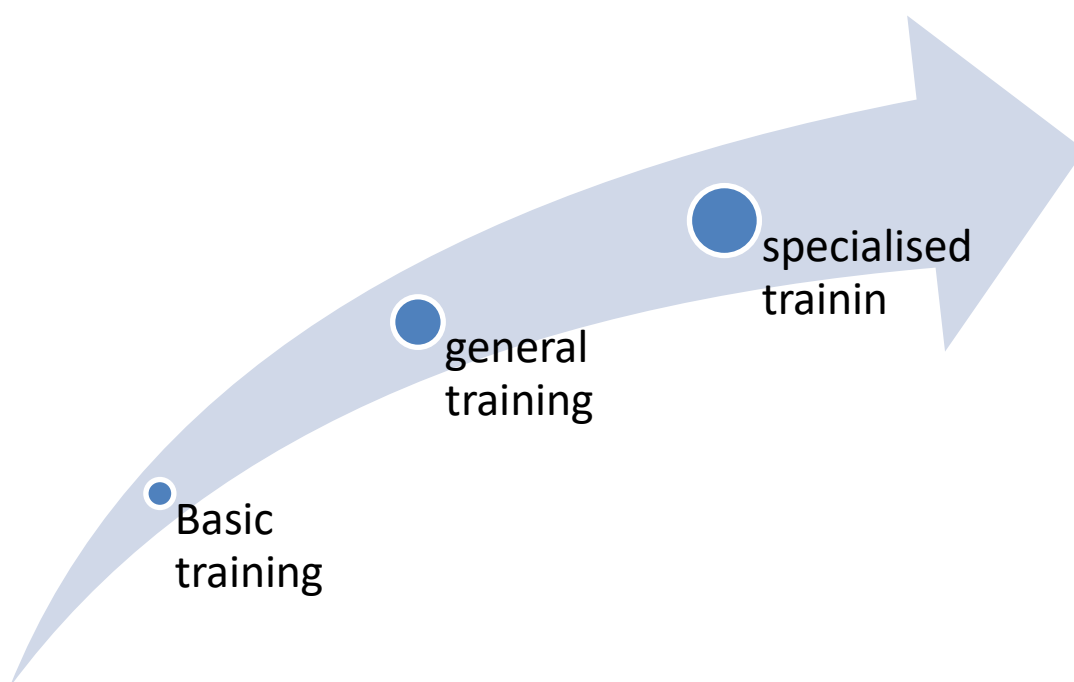
Basic training

According to Armstrong (2001), this is the entry training where trainees receive basic skills. Usually, such training consists of series of modules which are chosen on the basis of an analysis of the skills required. This is the standard of police where police trainees are taken through basic training. The aim of this training is to make trainees understand certain basic issues in the organisation to enable them to solve simple problems

General training

This is the second step (phase) where trainees given experience in a number of organisational processes or operations with the aim to consolidate the basic training. This is usually an on-the job training where new employees who have gone through basic training are rotated among different departments for them to gain experience.

Specialised training

When trainees have been moved around departments, they settle in the department or section of their choice and which they are best fitted in terms of their interests. This training becomes part of the professional development as it ensures that trainees are equipped to apply their learning in normal working conditions especially in these

specialised departments. Examples of such departments in police include traffic, investigations and Victim Friendly Unit. This training is meant to equip the trainees with requisite skills and capability to reach the level of quality expected from a fully experienced and competent individual.

After identifying the gap between the actual and desired performance in the chosen department, it is then the responsibility of the manager or Head of that department to decide the type of training employees need and even the form of training suitable for employees (Robbins, Coulter, and DeCenzo's 2020). Whatever the training chosen, the objective is to help participants in activities that will shape logic, reasoning, and skills. Robbins and Coulter (2002) advocated for on-the-job training due to its advantage of being simple to implement and being more expensive. Mensah (2019) supported this when he noted that these pedagogical practices, when thoroughly done, promote efficiency in police performance resulting from these police training practices, leading to the achievement of desired outcomes.

METHODOLOGY

This research primarily used theoretical (generalization, systematization) and sociological (observation, interviews) methods as its main research approaches. A comprehensive literature search was conducted using various databases and resources, including library databases (Criminal Justice Abstracts, PsychINFO, and PubMed), Google Scholar, library search tools, professional journals, and government reports. Relevant literature was selected based on its relevance to policing and criminology, and analyzed using content analysis to identify themes and patterns, as well as narrative analysis to examine the stories and experiences presented in the literature. Through this analysis, key findings and insights were extracted, providing a deeper understanding of the research topic and informing the development of evidence-based policing strategies.

CONCLUSION

The importance of training police officers cannot be overemphasized. However, it should be noted that factors such as physical fitness, scenario-based training, and ethical decision-making must be included when designing effective police training programs. Moreover, ethical considerations, community policing strategies, and de-escalation techniques should be central to the police training curriculum. It is also important to recognize that policing is rapidly changing in its dynamics, and there is a need to prepare the mindsets of those in the policing fraternity. By its nature, policing involves the enforcement of laws (national legislation), which means law enforcers should first be educated on the laws. Police training can benefit from andragogical methods such as problem-based learning, experiential learning, case study analysis, and simulation training, which encourage officers to develop practical solutions and skills through real-world scenario-based exercises. Using these methods, officers can improve their critical thinking, decision-making, and tactical skills and better prepare themselves for complex and dynamic real-world situations, such as crisis negotiations, tactical operations, or community policing scenarios. Future research should, therefore, focus on law education for police officers.

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