

Knowledge on initial literacy training

Overview of literature on literacy and second language acquisition



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1. Introduction

The aim of this document is to provide an overview of literature on initial literacy training methods.

The literature survey was conducted by searching databases and the Internet, and manually searching literature indexes. The overview does not cover all literature on the subject.

The searches in the various databases gave a total of 21,165 hits. In addition, we had 50,702 hits in Google and Google Scholar. Initially, we adjusted the searches in order to produce more relevant hits. We then roughly sorted the references based on title and went through the remaining references based on available abstracts. Sixty references were considered to be relevant. In addition, we have included 35 articles and books that we evaluated based solely on the title or the author.

The literature is presented in the reference list at the end of the report. The literature has not been read in its entirety, and we have not evaluated the methodological quality of the references or synthesised conclusions.

Project lead was Pernille Birkeland.

2. Background

There is relatively little literature on basic reading and writing training/initial literacy acquisition among adult immigrants with little or no education, where the training takes place wholly or partly in a second language. The literature that exists is not easy to find, since it is not always clearly categorized and coded, i.e. many different terms are used in connection with the subject. Much of the available literature on the subject is also about children and adolescents. The literature on adults has not previously been surveyed or collected in order to produce an overview.

Such an overview, however, has been called for by those working in the literacy field, both in relation to teaching and in connection with issues related to those who need training.

Vox therefore initiated a project aimed at mapping literature on the field of basic reading and writing training for adult immigrants with little or no education. The project will also be useful for further development of the field, since the project may uncover any thematic gaps in the research literature.

3. Method

Ensuring that existing and relevant research is included in the literature search is one of the challenges of producing knowledge summaries. We have therefore taken a methodically flexible approach. This means that various types of literature and studies based on different types of methodology have been included.

The project aimed to identify and collect existing literature in the field. The literature has therefore not been reviewed or evaluated, and the overview is not considered to be a 'systematic review'.¹

Databases

We performed systematic literature searches in the following databases:

- Bibsys
- Eric
- Idunn.no
- International Bibliography of the Social Sciences
- ISI Web of Knowledge
- Social Care Online
- Social Service Abstracts
- Sociological abstracts
- SpringerLink.com
- Frida/Cristin
- OECD iLibrary
- Swepub
- Uppsök - examensarbeten och uppsatser i fulltext
- ArtikelSök
- Karlsruher virtual catalog
- Campbell library
- International Bibliography of the Social Sciences
- Social Care Online
- SpringerLink
- Jstor
- Open Gray

We also searched these websites:

Google.no

- Scholar.google.no

We manually searched in the following books and articles²:

- Alfa og omega
- Att utveckla litteracitet i vuxen ålder Adult refugee learners with limited
- Literacy: needs and effective responses, Teaching Adult Second Language Learners Who Are Emergent Readers
- Testing the Reading Ability of Low Educated ESOL Learners
- Using Oral Language Skills to Build on the Emerging Literacy of Adult English Learners

¹ 'Systematic review' is a literature review based on a specific issue, which identifies, evaluates, selects and synthesises all research that is relevant to the issue.

² The books and articles are listed in the references.

Search terms

The search terms were selected based on a review of a selection of literature on initial literacy training. Many different terms and words are used in relation to the subject, and the list of search terms is therefore quite extensive. The use of search terms was also adjusted during the process. The searches we conducted at the start of the project were too vague, and resulted in too many hits. We have used various combinations of the words in our searches in order to produce more precise hits.

- | | |
|--|-----------------------|
| • Illitera* | • Refugee |
| • Literacy | • Language barriers |
| • Basic literacy | • Non-native speaker* |
| • Second language | • Aplphabetization |
| • Method* | • Analfabetism* |
| • Alphabet* | • Andrespråk |
| • ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) | • Analfabet* |
| • Adult | • Alfabet* |
| • New literacy | • Alfabetisering* |
| • Immigrant* | • Andraspråk |
| • Illiteracy* | • *vux* |
| • Literacy proficiency | • Läskunnighet* |

The literature search was conducted in the period January 2013 to January 2014. Literature published after January 2014 is not included.

Article selection

We have also made other refinements to the literature searches. By using inclusion and exclusion criteria, we ensure that the literature is relevant to the topic and relatively up-to-date.

Inclusion criteria:

- The literature must relate to adults.
- The literature must relate to adults with little or no education.
- The literature is limited to English, Norwegian, Swedish and Danish.
- The literature must have been published between 1990 and 2014.

Exclusion criteria:

- Literature relating to children and adolescents.
- Literature published before 1990.

Following the literature search, project staff members independently of each other evaluated articles and abstracts in relation to relevance and themes. The evaluations were made based on available abstracts. When disagreement arose about a reference, it was discussed, and either included or excluded.

4. Main findings

Having evaluated the literature, we were left with 60 relevant articles, which were then coded according to the thematic focus of the content. The following is an overview of the different topics we found*:

Discussion article on the actual training/method	22
Qualitative study: the participant's perspective	20
Classroom experiences and what works/does not work in a teaching context	18
Qualitative study: the teacher's perspective	13
Discussion article on the subject area	10
Literature/knowledge summary	6
Specialist literature for teachers	4
Documentation, governance and organisation	2
Policy briefs	1

*Some of the literature was sorted under more than one topic.

In the literature review, it was evident that a great deal of research is being conducted on second-language learning, but only a small part of this research relates to initial literacy acquisition.

Much of the literature focuses on the classroom experiences of participants and teachers, and many of the articles are written by the same people, which is a further indication that this is a fairly limited area of research.

A large part of the literature consists of Swedish student assignments at university level.

Many of the articles address the challenges of organising training for those who cannot read and write in their own language. The challenges lie both in the framework surrounding the training and the complexity of the training situation as the adult participants have to adapt to a learning environment, perhaps for the first time, and also learn to read and write.

Table with overview of articles

Surname of author	Discussion article on the actual training/method	Discussion article on the subject area	Literature/knowledge summary	Qualitative study: the participant's perspective	Qualitative study: the teacher's perspective	Specialist literature for teachers	Classroom experiences and what works/does not work in a teaching context	Documentation, governance and organisation	Policy briefs
Abadazi (1994)			x				x		
Ahmbad (2011)				x	x		x		
Alver og Dregelid (2001)		x							
Alver og Lahaug (1999)						x			
Andersson og Niemi (2005)					x				
Antby (2008)				x					
Bager (2011)	x				x				
Bergström (2012)	x				x				
Bigelow (2010)			x						
Björlin (2011)				x					
Brandlöv (2010)					x				
Brod (1999)	x	x							
Burgoyne og Hull (2007)	x						x		
Burgoyne og Hull (2007)				x			x		
Burt & Schaetzel (2008)	x						x		x
Christensen & Kabaci (2004)	x						x		
Croydan (2005)						x			
Davidsson (2010)				x					
Fish, Knell og Buchanan (2007)							x		
Florez og Terrill (2003)							x		
Franker (2004)			x						
Franker (2005)						x			
Franker (2005)	x				x				
Franker (2007)	x								x
Franker (2007)	x				x				
Franker (2011)	x	x	x	x	x				
Franker og Skeppstedt (2005)						x			
Franker og Skeppstedt (2007)		x							x
Gulliksson (2005)	x				x				
Hagem (2011)				x					x
Hedström (2005)							x		
Juul (2006)							x		
Knudsen (2002)					x		x		
Kruidenier (2002)	x		x						

Surname of author	Discussion article on the actual training/ method	Discussion article on the subject area	Literature/ knowledge summary	Qualitative study: the participant's perspective	Qualitative study: the teacher's perspective	Specialist literature for teachers	Classroom experiences and what works/ does not work in a teaching context	Documentation, governance and organisation	Policy briefs
Kurvers, Van Hout og Vallen (2009)	x			x					
Lado (1991)				x					
Larsson (2011)				x					
Lindsjörn (2012)	x			x	x				
Lundberg (2005)							x		
Lundgren (2005)	x			x					
Lund-Persson (2012)	x			x					
Malm (2005)							x		
Marshall og Decapua (2009)							x		
Mörnerud (2004)				x					
Mörling (2010)						x			
Nordström (2012)	x			x	x				
Oldberg (1994)	x								
Penttilä (213)					x		x		
Pettersson (2003)		x							
Peyton (2000)	x						x		
Rydén (2007)		x		x					
Shameem, McDermott, Martin-Blaker og Carryer (2002)	x								
Skoglund (2012)	x			x					
Svendsen (1999)				x			x		
Svendsen og Furre (1998)				x			x		
Trupke-Bastidas og Poulos (2007)	x						x		
Van de Kraats, Kurvers og Young-Scholten (2005)		x							
Vinogradov (2008)							x		
Vinogradov og Bigelow (2010)	x		x						
Wall og Leong (2010)	x	x							
Wedin (2010)		x							
White, Watts og Trlin (2001)		x		x					

What does the literature say?

The articles contain many good tips on how to structure and execute the training. Some of the more common aspects include:

Teaching:

- Teaching with native language support³: This is particularly important at an early stage in the learning.
- The teacher's role in teaching: The participants should be involved in their own learning through discussing expectations, developing language training strategies and other details of the training. The teacher must acknowledge the participants' cultural background and experiences, and relate the teaching to this.
- The training must have a utilitarian value for the participants: this can be done by linking the teaching to the participants' lives by using authentic and relevant texts. The participants should be given the opportunity to communicate with native language speakers both in a working environment and at school.
- Reading strategies: In the teaching, both synthetic and analytical methods should be used. Both the top-down and bottom-up approach should also be used. This entails both whole word reading and the phonics method.
- Flexibility in the teaching: The participants must be given the opportunity to develop skills and take part in activities that they consider to be meaningful.
- Training in social studies: At an early stage, the participants should be taught about the society in which they are going to settle.
- Use of pictures: Using pictures (preferably photographs) can be extremely beneficial in initial literacy teaching. The pictures should be personal, and challenge and stimulate the participants.

Framework surrounding the training: The literature discusses challenges such as group size, use of native language, time perspective, dividing participants into groups by language or education, and how the different elements of the framework affect the learning outcome:

- Dividing participants into groups/classes: Small groups/classes are preferred, where the participants are placed in groups according to their native language. Small classes enable more effective learning, and the participants are better able to help and support each other.
- Time pressure: Most participants need more time at school than they have available. For many women it is important that the teaching is in close proximity to where they live, and that child minders are available.

Qualification: Better qualification of teachers⁴: This can be achieved through both higher education and continued education.

³ Experiences from Nygård school: http://www.vox.no/contentassets/abc176d39fef4bb7908b4e8dba18f63c/kap2_morsmalstottet_leseoppl.pdf

⁴ From 2014, Bergen University College offers a study programme for initial literacy teachers. The programme will be evaluated by Vox.

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