

NATIONAL REPORT GERMANY

NATIONAL REPORT ON QUESTIONNAIRES AND INTERVIEWS RESULTS



Training Access

Partner organization: Wisamar Bildungsgesellschaft gGmbH

NATIONAL REPORT

PROJECT INFORMATION

PROJECT:

TRAINING ACCESS

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INTRODUCTION

GENERAL INFORMATION – NATIONAL BACKGROUND

14 % of the working age population in Germany are so called "functional illiterates" - that are 7,5 million. This was one of the alarming results of the LEO study financed by the German Federal Agency of Education and Research which explored the literacy of adults at the lower levels of competence¹ in 2010.

What does "functional illiteracy" mean? The Federal Agency defined it in its campaign "Alphabund":
 ""Functional illiteracy" is given when the literacy competences of adults are lower than those which are minimally necessary and taken for granted in order to meet the demands of society. [...] ... if a person is not able to read from a simple text one or more directly contained information in a meaningful way and/or is at a comparable level of competence in writing. UNESCO speaks of functional illiteracy when full participation in reading, writing and arithmetic is not achieved. This definition is high and difficult to operationalise."²

For the operationalization in an implementable study design, the LEO staff defined 6 so called alpha level. Illiteracy in the strictest sense of the word affects more than 4 % of the working-age population (Alpha Level 1-2). This is when people can read, understand and write single words - but not whole sentences. People affected also have to read standard words letter by letter. Functional illiteracy affects an accumulated 14 % of working-age population (Alpha Level 1-3). The term is used when people can read or write single sentences, but not continuous text - even if it is brief. Poor writing skills - despite the command of standard vocabulary - affect another 25 % of the working-age population, particularly where spelling is concerned (Alpha Level 4). This is the case when at sentence and text level, even with commonly used words, people read and write slowly and/or with mistakes. There is no sufficient command of spelling, in the form taught until the end of primary school. People concerned often typically avoid reading and writing.

According to the LEO results, more men (60 %) than women (40 %) are functional illiterates (alpha level 1-3). The most significant influence on whether someone is affected by functional illiteracy is - not surprisingly - the educational background. According to the Federal Statistical Office, in Germany only about 4 % are without a school-leaving certificate (data from 2008-2017³). Of these, however, just under 60 % are functional illiterates, and a further 27 % can only write incorrectly. The largest group among the functional illiterates with 48% are people with low school-leaving qualifications ("Förderschule" or "Hauptschule" in Germany). What is surprising is that even the competences of 19 % of people with intermediate and 12 % with higher school education do not exceed alpha level 3.

Another surprising result is that 57 % of the functional illiterates in Germany are employed. Conversely, this means that 12 % of all employed persons have very low basic skills. Among the unemployed people, there are 32 % at alpha level 1 to 3 and further 30 % at alpha level 4, so in total more than 60 % who cannot adequate write and read.

¹ Unless otherwise stated, all results of the LEO study are taken from the following source: Hrsg. Bundesverband Alphabetisierung und Grundbildung e.V.: Alphabetisierung und Grundbildung, Band 10, Waxmann Verlag GmbH, Münster 2012

² Grotlüschen, Anke; Riekman, Wibke (2011): leo. - Level-One Studie. Presseheft. S. 13

³ <https://www.destatis.de/DE/Themen/Gesellschaft-Umwelt/Bildung-Forschung-Kultur/Bildungsstand/Tabellen/bildungsabschluss.html>, last view 3.4.2019



NATIONAL CONTEXT

EXPLORE NATIONAL STRATEGIES

The federal government and the governments of the federal states have reacted to the results of the LEO study by proclaiming the National Decade of Literacy and Basic Education 2016 – 2026, the so-called "AlphaDekade"⁴. The aim is to significantly improve the reading and writing skills of adults in order to enable them to participate fully in society. Measures have been and are being supported and financed in various fields to reduce functional illiteracy and promote basic education:

1. **Public Relations**

On the one hand, this is about shaking up and motivating those affected to face the problem and improve their skills. On the other hand, the population in general and special occupational groups in particular should be informed and sensitised in order to be able to support those affected and point out offers. Examples are projects such as iCHANCE⁵ or campaigns such as "Mein Schlüssel zur Welt"⁶ (My key to the world).

2. **Research**

Further research projects were initiated and supported during the AlphaDekade like the follow-up LEO study in 2018 financed by the German Federal Agency of Education and Research. The results will be presented and published in 2019.

3. **Learning offers**

As part of the AlphaDekade and on the base of the LEO results as well as long teaching experiences, the German Adult Education association creates framework curricula for reading, writing and calculating. Furthermore, they developed diagnostics ("Alpha-Kurzdiagnostik"⁷) to evaluate the alpha level of a person in a short way. These curricula are implemented in concrete training materials for the classroom (manuals and structured exercises⁸) as well as learning platform for online learning or blended learning concepts ("VHS-Lernportal"⁹). The online implemented "Alpha-Kurzdiagnostik" is the entry point for every learner into the learning platform, identifies the personal alpha level and assigns suitable exercises.

Besides the developing and creating of these basic teaching and learning materials, liveworld- and workplace-orientated offers of basic education of local and regional initiatives were and are supported in a wide variety of projects¹⁰.

⁴ <https://www.alphadekade.de/>

⁵ <https://www.ichance.de/>

⁶ <https://www.mein-schlüssel-zur-welt.de/>

⁷ <https://www.grundbildung.de/unterricht/alpha-kurzdiagnostik>

⁸ <https://www.grundbildung.de/unterrichten/>

⁹ <https://www.vhs-lernportal.de/>

¹⁰ Overview about and links to the financed projects: <https://www.alphadekade.de/de/projektdatenbank-1711.html>



4. Structures and networking

The aim of these measures is to network existing offers with each other and to make them more widely known. Therefore, the construction and the work of various local and regional networks was and is supported¹¹.

Furthermore, the "ALFA-Mobil"¹² was launched as part of the AlphaDekade. The ALFA-Mobil is on its way all over Germany to advertise reading and writing courses. Together with local course providers, the project staff advise adults who want to read and write better and inform the public about literacy and basic education. The ALFA-Mobil is operated by the Federal Association for Literacy and Basic Education in Germany.

The "ALFA-TELEFON"¹³, also operated by the Federal Association, offers telephone advice for those affected and their relatives and can help with concrete offers.

SURVEY & INTERVIEW RESULTS

The findings summarised below are results of the surveys and interviews conducted in Germany with various actors in the field of basic education (learners, teachers, organisers), combined with results of the LEO study. The findings summarised below are results of the surveys and interviews conducted in Germany with different stakeholders in the field of basic education (learners, teachers, organisers), combined with results of the LEO study. Before presenting in particular the topics that are relevant for further implementation in the Training Access project, there is first an overview of participants in the surveys and interviews.

Participants in the surveys and interviews

In the first stage of the needs analysis, **the survey**, data on people in the various target groups was collected by means of questionnaires. The direct target group of the project, people with low literacy, was interviewed with printed questionnaires, which were partly filled out with help. Unlike in other European countries, low literacy in Germany does not automatically mean being unemployed (see above). For this reason, not only unemployed people were included in the sample, but the focus was primarily on the level of education.³⁰ people aged 19 to 67 years participated with the following distribution:

People with low literacy

Gender

Male	Female	diverse
12	17	1

Educative Level

Without education	Primary school	Secondary school	others
3		25	2

¹¹ Overview about and links to the financed projects: <https://www.alphadekade.de/de/projektbank-1711.html>

¹² <https://alfa-mobil.de/>

¹³ <https://alfa-telefon.de/>



Unemployed since ...

< 6 months	6 to 12 months	> 12 months	employed	others
2	3	18	5	3

The survey of the participants of the other target groups (10 educators, 8 responsible persons in educational centres) was carried out with online questionnaires. The distribution was as follows:

Educators**Years of teaching experience**

< 5	5 – 10	10-20	20-30	>30
1	3	2	2	2

Type of the current educational Institution

Type of institution	Quantity of answers
Secondary school:	0
Further and higher education	0
Vocational Education and Training	2
Adult Education Centre	8

Responsibilities**Years of management experience**

< 5	5 – 10	10-20	20-30	>30
2	6	1	1	0

Type of the current educational Institution

Type of institution	Quantity of answers
Secondary school:	0
Further and higher education	0
Vocational Education and Training	1
Adult Education Centre	9

Type of education provided (choose one or both)

Formal	Non-formal
6	8

The **in-depth interviews** were conducted face-to-face with all participants. At the time of the interview, the educators and responsible persons worked at the Adult Education Centre "Volkshochschule Leipzig" (2), at the Adult Education Centre "Volkshochschule Burgenlandkreis" (2) and for the Literacy Coordination Office in Saxony "koAlpha" (1).

An in-depth group interview was conducted with 5 affected persons (4 male, 1 female), all participants in a literacy course at an adult education centre in Zeitz (Burgenlandkreis).

What were the results of the survey and interviews? Here is the summary on the relevant topics:

Everyday problems and strategies of affected persons

Affected persons try to avoid **reading and writing**. They often find it a little easier to read than to write, but official letters, information from the children's school, package inserts of medicines, etc. are mostly too complicated to understand for them. It is even more difficult for them to fill out forms (e.g. at an administration or at the doctor's). In the personal interviews, those affected confirm the avoidance strategies listed in the literature: They pretend to have forgotten their glasses, or even bandage their arms to pretend they have been injured. This allows them to ask their counterparts to fill out a form without having to reveal their reading and writing difficulties.

If those affected have to write something, it is important to them to write as correctly as possible in order not to attract attention. But that's the problem, of course, because they can't write correctly - and so they avoid it where it's possible. The only exception is personal communication with messengers like WhatsApp, even with people who don't know anything about the problem. Nearly all interviewed people confirm that this is where the Messenger function helps, which suggests complete and - emphasized by all - correctly written words.

For **basic mathematical skills**, it's more difficult to identify the concrete problems and lacks. The results in the questionnaires are very different and the spectrum ranges from people who, according to their statements, do not use any mathematical operations in their everyday lives to those who can also deal with multiplications, divisions and proportions.

Here the personal conversations with teachers were more revealing. Even though calculating plays a rather subordinate role in courses of basic education, some teacher have experiences - and it's alarming: Some participants reveal very fundamental problems already in the number range up to 10. They lack basic quantity concepts and even the simplest addition tasks seem to be unsolvable. This lengthy process requires a lot of patience and perseverance from both teachers and learners.

In the **field of digital competences**, the fewest statements can be made. Among those surveyed, there are some who have no computer skills at all and therefore consider their skills to be "non-existent". Others say they use some programs, use the Internet for communication (especially social networks), job search or information, and are reasonably familiar with the corresponding applications. Some call themselves experts - especially in the field of gaming.

Among the interviewed teachers, there was no one who explicitly teaches digital competences. However, some use learning platforms in the classroom. They told that some participants already have major problems with the registration process. However, when this hurdle has been overcome (and it is not a hurdle for everyone), the participants find the online tasks a pleasant change and are highly motivated.



Participation in courses of basic education

When asked about what prevents people from attending basic education courses, most of them say in the survey that they do/did not have time or have/had other, more important things to do. The reasons given were also that they did not know where to find such courses or had no one to guide them. Very few of them stated that they lacked motivation or interest. (However, the problem of social desirability should be taken into account. Although the surveys were anonymous, they were conducted face-to-face.)

What motivates an individual to participate in a course after all? In the survey, most people indicated that they hoped for new job opportunities and/or to earn more money, or that they wanted to develop personally. Someone put it in a nutshell: "I finally want to be able to read and write."

Another reason was not included in the questionnaire, but was mentioned explicitly by some: They want to be able to help their children at school and with their homework. In an interview, a young mother explained that her daughter should be better off than herself and that she wanted to support her in this. For this reason, after many years, she has overcome herself to start a course.

The personal reasons that lead to a course participation are very individual and yet they are always related to similar areas of life:

- Job (achieving qualifications, finding a job, improving a position, no longer having to hide ...)
- Family (helping children in school; understanding letters and writing notes for school; being able to read to children or grandchildren ...)

The aspect of no longer having to be ashamed or hide is also very important.



Motivation of Learners

It is not surprising that most respondents say they learn the most when they listen to others, when they are shown something, or when they do something themselves. At the same time, many say that they try less when they see no benefit in what they learn.

How do the teachers in the course deal with this? How do they arouse curiosity, how do they motivate? The **relation to the participants' environment** seems to be an important key - all interviewed educators emphasize this. They select topics that have a direct relation to the participants' living environment or they establish this relation; they explain the importance and usefulness of the topic; they focus on the exchange between the participants, use stories from their own lives or exciting other examples to explain the topic.

A second key is the **good relationship between teacher and learner**. It is important for all educators to give their participants personal feedback, not only to mark mistakes, but to explain them, and to highlight individual learning progress. These are often very small advances, confirmed by both teachers and course organisers. Some speak out what is also mentioned in the LEO study: For some participants, the limits of personal possibilities are reached. This have to be accepted, too.

The importance of the personal relationship in the course is illustrated by the story of an interviewee. He had already attended another course. The teacher could not continue (because it took place in the framework of a project that ended), but promised the participants another teacher. Most of the participants then stopped the course (and the learning) because they did not want a "stranger" to whom they had to reveal themselves (once again).

The teachers interviewed are aware of their role: they encourage an open, trusting atmosphere in the course and react immediately to questions and problems that arise. They use a variety of methods to ensure that participants understand and apply the knowledge. Many also rely on playful elements.

CONCLUSION

The main results and their significance for the implementation of the Training Access project are briefly summarized in the following points:

Relation to everyday life

In the materials that are developed, used examples and tasks should be closely related to the living environment and everyday life. This opens up the usefulness and applicability of the knowledge. In order to ensure that the reality of those affected is actually represented, they should be integrated into the development and the test as far as is practicable.

Individual feedback

The learners need feedback. Since learning progress is often slow, feedback must be designed accordingly. It is important not only to mark mistakes, but also to enable the learner to correct them and learn from them.

For online learning materials, it is essential to evaluate the learner's starting level and determine the individual entry point. In this way, demotivation due to over- or understrain can be avoided.



Embedding in and linking to existing learning offers

In Germany, there are already many learning opportunities in the field of basic education, both online and offline. Maybe, the Training Access project can take up existing concepts/materials and transfer it for the partner countries. On the other hand, it is important to link the offer from this project with the existing offers in Germany in order to give it greater popularity.

In addition, it is important to offer teachers a supportive handbook on how and for what purpose the online materials developed in the project can be used in classroom courses.

Awakening and strengthening motivation

There are still many people whose basic skills are very low but whose motivation is not (yet) high enough to change anything about them. It should be the aim of the Training Access project to reach these people by...

... using targeted dissemination to draw attention to the project and its offers.

... using local, regional and national networks to link the offer from this project. At the same time, it might be useful to link national contacts and services on the Training Access platform in order to show those affected possibilities of support in "real life".

... providing motivational examples on the Training Access platform and in social networks, etc. These could be stories of people who did the first step into a course of basic education or short, funny clips about problems of everyday life or similar.

