

OPEN LEARNING FOR ADULTS WITH LITTLE OR NO FORMAL EDUCATION IN ZIMBABWE

Professor Meshack Jongilanga Matshazi

Dean of Studies

Bindura University College of Science Education, Bindura, Zimbabwe

1. INTRODUCTION

The University of Fort Hare Adult Basic Education Project (UFH-ABEP) was started in June 1992, as a three year experimental project funded by the European Union through the Kagiso Trust. It was set up as a research project with the prime objective of researching basic educational needs in the community, and developing and testing a distance education methodology which would make suitable courses available to adults with little or no formal education. In pursuing its newly emphasised role as a university for the people, Fort Hare sought ways of helping the population in its surrounding areas whose education had been disrupted by the legacy of apartheid and who were having to adapt to rapid change in very difficult times.

From the outset, however, the University of Fort Hare envisaged that the project should pave the way for a long term programme which would build on the project's research findings and, using the distance education methodology, produce and make courses suitable to large numbers of learners at increasing distance from the university campus. Thus, the transition period from project to programme was to be marked by a change from mainly research and development activities to large scale delivery accompanied by further research and development.

2. OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the project included the following:

1. To find out, through systematic research, what types and levels of courses:
 - a) would be interesting, effective and seen as beneficial to the target groups;
 - b) would be appropriate to the needs of the university's catchment area as perceived by the target groups and other education and development agencies operating in the area;
 - c) would complement and assist rather than compete with the work of these other agencies;
 - d) could be produced by staff from university departments and faculties working with the project staff and possibly other agencies, given limited time and resources;
2. To develop a range of such courses in collaboration with staff from the appropriate departments of the university;
3. To develop, test and modify as necessary cost effective non-formal education methodologies that use distance teaching techniques to reach rural and urban learners in their homes or workplaces;
4. To develop and test methods of monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the courses and methodologies referred to above;
5. To lay the foundation for a permanent University of Fort Hare programme of adult basic education.

3. ORGANISATIONAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE

The project had a Management Committee chaired by the Vice-Chancellor's representative, and its membership was drawn from the various sections of the University and included representatives of community based organisations. The initial task of the Committee was to recruit professional and

administrative staff for the project. These included the Project Director, Professor M J Matshazi; the Materials Coordinator, Mrs Nosimo Balindela (who later became Minister of Education - Eastern Cape Province); the Field Coordinator Ms Linda Ganda, the International Extension College Consultant, Dr David Warr; three Field Assistants, a Book-keeper, a Secretary and a Driver. The Committee was responsible for the project's policy issues and reported directly to Senate.

4. NEEDS ASSESSMENT SURVEY

To determine possible target groups and establish what type of courses would likely interest and benefit them, a needs assessment survey had to be carried out. However, before detailed plans were made to select areas for the survey, a visit was made to the Regional Office of the South African National Civics Organisations (SANCO), in East London. Having explained the project's aims and the need to establish close links with a number of rural and urban communities to the Regional Executive, the UFH-ABEP field team was given a list of names of SANCO staff as contact persons at sub-regional levels.

Visits to the staff in the sub-regions yielded names of local SANCO staff who in turn identified contact persons in individual rural and urban communities where the UFH-ABEP team could start identifying educational needs and target groups, and later pilot the first round of courses. As a result of the experience gathered during the visits and initial discussions with organisations and local communities, the project team was able to begin to define possible target groups, and start putting together ideas about the types of courses likely to be in demand and how these might be organised as components of a coherent programme.

Briefly, the survey revealed high levels of unemployment and/or under employment, as well as a diminishing number of opportunities for those with little or no formal education, (*Matshazi 1993*). The roles and positions of these persons in respective communities and in society in general, had increasingly become insecure because of educational and skills deficiencies.

Impressions gained from the survey suggested that UFH-ABEP's constituency included the following categories of disadvantaged persons:

- a) young adults who dropped out of the school system;
- b) unemployed adults;
- c) self-employed adults, including employed adults seeking further education and training.

Thus, persons from each of these categories were found in rural, urban and semi-urban areas throughout the university catchment area.

5. AREAS OF FOCUS/COURSE THRUST

In analysing the expressed and felt needs of the above identified categories of persons, indeed their indicated interests, the UFH-ABEP team saw the following as the possible areas of focus/thrust:

- a) School Equivalency Education

This consisted of a group of courses which were to be designed to provide:

- i. an alternative curriculum leading to certificates equivalent to those awarded by the school system;
- ii. Flexible entry and progression;
- iii. Flexible mode of evaluation.

b) Trade and Craft Skills training

This second group of courses were to enable individuals to acquire skills and qualifications which would help them find employment, go on to do further training in the areas concerned, or set up or improve their own income generating initiatives. Examples of such courses included:

carpentry
building trades
gardening
poultry keeping
livestock management
sewing and knitting
food processing
business management
book-keeping
accountancy etc.

c) Family and Community Education

This group of courses aimed at helping individuals to improve the quality of life in the family and the community. The courses sought to increase awareness of important issues, provide knowledge and skills needed for development in urban and rural areas, and help learners to plan and implement action for improvement.

Among several possible areas of study, course topics were drawn from the following areas:

primary health care
environmental protection
tree planting
civic education
starting a cooperative or creche
home improvement and maintenance
nutrition
managing family finances etc.

d) Literacy and Numeracy

A significant number of persons in the target groups wanted to acquire or to improve their skills in reading, writing and handling numbers. Hence the provision of literacy and numeracy was seen as important in providing these with further ambitions to acquire the skills needed to study at higher levels.

In response to the literacy and numeracy need, UFH - ABEP decided on a two pronged approach; to either draw on the services of one or more of the organizations with established

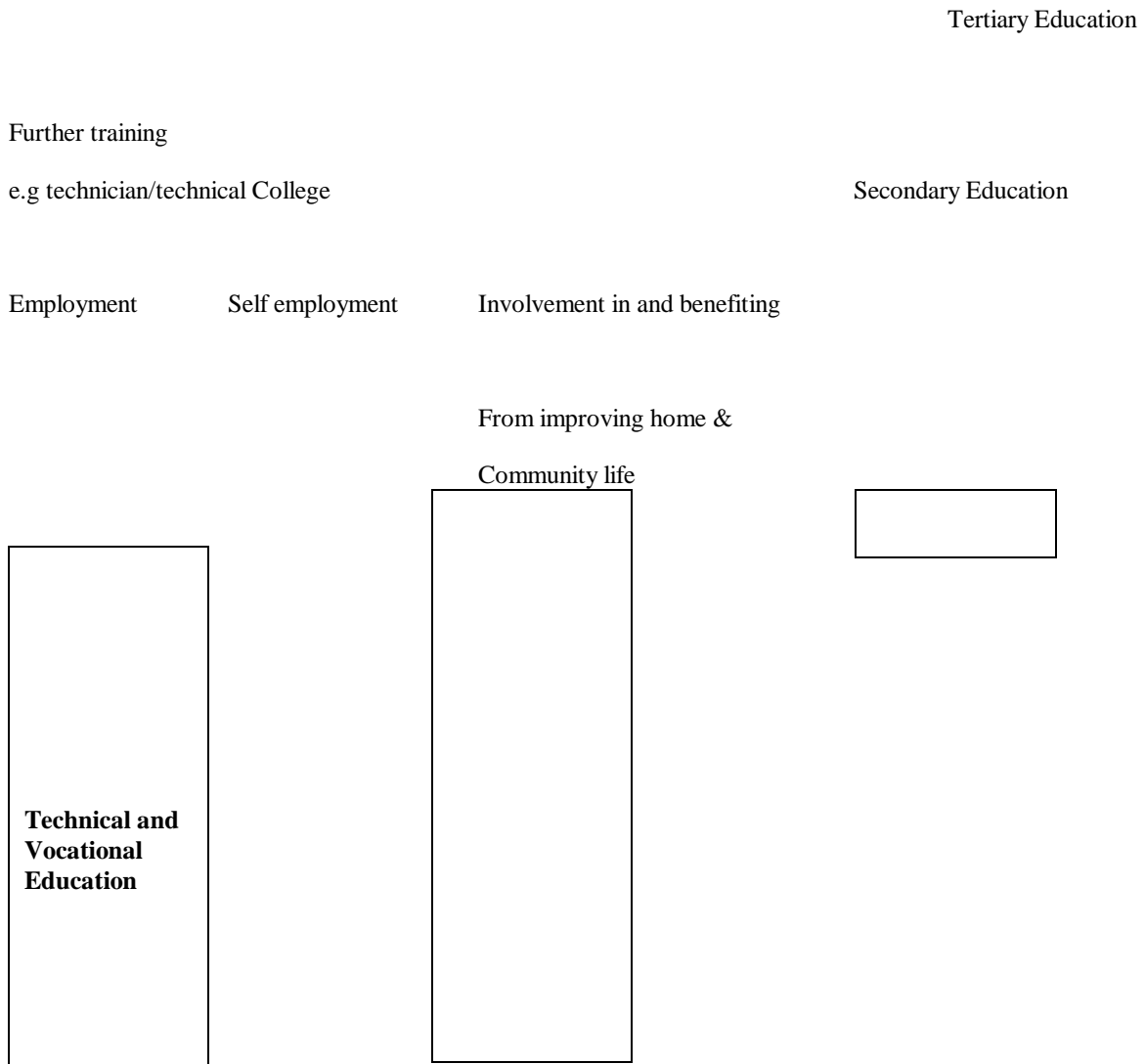
experience and reputation in that field as instructions could not be easily provided at a distance, or make provision for learners to study literacy and numeracy courses alongside any of the other courses outlined above.

6. UNIVERSITY OF FORT HARE ADULT BASIC EDUCATION PROJECT CURRICULUM STRUCTURE

A curriculum embracing the four study areas cited above was hammered out. It was proposed that the curriculum adopts a structure based on inter - related modules that were, in respect of school equivalency, literacy and numeracy, and trade and craft skills training, hierarchially structured and, in that of family and community education, horizontally presented. As such, the structure enabled the learner to enter each study area at the level of his/her competency, to study different combinations of modules according to personal preference and need, and to exit where and when he/she chose to.

Figures A and B below provide a graphic representation of the UFH - ABEP curriculum.

Figure A: Entry and Exit to the Study Programme



**Literacy and Numeracy
Education**

**Family/Community
Education**

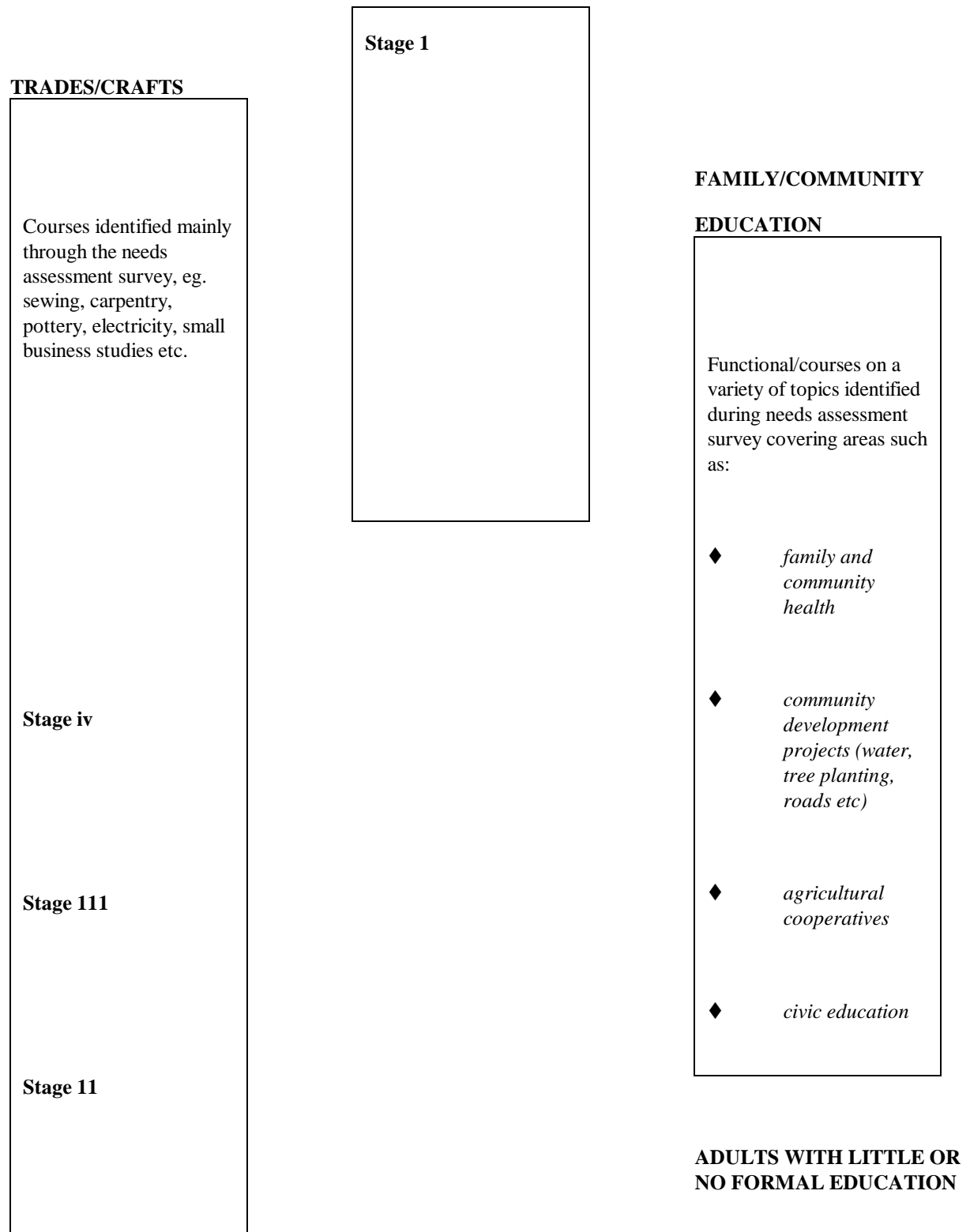
ADULTS WITH LITTLE OR
NO FORMAL EDUCATION?

S
E
E

***Notes:** *The aims of the study programme were as follows:*

- Those who completed the literacy and numeracy courses would be able to read and write in Xhosa and in English and do calculations to a level which would enable them to reach all the exit points shown at the top of Fig. A.
- Those who completed all the school equivalency courses would be able to enter secondary school programmes.
- Those who completed any of the technical and vocational courses offered would have acquired sufficient knowledge and skills to earn a living by practising the course topic in question. They would also have acquired a qualification which would be recognized:
 - (a) by employers in relevant fields; and
 - (b) Technical Colleges or other training institutions offering further studies in the topic concerned.
- Those who completed any of the family /community courses would be able to introduce practical improvements in the home and / or to work with others on development schemes which would benefit the community.

Figure B: An Outline of the University of Fort Hare Adult Basic Education Project Curriculum



LITERACY/NUMERACY

Courses taken to provide study skills for subsequent learning.

Basic English/ Numeracy 3

Basic English / Numeracy 2

Breakthrough/Numeracy 1

SCHOOL EQUIVALENCY

Courses designed in collaboration with the Independent Examiners

Board (IEB), covering communication, maths, sciences, social sciences etc.

I

I

I

I

* Notes

Each course was presented in modules which were designed to be free-standing or taken as part of a full course. Modules could also be included in more than one course e.g. a module from the book - keeping course could be used in a vocational course or in a community education course on how to start a cooperative, or might be part of two or three different courses on agriculture.

Learners could enter the programme by taking any course or free - standing module at any level and they could leave the programme after completing any course or module. Learners could also move between modules or between courses in any of the directions shown by the arrows in Fig.B. Learners were, however, expected to complete each module or course for which they enrolled.

7. THE STUDY /TEACHING METHODS

UFH - ABEP sought the attainment of its objectives through the adoption of a varied and flexible system of formal, non-formal and informal learning approaches, with special emphasis on the use of distance education. The distance teaching methodology developed by UFH-ABEP had the following characteristics:

- A typical study group exercise, open to any interested adult with a target size of twenty learners per group (preferably not less than ten or more than twenty five).
- Appointment of one member by the group as group leader and given an initial training before the course began, i.e in how to present the materials, how to lead discussion groups and other learning exercises, and how to report back.
- Teaching input was through simple, low cost media e.g audio cassette programmes (about 20 minutes), flip-chart illustrations.
- The study meetings were structured through prompts in the audio programme which informed the group leader what to do next - e.g “group leader, turn to the next page of the flip chart, or stop the tape for a learning activity.”
- Frequent opportunities to stop the tape for group discussion and other exercises - e.g to assist and reinforce learning, to relate new ideas to existing local experiences and encourage group action.
- Some mechanism whereby each group could feed its responses back to UFH-ABEP e.g comments on the methodology and suggestions for course topics.
- A member or a few members of UFH-ABEP staff attended each meeting and monitored proceedings unobtrusively from the back of the group, post-meeting discussions with groups and leaders to record their reactions to the exercise and assist in the evaluation of the exercise.

For instance, a UFH-ABEP course on “Adult Learning” consisting of two meetings could be structured thus:

Meeting 1: “Its Never Too late to Learn”

- Welcome to the group
- Introduction to the programme, the course and the first meeting
- “It is possible to learn, and never too late, even if you are an adult and have not been or finished school.”
- Demonstration of the methodology - a sample teaching session based on a new method of

growing vegetables using a narrator and drama on the tape, supporting, flip chart illustrations and group discussion.

- Learners are tested to show that they can learn from this methodology
- Learners analyse and discuss the methodology and provide comments which are then noted by the group leader.
- Learners are given a task to be completed before the next meeting - e.g discuss with family and friends what problems they face which they could solve if they could learn more about the issues.

Meeting 11: “What Do We Want to Learn ?”

- Brief recap of the teaching methodology introduced in meeting 1
- Exercise to encourage learners to say what sort of new ideas, skills and explanations they would find useful to learn
- Examples of different types of people with different learning needs and an outline of four main types of courses that learners might find useful (literacy and numeracy, school equivalency, craft/ income generating, and home and community development) using short dramatised case studies, narrator and supporting flip chart illustrations
- Feedback exercises in which the learners make tape recording and write notes regarding the problem encountered in their community and the types of courses they would find interesting to study which might help them to solve these problems.

8. PILLARS OF THE UFH-ABEP DISTANCE EDUCATION METHODOLOGY

It will, therefore, be noted that the success of the UFH-ABEP’s distance education methodology has largely depended on the two sections of the project: the Materials Development and Field Sections.

The Field Coordinator is responsible for setting up learning groups; identifying group leaders and arranging for them to come to the UFH-ABEP centre for training; recording a schedule of dates, venue and times when each group will be meeting; designing evaluation instruments; supervising the analysis and presentation of feedback.

The Materials Coordinator is responsible for designing the course materials (audio programmes and flip-chart illustrations and producing and duplicating sufficient copies for the learning groups). In this work, the Coordinator receives assistance from the staff of other departments within the University. These include assistance from the Graphic Artist who helps in the design of flip-charts illustrations; TV studio technician who render valuable assistance with the audio scripts and related technical advice; and language and drama experts who facilitate access to language laboratory facilities and drama productions respectively. The Materials Coordinator also supervises and conducts the training of group leaders on the use of the teaching/learning materials.

9. CONCLUSION

The UFH-ABEP project has provided designers and deliverers of instruction with very valuable experience and feedback concerning the teaching methodology and the procedures and skills required to plan, design, produce, run and monitor an adult basic education course using distance education techniques. For the most part, group leaders presented the materials and followed the instructions on the cassette programmes as intended. Participants responded well to the materials and appeared to be able to learn from the combination of cassette, flip chart and group discussion.

The project team learned valuable lessons about the design of the course; administering and monitoring the

study meetings. On the negative side, the team learnt that:

- a) the lack of a good omnidirectional microphone affected the quality of drama recording;
- b) in the absence of an open reel tape recorder, all editing had to be done by dubbing between two cassette recorders with a consequent loss of sound quality overall;
- c) the special cassette copier (for the copying from the master tape) sometimes did not function correctly. In particular this resulted in serious interference between sides A and B of the copied cassettes.

On the positive side, the team discovered :

- a) the value of improvised drama, which, in the hands of the good actors, produces a lively dialogue;
- b) the technique of moving from carefully structured programme outline in English to a natural sounding and easily understandable Xhosa narrative equivalent by using a skilled interpreter;
- c) the importance of a graphic designer with a quick, creative and flexible approach.

In some way, UHF-ABEP was engaged in pioneering work which was new both to the university and to the target groups. Every operation was being tackled for the first time and that brought many challenges. The way both the Materials Coordinator and the Field Coordinator responded to these challenges was highly commendable. Early in 1996, UHF-ABEP was absorbed by the university and now functions as the university's extension programme.

REFERENCES

1. **Matshazi, M J (ed.)(1993)** *A Study of Adult Basic Education Needs in the Former Giskei/Boarder Area*, University of Fort Hare, Alice: Lovedale Press.
2. **Warr, D (1993)** "An outline of the project, its progress and possible future development" *Report to the Executive Council*; Univesity of Fort Hare (unpublished).
3. **"UHF-ABEP** "Report on Phase One of Project Activities, 1st June - 31st December, 1992", Senate Paper: University of Fort Hare, Alice. (Unpublished).