
LEARNING

INDICATOR TYPE: Social

DOMAIN: Learning / Language Aptitude

Formal schooling is not the only way to gauge the learning potential or attainment of a region's population. Literacy has long been used to gauge the well being of countries, particularly in developing countries. While developed countries have in the last half-century made great progress in terms of public literacy, largely as a result of public schooling, simple literacy is no longer an accurate indicator of how well individuals are coping with learning challenges. As a result, developed countries have begun to shift to a literacy scale (IALS) to ascertain the literacy aptitude of the public in order to determine the degree of frustration their citizens will face in negotiating the challenges of living in this modern information age.

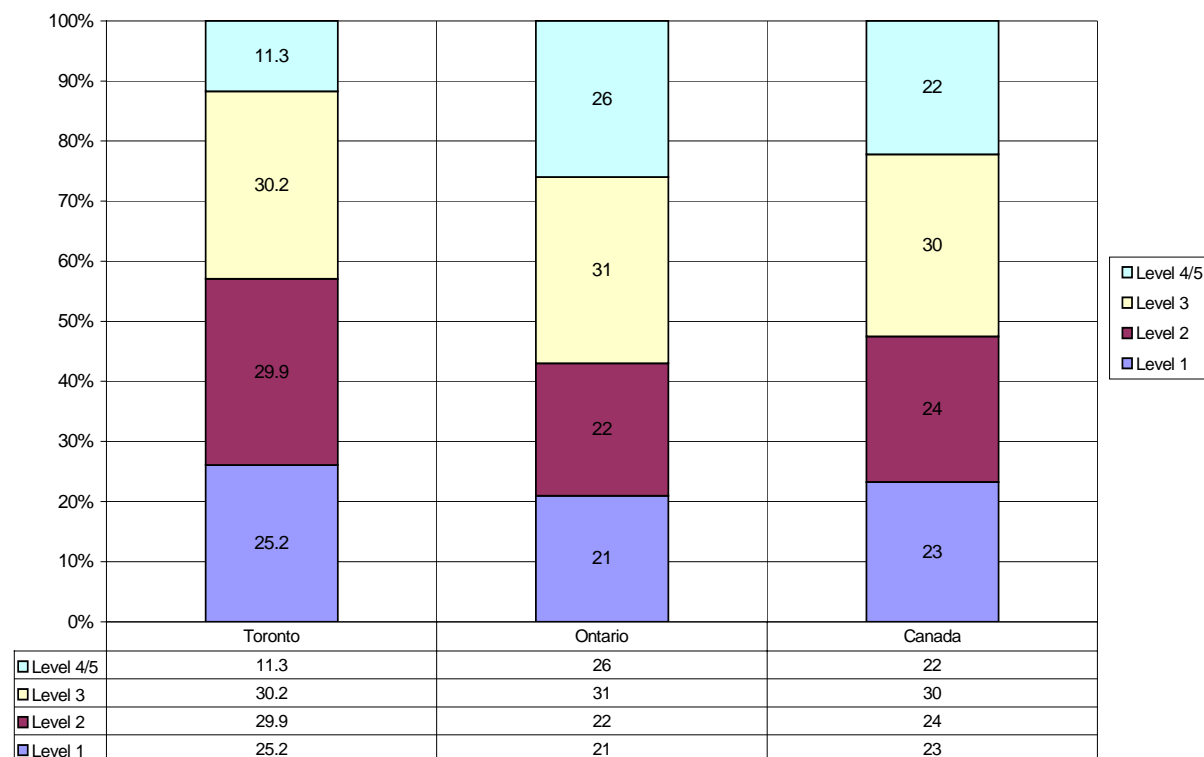
Description: The IALS (conducted by Statistics Canada in 1994) looked at adults 16 years and over and discovered that 24% of adults in Toronto have low level literacy skills, a factor which limits their participation in society and in the economy. They may be unable to comprehend written materials or sophisticated instructions a fact, which has consequences for employability and health, (*due to errors in medication*). Indirect effects can include reduced access to health care and social services as well as poverty from unemployment.

*The International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) in 1994 identified three type of literacy--prose literacy, document literacy and quantitative literacy. Based on the research conducted twenty two percent of Canadians are at level 1. These people have difficulty reading and have few basic skills or strategies for decoding or working with text. Twenty six percent of Canadians are at level 2. These are people with limited skills who read but do not read well. Canadians at this level can deal only with material that is simple and clearly laid out. Thirty three percent of Canadians are at level 3, which means that hey can read well but may have problems with complex tasks (minimum skill level for successful participation in society) Only 20% of Canadians are at levels 4 and 5. These people have strong literacy skills, including a wide range of reading skills and many strategies for dealing with complex material.
[<http://www.nald.ca/nls/nlsid/fact3.htm>]

TRENDS: Toronto adults had lower levels of literacy than Canada but Ontario had higher literacy levels than Canada. The 24% of Torontonians who fall in the lowest level of literacy will experience serious difficulties with printed material and will be able to identify themselves as such. The 32% who fall in the second lowest level are capable of dealing with simple and clearly laid out material, however individuals in this level often do not recognize their own limitations. The 33% of Torontonians at level three can read well but may have problems with more complex tasks. This level is considered by many countries to be the minimum skill level for successful participation in society. Only 11% of Torontonians are at level 4 or 5. These individuals can meet most reading demands and can handle new challenges as they emerge.

Difficulties: The result for Toronto must be interpreted with caution as the national pattern relating literacy to demography may not apply because of the large population who speak neither official languages. This factor was not included in the calculation of small area estimates

Distribution of Literacy Skills (Document Scale) for Adults aged 16 + , 1994



Source: Toronto District Health Council, Toronto Profile III

The Literacy and Homelessness Project has worked since 1994 to make literacy accessible and relevant to people who are transient, socially isolated, homeless, and under housed in Toronto. In developing literacy and homeless practice in Toronto, the project was able to draw on the experiences of innovative programs like Beat the Street, Parkdale Activity and Recreation Centre, Street Heaven Literacy, the First nation Adult Educational Project, Graffiti Jeunesse and the Meeting Place’s Black Homeless Initiative Project. Staff from these programs formed the Projects advisory group and provides training for expertise. [<http://ww.nald.ca/schalp/homeless/gsl.htm>]

In 1995, there were at least ten drop-ins, shelters, literacy programs, and institutions in Toronto doing some form of literacy and homeless work. These shelters were not properly administered and as a result homelessness learners had a low profile in the literacy community. In 1996 the first literacy and homelessness program was funded by the National Literacy Secretariat. It has since expanded to become Toronto’s Main Literacy and Homelessness Program. Other notable programs include, Beat the Street, Street Heaven, The Adult Basis

Education Unit of Toronto Board of Education (ABEU), Parkdale Activity and Recreational Centre (PARC), and Graffiti-Jeunesse.
[<http://www.nald.ca/schalp/homeless/g2.htm>]

Note: While the 1989 Survey of Literacy Skills used daily activities, (LSUDA) looked at literacy among adults 16-69. Although the IALS is not directly comparable to the LUSDA, it provides an update on the status of literacy in the residents of Canada and the Provinces. Ontario Adult Literacy survey October 29, 1999 by Statistic Canada Catalogue No 89M0018XCB