DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 435 003   CE 079 189

TITLE   Literacy Research, Evaluation and Statistics. Ensuring
                 Universal Rights to Literacy and Basic Education. A Series
                 of 29 Booklets Documenting Workshops Held at the Fifth
                 International Conference on Adult Education (Hamburg,
                 Germany, July 14-18, 1997).
INSTITUTION   United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural
                 Organization, Hamburg (Germany). Inst. for Education.
ISBN   ISBN-92-82010-89-9
PUB DATE   1999-00-00
NOTE   15p.; For other booklets in this series, see CE 079 178-206.
AVAILABLE FROM   For full text: <http://www.education.unesco.org/uie>.
PUB TYPE   Collected Works - Proceedings (021)
EDRS PRICE   MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS   Adult Basic Education; Adult Literacy; *Developing Nations;
                 Educational Policy; *Educational Research; Foreign
                 Countries; Information Needs; *Literacy Education; Program
                 Evaluation; Relevance (Education); Research Methodology;
                 *Research Needs; *Statistics
IDENTIFIERS   International Adult Literacy Survey

ABSTRACT
                 Although adult literacy programs exist in almost every
country throughout the developing world, comprehensive information on their
capacity, performance, and impact is seriously lacking. This deficiency has
direct consequences for the effectiveness of developing countries' national
literacy education policies. Reasons for the lack of data include the popular
character of adult literacy programs with their grassroots, bottom-up,
participatory approach and the fact that, in some countries, the private
sector has taken over adult literacy. The knowledge base on adult literacy
programs must be improved and broadened to enable policymakers and donor
agencies to understand literacy programs' context, grasp learners' needs, and
discuss programs' effectiveness and relevance by capturing the continuum of
literacy abilities that goes beyond the simplistic literacy/illiteracy
dichotomy. Effective monitoring and evaluation are needed to ensure the
quality of adult literacy programs. The International Adult Literacy Survey
is a good demonstration of how to use the best of education assessment
technology to gather data on a broad range of individual literacy skills and
examine basic skills from a continuum or scale perspective. In assessing
requests for assistance, donor agencies are interested in research,
evaluation, and statistics regarding the planning and implementation of adult
literacy programs. (MN)
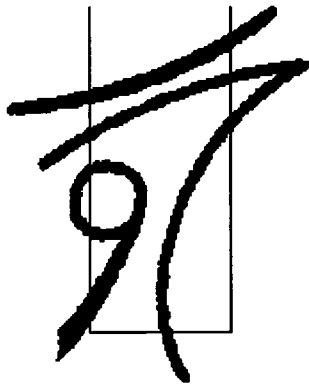
A series of 29 booklets
documenting workshops
held at the Fifth
International Conference
on Adult Education

CONFINTEA
HAMBURG
1997

3d Research, evaluation & statistics

Literacy research, evaluation and statistics

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UNESCO

Theme 3: Ensuring universal rights to literacy and basic education
Booklets under this theme:
3a Literacy in the world and its major regions
3b Literacy and learning strategies
3c Literacy, education and social development
3d Literacy research, evaluation and statistics
3e Literacy in multilingual/intercultural settings
3f Literacy and technology
3g Literacy for tomorrow

Foreword

In July 1997 the Fifth International Conference on Adult Education was held in Hamburg, organised by UNESCO and in particular the UNESCO Institute for Education, the agency's specialist centre on adult learning policy and research. Approximately 1500 delegates attended from all regions of the world, with representatives of 140 member states and some 400 NGOs. In addition to the work of the commissions and plenary which debated the official documents of the Conference The Hamburg Declaration and The Agenda for the Future, there were 33 workshops organised around the themes and sub-themes of the Conference.

As part of its CONFINTEA follow-up strategy, the UNESCO Institute for Education has produced this series of 29 booklets based on the presentations and discussions held during the Conference. The recordings of all the workshops were transcribed and synthesized over one year, edited, and then formatted and designed. A tremendous amount of work has gone into this process. Linda King, coordinator of the monitoring and information strategy for CONFINTEA, was responsible for overseeing the whole process. Madhu Singh, senior research specialist at UIE, undertook the mammoth task of writing almost all the booklets based on an analysis of the sessions. She was helped in the later stages by Gonzalo Retamal, Uta Papen and Linda King. Christopher McIntosh was technical editor, Matthew Partridge designed the layout and Janna Lowrey was both transcriber and translator.

The booklets are intended to draw out the central issues and concerns of each of the CONFINTEA workshops. They are the memory of an event that marked an important watershed in the field of adult learning. We hope that they will be of use both to those who were able to attend CONFINTEA V and those who were not. We look forward to your comments, feedback and continuing collaboration with the UNESCO Institute for Education.

Paul Bélanger,
Director, UNESCO Institute for Education, Hamburg
and Secretary General of CONFINTEA

Literacy research, evaluation and statistics

Introduction

The area of literacy is one domain in the broad field of education where relatively little attention has been given to research, evaluation and statistics. There is now a critical need to build a more effective knowledge base, to facilitate the design, planning and implementation of literacy work.

This booklet describes some of the issues concerning research, evaluation and statistics in relation to literacy which were discussed at a workshop held during UNESCO's 1997 Fifth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA) in Hamburg. The discussions covered a wide geographical and thematic range. The panel was chaired by Dan Wagner, Director of the International Literacy Institute, University of Philadelphia. The speakers on the panel were: Maki Hayashikawa, UNESCO; D. J. Daswani, Professor of Linguistics, NCERT, India; Sissel Volan, Norwegian Development Agency (NORAD); Scott Murray, Statistics Canada, Ottawa; Claudio de Moura Castro, Division of Social Policy, Inter-American Development Bank, Washington; Ila Goksal, Director of the Mother Child Education Foundation, Istanbul, Turkey.

CONFINTEA attracted a very large number of organisations dedicated to research and action in adult literacy. It is not enough to say that governments do not take or support adult literacy seriously enough. The spadework of providing them with research, evaluation and statistics upon which they can base their policies is a key task if adult education is to reach those it is most intended for.

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Stating the problem

Although there are adult literacy programmes in almost every country of the developing world, there is a serious lack of comprehensive information on their capacity, performance and impact. This has direct consequences for the effectiveness of national policies. Government and official adult education agencies use statistics of adult illiteracy which are often not very dependable and which tend to be out of date and too general.

Evaluation is normally one of the formal requirements for running a programme. Every programme should provide an evaluation report on completion. Very often the commissioning or government agency is interested in obtaining value for money. In this respect, literacy evaluations have tended to be rather limited in their criteria. In addition, each evaluation is based on its own methodology, hypothesis and theory, with the result that evaluation reports seldom lend themselves to comparisons.

With regard to research, there are many universities offering courses in adult learning, from undergraduate to post-graduate and doctoral research programmes. But often there seems to be little interface between the programme and the regular university system. University graduates seldom become involved in the implementation of adult literacy programmes. Consequently, research at the university level is largely academic, is treated as a course requirement, and seldom deals with field level problems that are faced by implementing agencies. While there have been a number of research projects on infrastructure and the profiles of learners and teachers, these are sporadic and unconnected with each other.

In view of the inconsistency in the collection, analysis and dissemination of information on literacy, it has been very difficult to demonstrate the efficiency of literacy programmes and the quality of the output. Policy makers and donors agencies have not been getting the data on which to base policies, projects and advocacy.

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Analysing facts

One of the reasons for this lack of data lies in the popular character of adult literacy programmes with their grassroots, bottom-up participatory approach. Well analysed facts to support them have not been there. For example there has been little comprehensive testing of participant achievement or other research that would help to plan and implement programmes elsewhere, or academics to deepen theories of effective adult learning. The situation is further complicated by the fact that in some countries, the private sector has taken over adult literacy, with a strong reliance on media. It is too early for any reliable indicators of success of these efforts.

This situation is amply demonstrated by the three large-scale literacy movements in Brazil. The first cycle of literacy programmes was driven by a peasant social movement. The second cycle came from a military regime. The third cycle is being promoted by employers and their associations.

In the first cycle, the literacy drive was connected with wide mobilisation of peasants. It used a method developed by Paulo Freire to educate poor peasants and was part of the process of creating political awareness. Literacy was expected to help people become aware of their situation, and the idea behind the mobilisation was that, in order to make the population literate, it was necessary to make people conscious of their situation.

The second cycle came during the 70s, when Brazil had a growth rate of 11 per cent but 30 per cent illiteracy. Economists were hired, and a lot of money was spent on creating an extremely well-trained staff of teachers and instructors. But this technocratic approach did not work because it was too short-sighted, and the emphasis was more on showing results rather than producing the right outcome. It failed to consider the real difficulties at hand. There was a lack of visibility of the results of the many large scale literacy programmes.

Since the late 80's, Brazilian firms have become leaner and more worried about costs and efficiency. This movement has generated a third cycle of literacy programmes in the form of a spontaneous development inside business and in employers' associations. Although there is no master plan, nor a broad consensus, there appears to be a tacit agreement on the need for more education and the provision of this by employers. This tacit agreement has generated a number of solutions.

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These include:

- Workers returning to school with financial support from their employers.
- Associations of employers creating programmes like FIEMG (The Federation of Industries of Minas Gerais) which has made concrete plans to eradicate illiteracy from the State's work force by the year 2000.
- Payment of 35 million dollars by the Federation of Industries of the State of Sao Paulo to a television network to create a televised course to prepare for the equivalent of primary- and secondary-school leaving examinations as well as offering a course on mechanical technology. All lessons take place in factories and offices, and involve workers and managers rather than the traditional classroom teachers and pupils.

Need for a better knowledge base

We need a much wider knowledge base and better research data upon which to base adult literacy programmes. The questions that need to be addressed are:

- Who participates in literacy programmes?
- How do adults learn?
- What knowledge do they bring with them when they come to the programme?
- What is their motivation?
- What is the communicative repertoire of the learner?
- What is their mother tongue?
- What is their second language?
- What are the uses of literacy in society?
- How is literacy retained?
- How much literacy is retained ?
- How is literacy diffused?
- What are the changes in literacy requirement?
- What is the impact of literacy on productivity, quality of life, and on society?

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The purpose is to understand the context, grasp the learners' felt needs and to discuss the effectiveness and relevance of programmes by capturing the continuum of literacy abilities that goes beyond the simplistic literacy/illiteracy dichotomy.

Ensuring quality of adult literacy programmes through effective monitoring and evaluation

Providers of information on literacy can be individual persons and literacy centres/institutions. Data on individual persons can be obtained from population censuses, household surveys, and literacy surveys. The type of data collected through population and household surveys would include data on the illiterate and literate population, educational attainment, school attendance, household and personal characteristics. Household and literacy follow-up surveys could include more detailed questions on perceived relevance and quality of literacy programmes attended, retention, use, spread, improvement of acquired skills and finally outcomes and impacts of literacy.

Data channels for monitoring literacy institutions and programmes are regular surveys or administrative records and reports. Such data focus on the availability, location and timing of adult literacy programmes by type of institution, capacity, participation, level of resource inputs, quality of personnel and facilitators, relevance and impact of the programme and level of achievement of participants through participatory learner assessment.

Literacy information management systems, including practical assessment methodology, will provide information on three levels of programmes and a continuum of literacy abilities. These programmes are:

- Non-formal basic education for out-of school children and youth.
- Adult basic literacy programmes.
- Continuing education.

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In terms of the subsequent analysis of the information, it will be particularly valuable that the following issues be clarified:

- learning achievement in individuals;
- outcomes/impacts on learners' everyday lives;
- programme level efficiency and accountability;
- in-country and international comparisons.

The coming years will witness the development of broader strategies for monitoring literacy, by:

- making coordinated use of different approaches;
- introducing a participatory approach;
- promoting the creation of national directories/databases;
- fostering a culture of information for literacy;
- developing practical literacy assessment methodologies and tools.

To do so, the countries may have to adopt the following measures and policies:

- building in-country monitoring capacities;
- maximum use of existing monitoring channels;
- establishing universal literacy criteria and norms;
- adapting the assessment methodology to specific social and cultural contexts;
- applying the methodology to specific countries;
- mobilising appropriate partners, such as NGOs and community organisations.

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Surveys on literacy skills

The International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS), based on an initial survey in Canada and a subsequent survey in the United States, and which has now been carried out in many countries, is a good demonstration of how to use the best of education assessment technology to gather data on a broad range of individual literacy skills and to look at basic skills from a continuum or scale perspective, rather than reducing literacy research simply to categories such as literacy/illiteracy. The survey has shown that:

- Factors which make reading more or less difficult for adults are common to many languages and cultures.
- The conditions and causes of literacy skills are becoming clearer.
- Such studies offer a normative base, against which all other statistics can be compared.
- They give a coherent framework for thinking about literacy development.
- They inform choices at both the individual and the governmental policy level. Individuals need to make choices about what they want to do with their lives; governments need to make choices about resource allocations.

There are several myths about literacy which the literacy survey has tried to demystify. It is often assumed, for example, that literacy is very high in the industrialised countries. The literacy survey has been able to show that in every country studied in the IALS survey there is a high percentage of adults without the required skills for effectively participating in the society and economy. Low levels of skills limit the social and economic participation and opportunity of adults.

There is the myth that literacy is a product of formal schooling and that initial education gives everybody a standard quantum of literacy competency. Data is now available indicating that this is not true. There are many people who are illiterate despite their formal qualifications. On the other hand, there are a great number of adults who do not have formal qualifications, yet have literacy skills at quite high levels. This indicates that there are other forces in society besides formal education that are responsible for a person's level of literacy. It also raises questions about equity and quality in the educational system and the role of literacy environments, workplace literacy and family literacy.

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Information from highly-developed economies shows that literacy skills are to some extent independent of formal qualification: only 30 per cent of literacy can be attributed to formal education and qualifications, while a further 30 per cent is acquired in out-of-school situations. The same is true of the workers who are past the credential stage in our economies.

Literacy has a strong influence on who gets access to adult continuing learning, particularly at the workplace. Literacy skills can thus be a key marginalising force, leaving governments with the problem of what to do with those people who are marginalised in the process.

Literacy is not just a matter of the supply of skills, but also of the demand for skills in the economy. This is important to recognise because it is often held that the workforce is over qualified and does not use the skills that it already has.

Many economies pride themselves on having an equitable system – educationally and economically – with fairly reasonable equality of opportunity. But, contrary to this view, analysis from the surveys shows that children and adults from disadvantaged backgrounds who live in provinces with severe social and economic problems perform more poorly on literacy achievement than adults and children from other provinces.

The major problem in the world today is not one of absolute illiteracy but of low literacy skills which are insufficient to meet the demands of a changing economy.

The importance of research on adult learning and literacy

A research project conducted in Turkey has been developed into a full-fledged programme of parent and early childhood education, called the Mother-Child-Education programme. It is a multiple-pronged programme, which not only underlines the potential of academic research, but also attempts to create a more literate family environment, for both parent and child. It sets out to assess the socio-economic, socio-emotional and cognitive development of pre-school children and the impact of training given to a random sample of mothers for over two years. There were two components to the mother training project: (1) A cognitive component, which was designed to foster cognitive development of the child; (2) A mother support component, which was designed to support the mother in fostering the socio-emotional and personality development of the child.

The cognitive component was designed to create a more literate home environment for mother and child. It was found that the implementation of the cognitive programme for children contributed to significant differences in children's cognitive development and in mothers' literacy skills.

This programme, implemented in 50 provinces in Turkey, has been extended to include reproductive and family health, aiming not only to upgrade the pre-literacy and numeracy skills of a child, but also aiming to further the literacy of the mother in order to support a more functionally literate society.

Literacy needs to be supported by other institutions in society, the family being one of the most important. People need to be reached in the context of their environment and positions in society. Mothers are being reached and drawn into the programme by telling them: "You can help prepare your children for school, or you can help them to become more successful in school." This is found to be a better approach than saying: "Your skills are not enough for the society – let us try and upgrade them."

The three main aspects highlighted by the study on mother-child literacy are: (1) The importance of research which guided the programme and enabled it to reach a wide range of people; (2) The importance of multi-purpose programmes in literacy, with an emphasis on adult education rather than on adult literacy alone; (3) The importance of conducting evaluation at different levels and for different stakeholders.

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Donor agencies and literacy programmes

In assessing requests for assistance, donor agencies are interested in research, evaluation and statistics in the planning and implementation of adult literacy programmes. In planning such programmes the following considerations are important:

- Planning needs to be accompanied by systematic research or solid evaluation.
- A closer contact needs to be made between academic research in universities and literacy programmes.
- Official agencies should provide reliable statistics on literacy, emphasising both quantitative and qualitative data.
- It is necessary to take into account the growing role of industry in providing literacy education.
- Improved tools are needed to enhance the knowledge base on literacy. It is not literacy or formal qualifications per se that make people literate. It is more a question of providing equitable opportunities for continuous learning.
- Learners need a supportive literate environment for sustainability of literacy skills and for developing themselves into holistic personalities.

Effective action depends on adequate knowledge. The very sustainability of literacy work in an increasingly competitive educational environment will require adult literacy and adult learning to build a better knowledge base on initial education.

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The CONFINTEA logo, designed by Michael Smitheram
of Australia, represents the lines on the palm of a hand.
These lines are universal and yet different for each
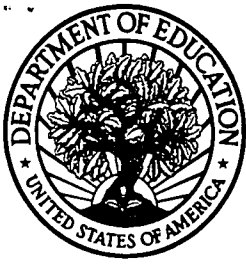subject. They celebrate cultural diversity and the joy
of learning.

Theme 3

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and basic education

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