

Adults' Readiness to Learn as a Predictor of Literacy Skills

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THE STUDY: investigated adults' readiness to learn, drawing upon data from the 2013 Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) Survey of Adult Skills, to address six research questions regarding the extent to which adults' readiness to learn (RtL) predicts adults' literacy and numeracy skills, skills for problem-solving in technology-rich environments, and uses of these and other skills at home and at work. The study also examined both the mediating and moderating effects of RtL on the relationships between several demographic variables -- age, gender, educational attainment, and work experience -- and literacy skills outcomes and skill uses. The investigation focused on RtL among U.S. adults (N = 5,010 adults) ages 16-65 that participated in the PIAAC study. Regression analyses were carried out using RtL as a predictor of both adult skill levels and uses of these skills.

FINDINGS: RtL was not a strong predictor of adult skill levels, but was a statistically significant predictor of adults' use of skills -- particularly skill use in home settings. Additionally, RtL partially mediated the effects of age, education, and work experience on skill levels, and also partially mediated the effect of education on the use of these skills. Further, RtL showed significant moderating effects for age and education on the outcomes of literacy and numeracy; and, RtL moderated the effects of education on several measures of skill use. Increased levels of RtL decreased the positive effect of these demographic predictors. Finally, RtL significantly moderated the effect of gender on adults' use of numeracy skills at work, with increased levels of RtL lessening the gender gap.

DISCUSSION: Readiness to learn appears to be more strongly associated with adults' skill uses than with the skills themselves -- particularly for those skills used at home. The contemporary workplace may not leverage adults' readiness to learn, by failing to provide opportunities to fully apply the range of one's skills for work tasks.

IMPLICATIONS: It is important for employers to focus on adult education practices that enhance the readiness to learn of low education workers to ameliorate negative effects of low education on skills and skill uses (e.g., assist adults in transferring skills used at home to the workplace). Employers could devote time during employee orientations to learning what skills, curiosities, and interests new employees bring to the work environment and use this knowledge to assist workers in finding meaningfulness in their work, and encourage the development of robust problem solving approaches.

RECOMMENDED RESEARCH: (1) Additional psychometric data on RtL construct are needed; (2) Examine RtL in relation to other constructs (e.g., employment status, social engagement, skill development, skill use) in diverse settings; (3) More extensive examination of the moderating and mediating effects of RtL on educational level is needed; and, (4) Examine the relationship between readiness to learn and adults' participation in various forms of adult education and training.