

PLAIN LANGUAGE SUMMARIES

Measuring Adult Literacy and Life Skills: New Frameworks for Assessment

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What is this study about?

This study documents key aspects of the development of the International Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey (ALL) – it's theoretical roots, the skill domains selected for possible assessment, the approaches taken to assessment in each domain and the criteria that were employed to decide which domains were to be carried in the final design.

The ALL survey was meant to build on the success of the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) assessments by extending the range of skills assessed and by improving the quality of the assessment methods employed. This report documents several successes including:

- the development of a new framework and associated robust measures for problem solving
- the development of a powerful numeracy framework and associated robust measures
- the specification of frameworks for practical cognition, teamwork and information and communication technology literacy

The report also provides insight into those domains where development failed to yield approaches to assessment of sufficient quality to be included in the ALL study.

What are the questions addressed by the study?

The report is divided into three parts:

The first part of this publication provides readers with an overview of the policy issues that motivated the IALS, the study upon which the ALL study seeks to build. It identifies the explicit objectives that were set for the ALL study, the pragmatic considerations that influenced the design and documents the overall approach taken to the development and validation of the instrumentation applied in the study. The following portions of Part 1 (chapters 2 and 3), trace

development of the ALL study from the general theory that underlies the ALL assessment through the research and development that led to final design. Readers are provided with insight into the thinking that went into the selection of skill domains, the process that was followed to develop assessment frameworks and related instrumentation in each domain, how the assessment instrumentation was validated, what criteria were established for measures to be included in the international comparative assessment of skill and where development managed to produce measures of sufficient quality

The second part includes three chapters that provide assessment frameworks for the four skill domains that met the criteria set out for inclusion in the international comparative assessment. These chapters also document the processes that were used to develop and validate the assessment instruments and presents data related to validity and reliability.

Chapter 4 presents the framework for prose, document and quantitative literacy. This framework covers the three domains that were included in the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS). Quantitative literacy was replaced by Numeracy for the ALL study. This framework served as a model for other frameworks.

Chapter 5 presents the framework for numeracy, and, chapter 6 presents the framework for problem solving.

In each case the framework provides a definition of the domain, sets out the factors that are believed to influence the relative difficulty of tasks, documents how the assessment will tap these factors and how the assumptions of task difficulty were confirmed empirically.

The third part of the report provides includes three chapters. Chapters 7 and 8 provide assessment frameworks for two skill domains where development failed to yield approaches to measurement that were sufficiently robust to meet the criteria set out for inclusion in the international comparative assessment. These chapters also set out what was learned during the process of development and validation. Chapter 7 presents the framework for teamwork and chapter 8 presents the framework for practical cognition. Chapter 9 provides the assessment framework developed by the Educational Testing Service (ETS) for measuring information and communication technology literacy. Although it was not available soon enough to inform the design of the ALL study, pilot testing has revealed that the framework is viable and the approach to measurement yields robust estimates that would meet the demanding criteria set for ALL.

In each case these skill domain were not assessed in the ALL either because the available theory was judged to be inadequate, the approaches to measurement did not yield valid, reliable, interpretable or comparable measures, or could not yield valid, reliable, interpretable or comparable measures within the constraints

of a test administered within the context of a household survey.

Why is this study important?

The study is important because it provides information on what was measured in ALL and how it was measured. This information is needed to interpret what the ALL study results mean. Without this background readers would over-interpret the results based on what can currently be assessed.

The study also provides an overview of the theory that underpins the ALL study and why the results should be of interest to policy makers.

What does the study conclude?

The study concludes several things, including that:

Having valid, reliable, comparable and interpretable estimates of adult skill is important to addressing issues in several important labour market, social, educational and health policy domains.

the theory, and approaches to measurement within the context of a household survey, exist that would support the inclusion of four skill domains: prose literacy, document literacy, numeracy and problem solving justify

that theory existed to justify inclusion of the other measures but that the available approaches to measurement were not able to meet the demanding standards set for the ALL study. This is the case for ICT literacy, practical intelligence and teamwork.

Publication information

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