

A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY OF ADULT BASIC
EDUCATION IN KANSAS

by >214

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A MASTER'S REPORT

submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree

MASTER OF SCIENCE

College of Education

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

1971

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The writer wishes to express his gratitude to all those who have assisted in the preparation of this study.

A special appreciation is acknowledged to Dr. Albert B. Campbell, whose constant guidance, encouragement, and cooperation were vital in every stage of the study.

Further appreciation is extended to Dr. Robert Johnson and Dr. Harold Kittleson for their time, patience and counsel.

The writer also wants to extend his thanks to Dr. Robert Meisner, for his deep concern and sincere efforts in making the study in this country possible.

Finally, the writer is deeply grateful to his wife, Wiesje, and their two children, David and Brynjulv jr., for their many sacrifices and for their patience during this study.

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CHAPTER I

I. INTRODUCTION

Nearly half the world's adult population is illiterate. An awareness of the high illiteracy rate is reflected in the enormous efforts of organized education which is carried out to curb the steady increase. UNESCO estimates show that in 1970, of 2,335 million adults, 810 million were illiterate.¹

In the United States the goal to eradicate illiteracy has been one of highest concern, not only because of the financial burden which it causes, but because of the great loss of potential manpower to society. The great advancement of knowledge and rapid technological development demand that more and more adults undertake supplementary education. At the moment there is a great need for workers to be retrained in new skills. However, this creates a major problem because a great number of them are lacking elementary education.

According to the 1970 U.S. Census, there were over 5.7 million (5.3 percent) adults 25 years of age or older with less than five years of schooling.² Of these, 13 percent had completed the eighth grade. Nearly every state has enough illiterates or functional illiterates in its population to justify a program of adult basic education. Although Kansas ranks high on the national literacy scale, number 4 with 0.9 percent illiterates, there are

¹"What is UNESCO?", UNESCO Information Manuals, (8th ed.; Paris: UNESCO, 1970), p. 29.

²U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1970), p. 11. Series P-20, no. 207. Educational Attainment, March, 1970.

adequate potential ABE-students to make the programs necessary. According to the 1960 Census, of the group of persons 18 years and older, 163,000 never got past the eighth grade. This number does not include those who fall between the ages of 16 and 18, who are also eligible for participation. About 30 percent of the Kansas population has completed high school, but even so, there are 680,000 persons 18 years and older without high school diplomas. Eight thousand seventy-seven adults 25 years and older are reported as not having completed formal schooling. Although the rate of illiteracy in the United States has declined to the point where it is only one-twentieth of the level that prevailed one hundred years ago, and cut to half in just the past decade, the goal is to wipe it out completely.³

The U.S. Government recognized the great need for adult basic education in 1964 when the Economic Opportunity Act was passed by Congress. However, it was not until the Adult Education Act was passed in 1966 that organized adult basic education programs were established throughout the country. They were free for all adults with deficient educational background, over 18 years of age. This was later reduced to 16 years.

In 1967 the Kansas Plan for Adult Basic Education was formulated under the provision of the Adult Education Act of 1966, and was approved on June 7. This plan provides operational procedures for adult basic education programs to be conducted by the Kansas State Department of Health, Education and Welfare.

The primary purpose of the Kansas State Plan is to "effect the establishment of new local basic education programs and to extend and improve

³U.S. Census Report, op. cit., pp. 1-2. Series P-20, No. 217.

the existing ones. The ultimate purpose is to provide basic education for all adults who have not acquired the ability to read and write the English language, and do not possess basic computational skills with special emphasis on serving those in the economically handicapped categories." The plan also provides for continuous enrollment during the fiscal year in three levels of instruction according to the previous background of the new students. Students are allowed to progress according to their own rate of achievement and are free to select their own material in a given subject.⁴

The adult basic education programs also provide the opportunity for previous high school dropouts to fulfill their high school requirements through the General Educational Development Examination (G.E.D.). When the G.E.D. is passed, the State Superintendent of Public Instruction issues a Certificate of Academic Achievement. The Certificate is accepted in lieu of a high school diploma for entrance in most public-supported colleges and universities, as well as for seeking new employment. This aspect of the ABE-program has recently been in high demand, and a great number of G.E.D. Certificates are issued annually. In the fiscal year 1970, 1,387 Certificates were issued in Kansas. This number is expected to be higher in 1971.⁵

At present, there are 26 ABE-centers operating in Kansas in which 153 Kansas teachers are employed part-time. The largest ABE-center is located in Wichita, where nine programs have been in operation since 1965.

⁴Kansas Plan for Adult Basic Education, Kansas State Department of Education, Division of Adult Education, 1967, p. 7.

⁵Number of certificates determined in this study as reported in Chapter IV.

Of the programs that are already in operation, most of them cover predominantly the eastern and southeastern counties with a few scattered in the remaining part of the state.

One of the aims of this study is to explore the present situation to see how well the ABE-programs cover the various parts of the state where the less educated reside, and where the need for basic education is most urgent. Other aims are focused on the local programs. Descriptive research and implementation of the research findings will be presented. This will be further explained in the following section.

II. STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

This study was an attempt to describe the Adult Basic Education programs in Kansas. The objectives of the study were: 1. To determine how well the adult basic education programs cover the areas of the state in which most undereducated adults reside; 2. To describe the manner in which the programs are operated in order to meet the needs of the students; and 3. To describe some common characteristics of the administrators, and students of the programs.

III. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

During the relatively few years the Kansas Adult Basic Education programs have been in operation, no study has been conducted to evaluate the programs. This study intends to ascertain whether the Kansas Adult Basic Education programs meet the needs of the undereducated in the state as well as to describe the present programs and how they are operated.

The findings of the research project could be beneficial to the Kansas State Department of Education, Division of Adult Education, in

evaluating the various programs in the state. The Director of Adult Education in Kansas, Mr. W. W. Lee, expressed great interest in this study. He believed that the results of this study could be very beneficial for future planning of his department.

The study could also be very useful for later research of the Kansas ABE-programs. Information, including 35 independent variables, has been collected and recorded on data cards. These have been handed over to the Department of Adult and Occupational Education at Kansas State University, and are available there for further research.

The investigator has made some implications for the improvement of the Adult Basic Education programs in Kansas.

In the following chapter, the literature of related research is reviewed as well as the literature that was found pertinent to this study. In the subsequent chapter the design of the study will be presented and the research procedures explained. In Chapter IV an analysis of the data and research findings will be given, and in the last chapter, a summary, conclusions and some implications will be presented.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Since the adult basic education programs have been operating in the United States for a relatively short period of time, little research has been done. However, serious research has increased markedly in recent years. Of the research projects that have been conducted on ABE-programs, most of them have been focused on characteristics of students, dropouts, readability levels of instructional materials, and program financing.

The Adult Education Act of 1966 was passed to encourage and expand basic education so adults could overcome the handicaps of being under-educated. This act was amended in 1970 and is now the foundation of the adult basic education programs in the United States.

The Act is funded and administered through the U.S. Office of Education by the Commissioner of Education. An eight member advisory committee, appointed by the President, advises the Commissioner on regulations and policy matters. It provides that funds are allotted in the form of federal grants, and that this money is made available to the local public educational agencies on a proportional basis through the state departments of education. How funds are allocated to the respective states is determined by the ratio of persons over 16 who have not completed more than the fifth grade.¹ Certain requirements must be met by the respective states, however, in order to be disbursed of funds. A state plan must be drawn and submitted to the U.S. Office of Education for the operation of programs providing basic education for adults within the state.

¹The Adult Education Act of 1966, Public Law no. 91-230.

The Kansas State Plan for Adult Basic Education was approved on June 7, 1967, by the Governor of Kansas. In accordance with the Adult Education Act, the State Plan must set forth a program for use of the grants; provide for the administration at the state level; provide cooperative arrangements between the state educational agency and the state health agency; provide grants to public agencies for special training projects and research; provide for cooperation with other anti-poverty programs; provide for adequate reporting and record keeping; provide acceptable fiscal control and accounting procedures, and finally provide such further information and assurances as the Commissioner may require. The Kansas State Plan also provides that the State Superintendent of Public Instruction shall appoint a state advisory committee with members represented from throughout the state. The function of this committee is to advise the State Director and staff of the adult education program. It further requires that each local program provides a local advisory committee composed by members representing other adult education agencies in the community.

With respect to other state plans, Crabtree (1965) reported that there were many differences in these in the various state programs. He substantiated his statement by referring to the New Jersey State Plan which provides that federal money would not be distributed to the local school districts on a first-served basis, rather, each district is guaranteed \$2,000. The total amount will depend on the number of functional illiterates over 18 years of age residing in the district. The New York State Plan shows other significant features as it provides that about one-third of the federal funds should be spent to employ personnel for the recruitment of students on the local level. The curriculum, which he found to be very sound, provides for

four levels of instruction: 1. Basic (Grades 0-2), 2. Primary (Grades 3-4), 3. Intermediate (Grades 5-6) and 4. Upper (Grades 7-8). As each level of instruction provides for 200 hours of instruction, the plan assumes that a total of 800 hours of instruction will enable the absolute illiterate to reach the equivalent of an elementary education.

As adult basic education has developed, it is considered more than just teaching the basic skills of reading, writing and arithmetic. The curricula have become more specialized to lead the students from basic literacy to a variety of knowledge for improved citizenship.

The Handbook of Adult Education (1970) reports that the National Advisory Committee on Adult Basic Education has made seven recommendations for ABE through 1972. First of all it is recommended that ABE-programs should focus on priorities concerning civic participation, jobs, home and family life. Financial aid of \$100 per ABE-student should be appropriated for the fiscal years 1970, 1971 and 1972. Special attention should be paid to areas of urban crisis, and 20 million dollars in additional funds should be appropriated immediately. The committee recommended that a ten-year national plan should be developed for adult basic education, and \$250,000 should be allotted for this purpose. They recommended that immediate steps be taken to strengthen the National Advisory Committee on Adult Basic Education so it may provide the leadership needed for its function. An annual appropriation of \$200,000 should be authorized to support staff, services and preparation for the publication of an annual report. Training programs for teachers, administrators and counselors should be strengthened by increased funding. Financial support for special projects and experimentation should be continued, and finally, ABE-programs should be extended beyond the present eight-grade functional level through legislative action.

With regard to characteristics of ABE-students, Dutton (1967) found in his study of ABE-students in Florida that all undereducated students were very heterogeneous, and those with a high degree of alienation differed significantly from those who exhibited a lower level of alienation. They did participate in social activities, and they had marked social problems. However, they did not make use of formal agencies to help themselves. All adults with traits of deprivation, subordinate social status and limited education were not highly alienated. (Alienation is here defined as "a measure of an individual's feeling of powerlessness, normlessness and social isolation").

Recruiting new adult students to ABE-programs is of major concern for most programs, and is therefore an important aspect for the success of the respective programs. Dutton pointed out that ABE-students were informed about adult education classes from many sources. This implies that a variety of media and methods should be employed to inform people about ABE-classes. Especially relevant to this study is the emphasis on advisory committees as a means of recruiting new students. Cass and Crabtree (1956) emphasized the significance of advisory committees as one of the most effective methods or practices of locating and contacting adults for education. They recommended that the committee should be composed of individuals in the community who are interested in working on a "citizenship education activity and whose positions in town will enable them to better assist in expanding the program as well as locating and reaching the persons to be served."

Minnich (1967) reported that disadvantaged adults are often under tremendous outside pressure, and may find it impossible to adjust their time schedule to the ABE-program schedule. He went on by stating that these students are reluctant to seek literacy education primarily because of the

little relationship between their economic and social problems and the curriculum of the ABE-program.

One of the most serious problems in the ABE-programs is to keep students from dropping out. Kirk (1968) found in his study of ABE-programs in Missouri that one of the most pressing problems there was the retention of students who had enrolled in a program. Almost one-third dropped out before they had completed the grade in which they had enrolled.

Moss and Richardson (1967), in a study of dropouts, indicated that most dropouts were in their thirties, married, at low reading levels and out of class after less than 50 hours of instruction. The main reasons for dropping out were change of residence and instruction's interference with work responsibilities.

An investigation by Zahn (1964) attempted to determine whether the dropouts differed in academic ability and anxiety level from those who completed the course. The findings revealed that no significant differences existed in academic ability between students who dropped out and those who completed. However, there was sufficient evidence to show that students with low academic ability dropped out of credit classes more often than students with high academic ability. There was no difference in the anxiety scores made by students in credit and non-credit classes. It was concluded that the cause of dropping out appeared to be interaction between the ability and perhaps the motivation the student brought to the course and certain elements within the course, rather than the cause existing only within the student.

In his study of dropouts of ABE-programs in New Orleans, Hawkins (1968) found that predominantly personal circumstances caused withdrawal from the

adult evening school programs. Moreover, it was concluded that the "conscientious development of an awareness of realistic short and long range goals to serve as incentives for continued application is an essential factor in the structure of these programs." Also, there was need for smaller groupings, diversified programs and flexible schedules in these programs. He recommended that students should be involved in the evaluative process, ABE personnel should be engaged in inservice training, and that counseling services must be adopted.

The use of counselors is an essential ingredient in the ABE-program. Langdon (1967) emphasized the importance of counseling as a means of avoiding dropouts, and to help students who have already dropped out. Whether the counselor should be employed full time or part time may be debatable, but Mitchell in his report (1965) suggested that the counselor of ABE-programs should have a combined job as an administrator, a coordinator and a model teacher of adults. This would give the counselor a better understanding of the entire adult program.

Studies have also been conducted on readability levels of instructional materials. Carrol (1967) made a study of this in Indiana, and concluded that instructional material should be more adapted to adult students.

In an ABE seminar report at Kansas State University in 1969, Schowalter pointed out that the lack of research into the mathematical needs of adults is rather appalling. The material used in adult education was often designed for children and new mathematical material needed to concentrate on assisting the teacher in teaching mathematical concepts at a level both sensible and meaningful to adults.

Many of the research projects that have been carried out in adult basic education have been pilot projects. Teams of investigators have jointly

performed the tasks. Those projects are very comprehensive and could hardly have been carried out by a single person.

One such project was conducted in Missouri by Ferguson and others (1969). This was a survey of the ABE-programs from 1965-1969. The survey was divided into three phases: 1. Characteristics of local programs, 2. The operation of the state office, and 3. A follow-up study of dropouts. From the research findings pertinent to this study, it was concluded that there was an apparent need for some type of special training for counselors of ABE-students. The practice of having local programs contribute ten percent of the funds might limit the participation of some school districts where it would be desirable to hold ABE classes, and where no local funds were available. It also placed a limitation upon the possibility of a more efficient operation in some areas of the State, whereby one school district could be designed as an administrative unit and satellite programs established in surrounding areas. It was recommended that the concept of levels I, II and III should be abandoned for placement purposes. Since there was already an emphasis on individualized instruction, it appeared appropriate to place students according to where they were in each subject matter area.

The Community Junior Colleges are to a great extent administering the ABE-programs in the United States. In Kansas they account for about 50 percent of the present programs. Thornton (1966) points out in his book the significance of ABE-programs in the Community Junior College. An increasing number of community junior colleges are enabling adults to complete studies leading to a certificate of high school equivalency. Of more importance, in Thornton's opinion, is basic education in other areas which the community junior colleges offer. More and more adults undertake such education for the

sake of their own education without concern for evaluation of credit. To work with such people in basic areas of education is, in Thornton's words, "one of the most stimulating and rewarding experiences an instructor can have."

Of the most recent research on the educational level of Americans, conducted and made public by the U.S. Census Bureau (1970), it was reported that the level is rising and the gap between the races is narrowing as blacks increase their schooling faster than whites. People living in suburbs have generally more education than city dwellers. This report is based upon a study of civilian population 25 years and older in 30 metropolitan areas sampled in 1969. Of the total population, 59.6 percent had at least a high school diploma in 1969 compared with 56.8 percent in 1967. Among the whites in those two years, the number of high school graduates increased from 59.3 percent to 62.2 percent, and among non-whites, 42.1 percent had completed high school in 1969 compared with 38.7 in 1967. The Census Bureau study did not include small towns and rural areas. However, it shows a significant difference between cities and suburbs in the educational attainment of their residents. Almost two-thirds of the suburbanites sampled had completed high school in contrast to barely more than half of the city dwellers.

With respect to the Kansas ABE-programs, it was reported in the Adult Basic Education Program Statistics (1963-1969) that of the 2,357 ABE-participants in fiscal 1969, 37 percent were males and 63 percent were females. Nine hundred fifty students were white, 715 were black, 93 were American/Indian and 467 were Oriental. Two hundred eighty-eight students completed all levels that year while ten percent dropped out. The student/teacher ratio was 26:1.

In Kirk's study in Missouri (1968), he found that the population of 25 years and above, with less than an eighth grade education, composed 26.2 percent of the total population of the state. The average grade levels completed by adults in each county, ranged from an average of 7.5 to an average of 12.1 years.

Summary

The adult basic education programs in the United States are of fairly recent origin and even though little research has been done, a marked increase can be sensed. The Adult Education Act was passed in 1966 and is the cornerstone for the operation of ABE programs. This act provides that the allotments of funds to the state and local public educational agencies be provided on a proportional basis, and that a state plan for the operation of ABE be drawn before any funds will be disbursed.

The Kansas State Plan for ABE was approved in 1967. It provides that an adult education program must be established for use of the grants. State plans in ABE differ, however, in the various states. In New Jersey the distribution of federal grants is conducted on a first-served basis, while in New York about one-third of the federal funds is spent on recruitment of students.

The National Advisory Committee on Adult Basic Education has made seven recommendations for ABE through 1972 with special attention to funding in order to strengthen the entire program.

With regard to ABE students, it has been found that they are very heterogeneous, and all adults with traits of deprivation are not highly alienated. However, they did not make use of formal agencies to help themselves. This often makes recruitment of students very hard and is therefore

a major problem in ABE. The use of a number of media and methods, including advisory committees, is reported by some authorities to be most relevant. Students are also often reluctant to seek literacy education because of the little relationship between the curriculum and the economical and social problems of the students. Dropping out of the program causes a most serious problem in adult basic education. In Missouri about one-third were reported to have dropped out before they had completed the grade they had enrolled in. Dropouts tended to be in their thirties, married, and at low reading levels. The reasons for dropping out were most often change of residence and of working schedule. Another authority reported that the causes of withdrawal from ABE programs were predominantly personal circumstances. There was no significant difference in academic ability between dropouts and remaining students in the programs. However, those who had a low academic ability tended to drop out more often.

The importance of counseling has been emphasized by many authorities. Counseling is an important means of avoiding dropouts and of helping students who have already dropped out. Instructional ABE material was reported to be inadequate for adults, especially in mathematics where most material was designed for children rather than for adults.

In a study project conducted in Missouri, it was found that the practice of having local programs contribute ten percent of the funds might limit the participation of some school districts because of lack of funds.

In another study in Missouri it was reported that 26.6 percent of the adult population 25 years and above had less than an eighth grade education. The average grade levels completed by adults in each county ranged from an average of 7.5 to an average of 12.1 years.

One of the latest census reports released by the U.S. Census Bureau, shows that the educational gap between the black and white is narrowing, and blacks have been increasing their schooling faster than whites. Suburbanites have generally more education than the city dwellers.

In a recent report concerning the U.S. ABE-programs for fiscal 1969, it was indicated that in Kansas, predominantly white females participated in the programs, about ten percent dropped out that year and the student/teacher ratio was 26 to 1.

CHAPTER III

I. DESIGN OF THE STUDY

This study was designed to determine: (1) the distribution of the local ABE-programs in relation to the areas in Kansas where undereducated adults reside; (2) the manner in which the programs are operated; and, (3) to describe some common characteristics of students and staff of the programs.

Most data were collected from the Division of Adult Education at the State Department of Education. Additional data were obtained from the administrators and personnel of the various ABE-programs throughout the state.

II. EXPLANATION OF PROCEDURES

An interview with Mr. W. W. Lee, the Director of Adult Education in Kansas, was arranged to obtain permission to conduct the study and to determine which data were available for this study. Full cooperation was obtained from the Director.

Next, several visits to the respective ABE-programs were made to observe how they were administered and conducted as well as to obtain supplementary information.

A questionnaire was mailed to the directors of the Kansas ABE-programs in May and collected at an ABE-workshop conducted by Dr. Albert B. Campbell at Kansas State University in the beginning of June. The questionnaire was employed in order to acquire additional data concerning the organizational structure and operation of the respective ABE-programs. It is included in the appendix.