

Glossary of Terms

Adult Literacy and Life-skills Survey: What IALSS is often known as in many countries, including Canada (*see also International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey*)

Causality: The extent to which one variable is dependent on ("caused by") the other

Cohort: A group of subjects that is studied within a defined period

Construct: A concept of a thing that cannot be directly observed or measured, but can be indirectly by measuring observable qualities which, taken together, then define the construct. For example, literacy is a construct which is defined by measuring skills that have been identified as components of literacy. (*Garger, 2011; Research Assessment Advisor.com, 2009*)

Correlation: A measure of the relationship between two variables

Criterion-referenced test: On a criterion-referenced test, each individual test-taker's score is compared with a fixed standard, not with the performance of the other test-takers. Criterion referencing is often done by defining proficiency levels in advance. The percentage of test-takers at each proficiency level depends on how well the test-takers perform on the test. Many achievement tests are criterion referenced; students pass or fail based on whether or not they meet the defined standard.

Decoding skills: Skills required to identify spoken or written letters and words, and to understand their meaning in the context in which they are used. (*CCL, 2008*)

Document literacy: The knowledge and skills required to locate and use information contained in various formats, including job applications, payroll forms, transportation schedules, maps, tables and charts. (*Statistics Canada*)

Empirical: Information gained through observation or experiment

Face validity: The validity of a test 'at face value' – it looks as though the test will effectively measure what it sets out measure. (*see also: Test validity*)

Information communication technologies (ICT): Education tools including computers, software and the internet. (*adapted from CCL, 2008*)

International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) — 1994: The world's first internationally comparative survey of adult literacy, which created comparable literacy

profiles across national, linguistic and cultural boundaries. Proficiencies were rated and reported on the basis of five levels: Levels 1 through 5. (*CCL, 2008*)

International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey (IALSS) — 2003: The IALSS built on its predecessor, the 1994 International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS). It measured Canadian adults' knowledge and skills in four domains: prose literacy, document literacy, numeracy, and problem solving. Proficiencies were rated and reported on the basis of five levels: Levels 1 through 5. (*CCL, 2008*)

International Survey of Reading Skills (ISRS) — 2005: Additional clinical reading tests administered to a sample of adults who had participated in the 2003 IALSS. (*CCL, 2008*)

Item analysis: A set of statistical techniques used to describe the relationships between an item or set of items in a test and the total score or underlying skills. Characteristics such as the difficulty of the item and how well it discriminates among those with differing ability levels are part of item analysis. (*Mary Lou Lennon*)

Item Response Theory: A statistical technique whereby test and item scores are used to indirectly measure a latent variable (*see also Construct*). For example, test items on a survey are used to determine a person's literacy level.

Large-scale assessment: A survey designed to provide information about populations or sub-populations rather than individuals. Large-scale adult literacy assessments provide information about the distribution of skills and background characteristics in the population being studied (for example, adults between the ages of 16 and 65) as well as subgroups within that population (for example, minority groups or young adults under the age of 25). (*Mary Lou Lennon*)

Latent class analysis (LCA): A process by which individuals are organized into groups based on their patterns of response to a set of background questions. (*CCL, 2008*)

Literacy: Understanding, evaluating, using and engaging with written texts to participate in society, to achieve one's goals, and to develop one's knowledge and potential (*PIAAC Literacy Expert Group, 2009*)

Literacy Levels: In IALS and its successors, literacy is seen as a continuum in which respondents fall into one of the following five levels:

Level 1: Able to read relatively short text to locate a single piece of information which is identical to or synonymous with the information given in the question or directive. If plausible but incorrect information is present in the text, it tends not to be located near the correct information.

Level 2: Able to locate a single piece of information in the text; however, several distracters or plausible but incorrect pieces of information may be present, or low-level inferences may be required. Other tasks require the respondent to integrate two or more pieces of information or to compare and contrast easily identifiable information based on a criterion provided in the question or directive.

Level 3: Can make literal or synonymous matches between the text and information given in the task, or to make matches that require low-level inferences. Can also integrate information from dense or lengthy text that contains no organizational aids such as headings, and generate responses based on information that can be easily identified in the text. Distracting information is present, but is not located near the correct information.

Levels 4: Able to perform multiple-feature matches and to integrate or synthesize information from complex or lengthy passages. Capable of complex inferences, able to process conditional information.

Level 5: Can find information in dense text which contains a number of plausible distracters, make high-level inferences, use specialized background knowledge and contrast complex information.

(adapted from *Statistics Canada, 2005, p. 16*)

Longitudinal study: A study of a group of people conducted over an extended period of time.

Norm-referenced test: This method of reporting test scores provides information about the performance of a test-taker in relation to one or more groups of test-takers (called "norm groups")

Numeracy: The ability to access, use, interpret, and communicate mathematical information and ideas, in order to engage in and manage the mathematical demands of a range of situations in adult life. (*PIAAC Numeracy Expert Group, p. 21*)

Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies: An Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) initiative which aims to collect information on the skills and competencies of residents from 27 countries, including Canada. (*Statistics Canada, 2010*)

Problem-solving: Involves goal-directed thinking and action in situations for which no routine solution procedure is available. The problem-solver has a more or less well-defined goal, but does not immediately know how to reach it. The understanding of the

problem situation and its step-by-step transformation, based on planning and reasoning, constitute the process of problem solving. (*Statistics Canada, 2005*)

Prose literacy: The knowledge and skills needed to understand and use information from texts including editorials, news stories, brochures and instruction manuals. (*Statistics Canada, 2005*)

Psychometrics: The design and use of quantitative testing to measure people's knowledge, abilities, attitudes, and personality traits.

Randomized control trial study: A study seeking to determine the effect of an intervention by randomly assigning study participants into groups – one group receiving the intervention, the other not.

Structured question: A question that can only be answered in a specific way (e.g. true/false, yes/no, selecting from a list, rating options).

Sub-skills: Components of a skill, specific behaviours in which people engage in order to be effective at a skill. (British Council)

Test validity: The extent to which a test measures what it claims to measure (*see also: Face validity*)

Acronyms (*some from CCL, 2008*)

ALL Adult Literacy and Life-skills Survey (*see also IALSS*)

IALS International Adult Literacy Survey

IALSS International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey (*see also ALL*)

ICT Information communication technologies

ISRS International Survey of Reading Skills

LCA Latent class analysis

OECD Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

PIAAC Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies

PIRLS Progress in International Reading Literacy Study

PISA Programme for International Student Assessment

PSE Post-secondary education

Sources:

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