

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE FIELD OF LITERACY AND BASIC EDUCATION

State of the art in Liechtenstein

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1. Introduction

The following report has been compiled as part of the project TRAIN “Professionalisation of Literacy and Basic Education – Basic Modules for Teacher Training”, an EU Socrates Grundtvig funded project, in collaboration with partners from Germany, Cyprus, France, Slovenia and Ireland.

The Swiss Federation for Adult Learning (SVEB) has joined the project as a self financed partner. SVEB’s participation is funded by the Swiss government.

It is the goal of this report to give a overview of the situation regarding literacy and basic education in the Principality of Liechtenstein. As the development of literacy is at a very early stage in Liechtenstein today and thus only very limited data and information is available, the report also provides a general overview over the general situation of adult education in Liechtenstein.

Information gathering for this report took place over a five-month period from January 2007 to the end of May 2007. It involved research of documentation related to the topic and discussions with the manager of the Adult Education Liechtenstein Foundation (April 2007).

2. Development of Literacy and Basic Education in Liechtenstein

Literacy and Basic Education is a very new issue for Liechtenstein. Until recently there was no discussion on the literacy problem neither on the political nor on the level of adult education providers. There was (and there still is) no basic skills course offer in Liechtenstein (except for one course for migrants).

Influenced by the developments in the literacy field in Switzerland, in 2005 the Adult Education Liechtenstein Foundation was the first institution to initiate the discussion concerning the problem of low basic skills. It has started a project to approach the topic bottom up (we look at the project in some detail in chapter 3). As until today a general structure in Liechtenstein regarding the promotion of literacy and numeracy is still lacking, we subsequently start by giving an overview over the general structure of Adult Education.

2.1 General Structure of Adult Education in Liechtenstein

Adult education in Liechtenstein is divided into general adult education and continuing vocational training. In practical and legal terms, general adult education is distinct from vocational and school-based continuing training. It is part of the informal sector, which is itself well structured and organised. In this report we solely look at the general adult education sector.

Legal framework

The legal framework for adult education in Liechtenstein is the Adult Education Act from 1979 and the Law on the Liechtenstein Adult Education Foundation of 18 December 1998, which regulates organisation, structural and financial aspects of adult education. According to the Law, the goal of adult education is to offer adults the opportunity to acquire and

improve their knowledge and skills, to work on their own intellectual development and to increase participation in societal affairs.¹

Adult Education Liechtenstein Foundation

Based on the law the Adult Education Liechtenstein Foundation is mandated to promote and fund Adult Education in Liechtenstein. The purpose of the foundation is

- to coordinate efforts in the area of adult education and programmes and courses on offer as well as to promote cooperation between providers;
- to allocate aid available according to the annual estimate in accordance with the Adult Education Promotion Act (*Gesetz über die Förderung der Erwachsenenbildung*);
- to guarantee the quality of the courses on offer;
- to cooperate with facilities and institutions in the area of continuing vocational training with a view to optimal coordination of adult education fields and vocation continuing training
- to implement its own adult education programmes and courses if these are not available from or cannot be offered by other providers
- to draw up medium- and long-term plans for adult education
- to promote the development of adult education and, in particular, training for adult trainers.

The foundation is financed mainly through an annual State subsidy, voluntary contributions from communities and private sources.

Providers and financing

In the year 2005 in sum 10 Adult Education providers received a total grant amount of 0.8 million Euros to finance approximately 200'000 lessons.² These 10 providers do not make up all the providers of general adult education in Liechtenstein, but they are responsible for the vast majority of courses.

Adult Education is largely state-aided in Liechtenstein. The course offer is heavily subsidized, which results in relatively low prizes and, as a consequence, in higher participation³. The downside of this policy is that the subsidy policy hinders the development of a free market of general adult education. A consequence is that there are few incentives for new private providers to enter the market. Another consequence is that there the lack of competition does not promote innovation and cost consciousness.

Teaching staff and quality assurance

There exists no qualification requirements for teaching staff in adult education institutions. Practitioners are mainly part-timers with professional skills and basic methodical and didactical knowledge.

Although funds are not linked to qualification requirements of teachers, the foundation actively encourages providers to meet quality standards and to work towards recognised quality labels (e.g. eduQua⁴ - the Swiss quality label for adult education providers).⁵

¹ Structures of Education, Vocational Training and Adult Education Systems in Europe, Eurydice UNIT, 2003

² Annual Report 2005, STIFTUNG EB, Vaduz, 2006

³ This is an assumption. There is no data on participation in adult education in Liechtenstein (e.g. percentage of adult population attending courses).

⁴ for more information see www.eduqua.ch

⁵ EURYDICE UNIT, 2003

2.2 Situation regarding the development of literacy and numeracy

The development of the literacy and numeracy field in Liechtenstein is still at a very early stage. While in the neighbouring countries Switzerland and Austria, the development in the field started in the late 20th century, in Liechtenstein there is yet no structure available.

To give an overview over the level of information available on illiteracy in Liechtenstein today, we subsequently look at the results of a preliminary study on the competences of adults in Liechtenstein and at the (lacking) course offer in the literacy field. In Chapter 3 we look at the ongoing project of the Adult Education Liechtenstein Foundation to develop at least a minimal course offer in the country.

2.3 Preliminary Empirical Study on Illiteracy in Liechtenstein⁶

Until 2005 there were no official data available to estimate the extent of illiteracy in Liechtenstein. The country participated neither in the International Adult Literacy Survey in 1998 nor in Adult Literacy and Lifeskills Survey⁷. Thus, no official figures or facts on the basic competences in Liechtenstein were available at all.

As a first step towards a sufficient data basis to analyse the problem, in 2005 the Liechtenstein Adult Education Foundation commissioned the Austrian professor Mag. Dr. Andreas Oberleitner to carry out a preliminary empirical study to get at least some basic evidence on the hypothesis of the existence illiteracy in Liechtenstein.

357 questionnaires were sent out to different occupational groups such as public offices at government and community level, medics, local companies, politicians and schools (at all levels). The questionnaire was designed to find out how often employees working in these institutions would mingle with illiterates, i.e. with people that had obviously low literacy skills. 84 questionnaires were returned, which accords to return rate of 24 percent.

The analysis of the returned questionnaires revealed that also Liechtenstein faces the problem of illiteracy. Estimations of the responding parties of the percentage of people with low literacy skills varied between 4 percent (companies) and 10.5 percent (schools). The study made no distinction between migrants and natives. But as the share of migrants of the total population in Liechtenstein is very low (only 5 out of 1000 people living in Liechtenstein are migrants) it can be assumed that migration had only a minimal influence on the results.

Although the methodology of the study varies substantially from the studies carried out by the OECD and thus the results are not really comparable, it showed that Liechtenstein is no exception in relation to the level of basic skills compared to other industrialized countries in western Europe. Nevertheless, the estimated level was lower than the level of the results of the ALL-Study in Switzerland⁸, where it was shown that 11 percent of the native adult population had low literacy skills.

Respondents agreed that the existence of low literacy skills they observed in Liechtenstein is

⁶ Illettrismus in Liechtenstein – Eine empirische Annäherung an eine tabuisiertes Thema“, unpublished working paper, 2006

⁷ Both studies were carried out under the auspices of the OECD

⁸ „Erste Resultate der ALL-Studie“, BFS 2006

closely related to social and financial poverty. It was found that illiterates could thus mainly be found amongst people with low income and low educational background. This result is insofar astonishing, as in a country with a very high per capita income and a very secure social system, poverty is definitely not an ostensible problem. It can be assumed, that besides social and financial, primarily educational poverty is very relevant.

It must be outlined at this point, that the study presented here can only be viewed as a first step. The results are based on estimations and observations of respondents with diverse background and knowledge. The chosen methodology is certainly cost-and time-effective, but it has fundamental limitations: e.g. people with low literacy skills have strategies to hide their problems, thus it could be concluded that the observations made in the study underestimate the problem of low literacy skills. Clarity on various aspects of low literacy skills can only be achieved through an "ALL-like" study, through which reliable data can be generated.

2.4 Literacy course offer

Today there are no, and there have never been, literacy or numeracy courses for natives in Liechtenstein. The only basic skill - course is run by the "Verein für interkulturelle Bildung". It is a very basic course in reading and writing for migrants that have never learned the German alphabet.

The nearest course offer for natives exists in Switzerland (approx. 60 km away) or Austria (approx. 30 km away).

3. Concept of teaching Literacy and Basic Education

As there exists no course offer in Liechtenstein in this section we cannot describe the concept of teaching literacy and basic education in the country.

Instead we would like to describe the project initiated by the Adult Education Liechtenstein Foundation to tackle the problem of illiteracy in Liechtenstein that has been started in 2005. It is the first and only project in Liechtenstein to develop the literacy field.

The goals of the project is

- to sensitize the the public and opinion leaders on the problem of low literacy skills of adults in Liechtenstein
- to develop professional knowledge and skills to build up and run an adequate literacy course offer for natives

According to these goals the project includes the following sub-projects:

1. *Preliminary empirical study on illiteracy in Liechtenstein*: Results see chapter 2.2.1
2. *Networking and sensitization of the public*: The foundation is connected with institutions in Switzerland that work in the literacy field. It is actively involved in the current development of a new umbrella organisation of providers of literacy courses in Switzerland.
Moreover, the Foundation has started to sensitize the public. E.g. it has organized a broad information event on UN Literacy Day on September 8.
3. *Participation in the Swiss project "professionalisation of literacy teachers"*: The foundation actively takes part in project that is currently run by the Swiss Federation of Adult Education. The project aims at the promotion of a professionalisation of the literacy field in Switzerland. As a first step, a set of competences thought to be

relevant for literacy teachers was developed. (See chapter 4) This set of competences formed the basis for the development of a new literacy teacher training course.

The foundation took part in the expert group for the development of the set of competencies. It has now also sent a practitioner to attend the literacy teacher course. It is intended that this practitioner acquires all competences needed to teach reading and writing to adults and will he/she will develop the first literacy course offer for natives in Liechtenstein in early 2008.

4. Review of Literacy Teachers Competences

The expert group, constituted in 2004 in Switzerland in order to develop a new modular training course for literacy teachers, reflected intensely on competences and skills thought to be fundamental for the work with illiterates. The result of the working group was the development of a set of competences that in next step formed the basis for the development of a modular training course for future "Literatoren".⁹

As the Liechtenstein Adult Education Foundation participated in that expert group as part of their project on illiteracy and now a literacy teacher from Liechtenstein is being trained according to this set of competences, it can be said, that *to date* this is the relevant set of competencies for Literacy practitioners Lichtenstein.

Generally, the expert group acknowledged that the work with illiterates requires a rather large set of special know-how and competences. Literacy teachers should have professional competences, methodical skills, social competences and cultural competences. We here list the competencies considered to be fundamental (The list is not closing):¹⁰

Professional competences

- Ability to teach reading and writing to Adults with adequate methods and didactics
- Ability to understand the target group, i.e. the cultural and social background of the learner
- Ability to understand the broader social and economical context of literacy
- Experience in the adult learning area
- Ability to initiate common learning processes with heterogeneous learner groups
- Knowledge of intercultural strategies
- Experience in preparing learner-oriented course and lesson plans

Methodical skills

- Ability to recognize, to use and to manage diversity among learner groups in order to strengthen the particular learner and to improve the mutual acceptance of the learners
- Ability to organize a learning environment that is suitable and supportive of the learners' needs
- Knowledge of different approaches and methods of literacy language acquisition
- Knowledge of and the ability to use learner-oriented counselling models.
- Knowledge of and ability to make use of suitable project work, self-directed studying, PC, learning software and the Internet

⁹ The term „LiteratorIn“ is today used in Switzerland to describe a literacy teacher.

¹⁰ These set of competences forms the basis for a the new literacy teacher training.

Social and personal skills

- Capability of establishing a studying climate based on respect, appreciation and partnership
- Capability of understanding the problem definitions and difficulties of the participants and advising them solution-oriented
- Ability reflect and change positively my moral concepts, strategies, cultural stereotypes as well as my attitudes regarding teaching and learning by means of self reflection

5. Prevailing problems and challenges

The development of the literacy field is still at the very beginning in Liechtenstein. With its project, the Adult Education Liechtenstein Foundation has taken the first and important steps in the right direction.

The foundation is definitely the accurate institution in Liechtenstein to be the leader of the development of the field. The “Law on the Adult Education Liechtenstein Foundation” forms a sufficient legal basis to fund and promote the development of literacy. One could even conclude that there is a binding legal mandate to take respective actions.

Moreover, the foundation has contacts to the relevant organisation in the neighbouring countries (a close working-relationship with Switzerland) and to the European Union. These contacts and co-operations are essential to transfer relevant know-how and knowledge into the small country.

Even if a first project has been initiated, there remains a lot to be done. Major challenges for Liechtenstein today include:

- the lack of clear data to analyse in depth the problem of low literacy skills
- the lack of an adequate course offer
- the lack of public awareness of the literacy problem

Once the course offer is developed it certainly will be a challenge to recruit a sufficient participants.

6. Conclusions and recommendations

With regard to the prevailing problems and challenges, we recommend focusing on the following priorities for the next four years:

- to carry out an in-depth analysis of the competences of the adult population in Liechtenstein that is comparable to the ALL-study
- to continue international cooperation to import know-how
- to develop an adequate course offer
- to develop an awareness rising campaign to sensitize the public and the people with low literacy skills.

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8. Links

www.erwachsenenbildung.li

Adult Education Liechtenstein Foundation, includes links to providers

www.lesen-schreiben-schweiz.ch

Umbrella association of Swiss providers of literacy courses for Adults: The Adult Education Liechtenstein foundation is a member of the Association