

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT

Adult Literacy and Numeracy



Australia's modern economy and society has increased the demand for high levels of literacy and numeracy. Technological advancement and globalization have decreased the amount of available low skills jobs and increased the amount of jobs that require high levels of information processing, digital and communication skills. Constant technological change means adults need to build new skills in order to remain employed, access services and engage in Australian social life.

HOW LITERATE AND NUMERATE ARE AUSTRALIANS?

The recent Programme for International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) survey indicated that around 1 in 7 Australians (14%) have very poor literacy skills (ABS, 2013). An additional 1 in 3 Australians (30%) have literacy skills, which are at a level that makes them vulnerable to unemployment and social exclusion in a modern knowledge-based economy and society.

Australia performed well in literacy in the PIAAC Survey compared to other countries. Australia had an average performance in numeracy relative to other countries.

AREAS OF CONCERN

PIAAC highlighted some areas of concern. The age groups from 45 onwards had much lower literacy and numeracy than younger adults. Women performed poorly in numeracy relative to men. People outside the workforce had much poorer literacy and numeracy compared to those who were working or looking for work.

WHICH LITERACIES?

Critics of widespread testing of literacy and numeracy suggest that they measure a very narrow range of text types, usually determined by powerful interests and don't give a true picture of an adult's abilities in context. Further, that in a rapidly changing, globalized world, new literacies are emerging all the time and no one is across all of them.

LITERACY AS SOCIAL PRACTICE

There is fairly strong consensus amongst educational experts that adults develop most of their literacy and numeracy skills in context, in order to get something done, either in the workplace, the home or the community. It follows then, that for adult literacy and numeracy programs to be successful, they should be practical, purposeful and customized to individual needs.

SEE FULL REPORT

<https://ala.asn.au/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/Literacy-Paper-Final.pdf>



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Adult Learning Australia

Lifelong and lifewide learning for all Australians



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