

Literacy is a dynamic concept that must continue to evolve in the face of societal challenges and change. Literacy encompasses measures designed to equip learners with key reading and writing skills. Since the 1990s, the focus of literacy has been increasingly extended to cover a range of basic education concepts. Basic education refers to the knowledge, skills, and personal and social competencies that individuals need to establish their place and play an active role in our society.

Actors and their responsibilities

The following actors are working on the funding initiative with the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF):

The **project management agency** (Projektträger) from the German Aerospace Center (PT-DLR) deals with BMBF activities related to project management and research funds. Its main responsibilities include: providing advice and additional input on behalf of the BMBF; preparing, discussing and recommending funding measures; providing expert and administrative support and advice to the projects that have been allocated funding; implementing support mechanisms; supervising the advisory board; and helping to evaluate the funding initiative.

The UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) is in charge of transferring the results of the funding initiative. By acting as a **transfer office**, the institute is responsible for ensuring the sustainability of the measures and results achieved through the funding initiative. This includes establishing and maintaining a – national and international – network of joint projects and sub-projects that have received funding, as well as carrying out public relations activities.

A BMBF **advisory board** oversees activities related to the funding initiative. The board is made up of people involved in the theory and practice of education, representatives of the individual federal states (Länder) and local authorities (Kommunen), and members of civil society.

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Research on Literacy
and Basic Education

Transfer office for the German Federal
Ministry of Education and Research's
funding initiative for research and
development activities in the field of
literacy and basic education for adults

BMBF funding initiative for research and development activities in the field of literacy/basic education for adults

To mark the United Nations Literacy Decade (2003-2012), the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) has launched a funding initiative for research and expert-led development activities in the field of adult literacy/basic education during the period 2008-2012.

The main aims are as follows:

- To improve the state of current research with the aim of gaining an insight into those involved and the extent of "functional illiteracy" in Germany
- To increase the quality of support and advisory mechanisms for adults lacking basic education
- To improve the current state of research with regard to the job market's basic education requirements
- To professionalise practitioners working in the field of literacy and basic education for adults

Using sophisticated technological applications presents challenges in the world of work



Photo: Horst Uhrig

Why this funding initiative?

As in other countries, there are people living in Germany who have attended school but still have problems reading and writing. Because these people, known as functional illiterates, have failed to master the constantly evolving requirements of the written language, they lack the skills and confidence they need in order to use the written word effectively – or even at all – in the course of their daily lives and professions. This lack can seriously compromise the quality of life of those affected as they are forced into a daily cycle of exclusion and dependency.

To date, no official figures have been published to indicate how widespread functional illiteracy is in Germany. The OECD's 1995 International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) was the first study to provide any reliable indications of adults' reading skills in Germany. According to this study, 14% of those tested achieved only the lowest skill level. Individuals' success or failure within the education system is closely linked to their social background. This is confirmed not only by the results of the PISA study and the 2008 Federal Education Report, but also by the personal histories of the adults who enrol in evening classes and other further education courses to have a second chance at learning to read and write.

The aim of the United Nations Literacy Decade (UNLD) is to significantly reduce the number of (functional) illiterates worldwide by the end of the decade and to establish basic education as a universal human right. For developed countries such as Germany, this not only involves the introduction of preventive measures in schools, but also increased efforts to provide for educationally disadvantaged adults and enable basic education for all. Adequate reading and writing skills form the foundation for lifelong learning. They are necessary capacities that make citizens aware of their democratic rights and equip them to enter professional life.

Why this funding initiative?



Photos: "Das G muss weg" ("Take off the G", documentary)



Daily situations pose challenges for functional illiterates

Topics and target groups involved in the funding initiative

Funding has been allocated to a total of 27 joint projects encompassing more than 100 individual sub-projects. These joint projects – including universities, research institutes, colleges of further education, and private concerns – are currently focusing on the following:

- 1) Research into the fundamental issues and needs that adult literacy provisions entail
- 2) Research aiming to improve the efficiency and quality of support and advisory mechanisms for adults lacking basic education
- 3) Research and development activities focusing on literacy and basic education efforts in relation to the economy and the world of work
- 4) Research and development activities aimed at professionalising teachers involved in adult literacy and basic education efforts

The results achieved will be used by the following target groups:

- Literacy and basic education course providers
- Practitioners involved in literacy work
- Practitioners involved in professional training measures
- Education consultants
- Universities
- Literacy funding providers
- Businesses, civil society partners, providers of further education for professionals
- Public sector representatives
- International experts

Examples of writing by literacy course learners

Ich spiele Fußball.

ich Spile Fußball

Ich spile Fosbal

isch schpillem Fußball

Ich spilh foasbal

Ich Spelle Fußball.

Ich schpile fußball

Ich schplen f-osbal

Topics and target groups involved in the funding initiative