

## **IVQ: more than a national survey, more a basis for an indicators net**

*by Jean-Pierre Jeantheau*

### **Adult literacy assessment in France**

Estimation of the extent (or frequency) of low literacy and basic skills proficiency levels within the overall population has been considered a priority in France for several years now, and has been the subject of increasingly large-scale evaluation campaigns. Policymakers have rapidly become aware that measuring low literacy levels is crucial to justifying the development and implementation of targeted public policies. Thus it was not only the increased media coverage of low literacy (Lahire, 1999) that triggered public action, but also the implied extent of the phenomenon that was the main impetus for media and institutional mobilization.

Measuring literacy levels is fraught with difficulties, however, given the characteristics of the target population. When attempting to assess a non-captive adult population with respect to basic skills or low literacy, one must face two main challenges: defining the social situation or phenomenon to be measured, and finding the appropriate methodology and technology to perform satisfactory measurements.

### **Defining illiteracy and basic competencies**

In 1995, the GPLI (*Groupement Permanent pour la Lutte contre l'Illettrisme*<sup>1</sup>), proposed an initial definition of *Illettrisme*, which was subsequently reworked, completed and above all generalized in 2003 by the ANLCI (National Agency for Fighting Illiteracy), which worked with nearly 100 partner institutions to revise and disseminate it. Since 2003, the official definition is therefore as follows: "*Illettrisme* describes the situation of individuals over 16 years of age who, although they have attended school, cannot read and understand a text dealing with an everyday situation, and/or cannot communicate simple information in writing"<sup>2</sup>. So the definition of *Illettrisme* is more restrictive than the English definition of illiteracy, according to which anyone who has never received any education in any other language (and/or in other countries) facing difficulty when faced with tasks involving reading or writing. The *illettrisme* approach looks, at least for French authorities, more pragmatic, because it focuses on issues that depend completely on French educational policy; initial schooling and lifelong learning.

### **The main surveys available (not based on self-reporting)**

In order to estimate the number of people with literacy problems, we can today use four recent surveys, not based on self-reporting, whose frequency should enable us to identify trends in the literacy or basic skills of people living in France. These surveys are the OECD's PISA<sup>3</sup> survey, carried out in France by the research departments of the Ministry of Education; the Military Registration Day (JAPD/JDC) tests organized by the Ministry of Defence with assessment tasks supplied by the Ministry of Education; the LPP survey (Reading and Incarcerated Population Survey) and finally the Information and Everyday Life survey (IVQ) carried out by the National Institute for Statistics and Economic Studies (INSEE) at national level with the participation of the ANLCI.

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<sup>1</sup> Predecessor of the national agency for fighting illiteracy (ANLCI) , created in 1988 and dissolved in 1999)

<sup>2</sup> Rest of the definition: "For certain people, these reading and writing difficulties are sometimes combined, to different degrees, with an insufficient mastery of other basic skills such as oral communication, logical reasoning, comprehension and use of numbers and operations, spatial and temporal orientation, etc. Despite these deficiencies, people facing illiteracy have acquired experience, a culture and a skills capital that are based very little or not at all on the ability to read and write. Thus some of them have been able to integrate into social and professional life, but the balance is fragile and the risk of marginalization constant. Others find themselves in situations of exclusion where illiteracy is combined with other factors." ANLCI National Guidelines, 2003

<sup>3</sup> Programme for International Student Assessment

In this paper we focus in detail on the IVQ survey programme exclusively, whilst making reference to other surveys when appropriate.

### The Information and Everyday Life survey (IVQ)

For the ANLCI module in the IVQ survey instrument, the working definition is as follows: "*Illiteracy* describes the situation with respect to the written word of individuals who, having attended school in French, are unable, by themselves and using only the written word, to effectively understand a text dealing with everyday situations, and/or cannot effectively communicate a message in writing." For the "high level" module the unwritten definition is close to that of PISA, IALS (International Adult Literacy Survey) or to the definition of functional literacy.

### Survey economics

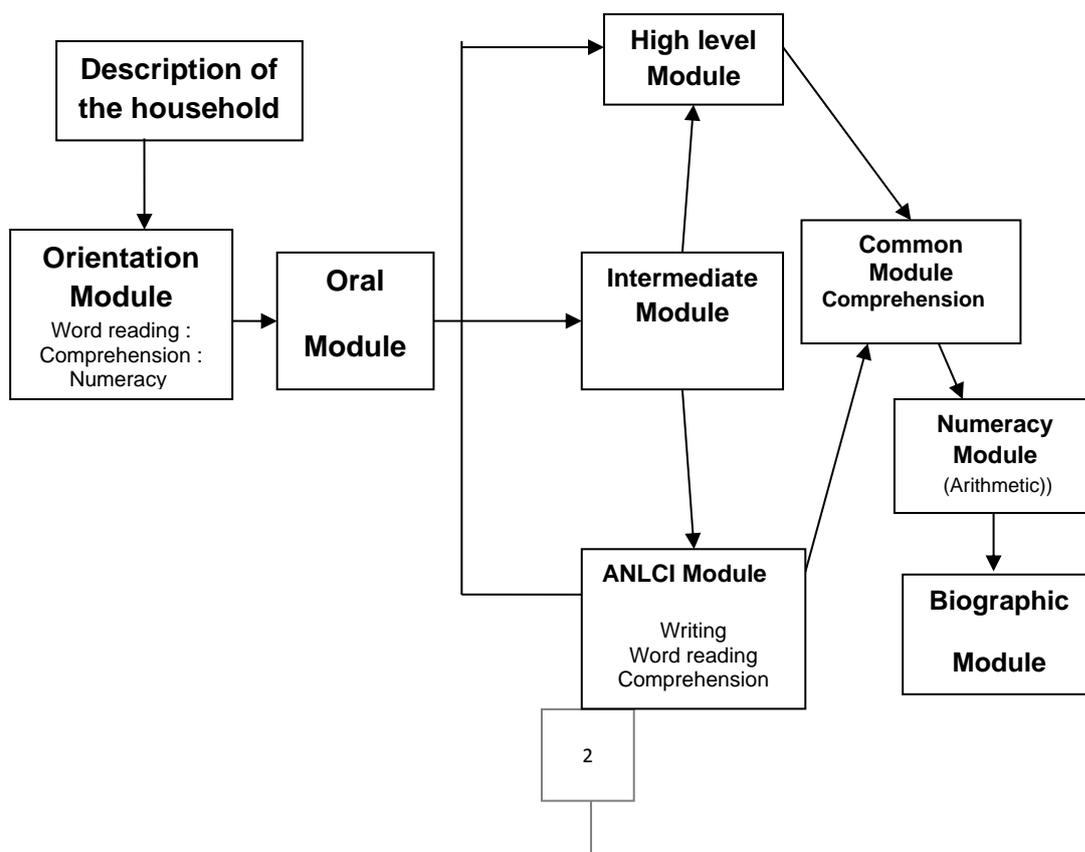
#### The target population

The IVQ survey focuses (at national or regional level) on representative samples of the general population, and among other goals tries to identify the proportion of people with low literacy levels among the overall population. It can therefore supply a wealth of information on the general population, on the population referred to as illiterate, and also on all individuals living in France (including immigrants) or on any other sub-category of individuals, provided that they are sufficiently represented in the sample. In 2004 in the metropolitan area and for the metropolitan regional extensions, as well as for the overseas regional surveys conducted in 2005 (Martinique) and 2009 (Guadeloupe), the target population was individuals aged from 18 to 65. In 2007 in the regional IVQ survey in La Reunion, as well as in the metropolitan IVQ repeated in 2011, the metropolitan regional extensions and the regional IVQ surveys (French Guyana and La Reunion) the target population was adults from 16 to 65. In 2013 (Mayotte and New Caledonia) the same age-group has been targeted.

#### Test administration

The IVQ test initially orients the interviewees (initial sorting) as quickly as possible towards the test that is most appropriate to their literacy competence level. Trials resulted in the proposal of a two-step process: a short orientation module to distinguish individuals with noticeable difficulties and those with none, followed by an intermediate confirmation module for those individuals scoring close to the orientation threshold. Figure 1 shows the different steps and illustrates the sequence of the specialised modules.

Figure 1: Organization of the IVQ 2012 modules



## The samples

For the 2011/2012 IVQ survey, a data file is available containing 13,743 records (10,384 in 2004) i.e. the information collected from respondents who participated in the survey in metropolitan France. Basically, these candidates were chosen through a two-stage random sampling process: first the random draw of a household, then a second random draw of an individual among the people usually living in that household and eligible for participation in the survey. The main consequence of this method is that the population targeted by the survey represents a variety of nationalities and social backgrounds. However, certain populations are excluded, such as prisoners, the homeless, the members of certain religious groups, and students living in dormitories. Therefore all of the respondents correspond to an adult population of working age living in ordinary households. To facilitate a certain number of studies of specific problems, the sampling was stratified and the resulting response data weighted.

## The tests used

The IVQ survey was designed using the conception of illiteracy and basic skills proficiency specific to France. Therefore, oral comprehension exercises relating to simple texts feature (in order to subsequently determine whether failure is due to a lack of comprehension of the language), along with comprehension tests on short texts, tests involving the reading of words, groups of words or sentences, and the writing of simple words. It was also decided not to use directly calculating scores to describe the exercises or tests results, but rather to assign levels according to success percentages (calculated on the basis of the scores but matching more with the philosophy of evaluation of level of competence vs. measure of competencies). Thus when exploiting the data from the IVQ survey, it was decided that the category of "people with low literacy" would be composed of adults between 16 and 65 (field of the survey in 2011) having achieved very low results<sup>4</sup> during the tests on the fundamental aspects of written communication. This simple construction can be used immediately and easily.

The tests proposed during the IVQ survey are organized into modules (Figure 1). The modules administered to all respondents (the orientation and oral comprehension modules) explore the reading of words, written and oral comprehension, and arithmetic (orientation and numeracy modules). Another module, referred to as the "high level" module, explores in greater depth the competences of respondents with no particular reading difficulties, using a variety of materials (e.g., a TV programme). The ANLCI module, designed for individuals displaying serious difficulties in the orientation module, explores the ability to read and write words and to comprehend a simple text. The choice of exercises and their refinement were the subject of research projects involving teams from several universities<sup>5</sup>. Efforts were especially focused on defining the survey methodology in order to guarantee the best possible data quality and avoid the biases that often affect this type of survey (Murat, 2005). Several field trials served to fine-tune the questioning procedures and check the psychometric properties of the modules. Thus, by the end of 2002, over 2000 people living in 10 metropolitan regions had been questioned/assessed. This large-scale methodological investigation made it possible to validate the questioning procedures used for the 2004/2005 IVQ survey. In the 2011/2012 IVQ survey a so called "common module" was added to the initial test modules. The stimulus resource for this module is a medicine prescription, the module goal being to have enough items common to all the interviewees so that the whole sample could be assessed on the same underlying reading competence scale using an item response modelling procedure. However, this procedure proved not to be effective, to the extent that the data analysts have not yet been able to produce a common scale for all interviewees.

As far as adult literacy is concerned, the IVQ survey has been a success in France. Its results are reported on and used by all of the national and local political and administrative officials, as well as by most academics and almost all NGOs. Extensions financed by the local public authorities were carried out at first in three metropolitan regions in 2005, and then in three regions of France's overseas territories in 2006, 2007 and 2008. In 2012 five

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<sup>4</sup> Less than 60% success in one of the three areas described as fundamental to literacy.

<sup>5</sup> The work on the orientation module, the oral module and the ANLCI module was carried out by a team at the PsyEF lab of the Université Lyon 2, led by Jean-Marie Besse. The numeracy modules were the work of a team led by Camilo Charron and Claire Meljac at the Université Rennes 2 and the Hôpital St Anne, and the "high level" module was the responsibility of H. Tardieu's team at the Université Paris V.

metropolitan regions and two overseas regions carried out similar extensions, as did the Training organisation for temporary employment (FAF-TT). In 2013 two further overseas territories carried out an IVQ survey. It is already known that the public authorities are expected to repeat the survey in coming years, possibly in 2018, and other entities have requested authorization to use the tool, or tools built according to a similar model (for example, the Ministry of Justice for prisoner assessment, and the construction sector).

In addition to methodological quality and sample size, this success can be attributed to several factors:

- *The tool design quality*
  - achieved by involving university teams familiar with the target population (especially for the ANLCl module). Indeed, in the case of adults, statistical knowledge alone does not allow the design of a tool that can be recognized as valid by practitioners. Since the validity of assessment tools for adults can only rarely benefit from external data that make it possible to confirm the external validity of the tools (or surveys), the choice of recognized experts is essential, at least during the first phases of tool development. (Jeantheau, 2008)
- *A communication strategy*
  - in which the ANLCl took into account the preoccupations of both the statisticians or researchers and the decision-makers. Communication of the findings was carefully targeted, and different documents were drafted for different decision-making levels; they were easy to read and understand but also highlighted aspects of the results that, scientifically recognized, were in line with the preoccupations of the decision-makers.
- *The flexibility of the studies conducted*
  - they were always designed to meet the preoccupations of ANLCl partners (policy makers) or to immediately respond to topical issues under public debate.

For example, the results of this survey were used to make a distinction in public policy between fighting illiteracy and teaching French as a foreign language. Indeed, the IVQ showed that the populations concerned by the first issue were much larger than those concerned by the second. The survey also served as a basis for reflection to modify governmental projects that concentrated all of the resources for combating illiteracy in the most underprivileged neighbourhoods, by proving that this type of concentration would deprive 90% of the people with low literacy levels of state aid. Moreover, since the survey showed that most people with low literacy levels were jobless, the law was modified to expand vocational training programmes (financed by companies for salaried employees) to include the fight against illiteracy. The same observation supported the efforts of certain professional branches to set up targeted programmes (the figures taken from the survey concerning each professional branch contributed even more to this aspect). In addition to the three success factors mentioned above we can add that the particular impact of this survey is also linked to the fact that most of the organizations in charge of actions in the field (they are numerous in France) were involved in the project from the start and associated with the processing of the results. They have truly taken ownership of these results, a real sign of success.

## ***The 2012 results of the IVQ repeat***

### **Main results**

The 2011-2012 IVQ survey focused on the French metropolitan population between 16 to 65, i.e. 40 millions persons. On the basis of the survey results it is estimated that:

- 11% (12% in 2012) were facing difficulties with basic skills, i.e. 4.3 million illiterate persons
- about 60% of this population was schooled in France and are illiterate, i.e. 2,5 million persons in situation of "illettrisme" (vs. 3,1 million in 2004) representing 7% of population schooled in France (36 million) at initial schooling.

In other words, in France more people are concerned by the fight against "illettrisme" than by learning French as a foreign language. If "illettrisme" is a hidden problem in daily life, the results of surveys like IVQ serve to render it visible for policy makers.

The main finding of the IVQ 2011/2012 survey is a decrease in the estimated number of adults '(18-65) facing literacy difficulties: the percentage of adults in a situation of "illettrisme" fell from 9% in 2004/2005 to 7% in 2011/2012. There are two possible explanations for this: Firstly, INSEE identified a generational effect: the oldest subpopulation (55-65), which showed the deepest difficulties in 2004, are now out of the scope of the survey and hence out of the sample. The younger generation in 2004 which replaced the oldest 2004 group in the 2012 survey had a lower illiteracy rate so the global illiteracy rate fell. But this cannot explain the whole difference between the 2004 and the 2011 IVQ results. Another reason could be the success of the literacy initiatives carried out in all metropolitan regions since 2003. [The survey showed that numeracy difficulties are still very frequent, and are more important nowadays than literacy difficulties, which suggests that the time is ripe for a new focus on the development of numeracy skills in the policies of public and private stakeholders.]

Complementary studies which could be conducted using the same IVQ sample (follow-on household visits by the researchers, for example) might provide additional data or information to shed light on the initial results.

Other results (survey estimates) are that within the population of individuals who have been schooled in France, the following subgroup proportions were identified as being in a situation of "illettrisme":

- 6% of women and 9% of men (8% vs. 11% in 2004)
- 4% of 18-25 year olds (4.5% in 2004) and 12% of 56-65 year olds (14% in 2004)[see Figure 2]
- 26% of persons with no qualification (30% in 2004)
- 6% of workers (8% in 2004)
- 10% of job seekers (15% in 2004)

Among individuals considered to be in a situation of « illettrisme »:

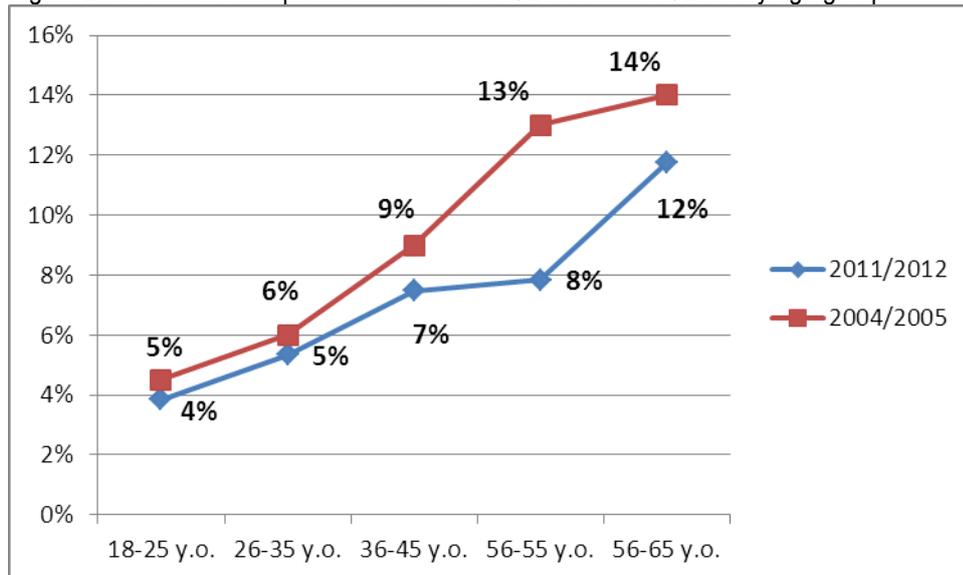
- 51% were employed (57% in 2004) and 10% were job seekers (11% in 2004)
- 21% lived in a rural area (26% in 2004) and 10% in a disadvantaged area (id)
- 10% lived in the Paris region (14% in 2004)
- 71% spoke only French at the age of 5 (at home) (75% in 2004)

All the results given above were produced expressly to reply to specific questions from policy makers. For example, in 2006 the government of the time wanted to focus all its literacy promotion effort on socially disadvantaged areas. The IVQ survey results revealed that if the government pursued this strategy it would be excluding 90% of people with literacy problems from the aid programmes. The government changed its policy intention. In the same year, after discovering that 57% of people with functional literacy issues were in employment, the OPCA (*organismes paritaires collecteurs agréés des fonds de la formation*) seized onto the new law permitting the financing of general training programmes with professional training funds to organise basic skill training throughout France.

### **Comparisons between IVQ 2004 and IVQ 2011 by age group**

Figure 2 shows that the older people are the higher the rate of illiteracy. This is an important finding for policy makers because it shows two things. Firstly, it reveals that there is a low level of reading ability among the oldest group surveyed whereas most of the time it is school leavers who are stigmatised for illiteracy. This literacy deficit could be attributed to a low level of initial education and/or a loss in competence throughout a lifetime, because of the type of activity people habitually engage in at home or even at work. Secondly, it shows that if one develops literacy programmes aimed exclusively at the young there will be no effect on the average level of illiteracy for decades, suggesting that one must rather attack the problem by offering help to people of all ages. As an aside, Figure 2 poses an interesting question for researchers, who might ask why the two survey curves are not parallel.

Figure 2 “Illettrisme”: comparisons between IVQ 2004 and IVQ 2011 by age group

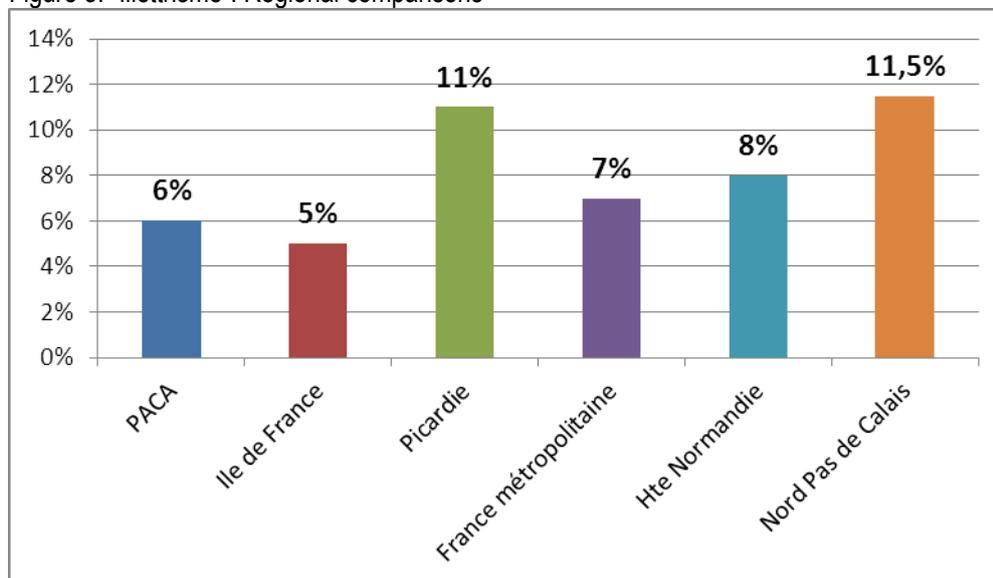


IVQ 2004 and 2011, INSEE data, computed by author

### Regional comparisons

Figure 3 shows that important regional variations lie behind the national illiteracy estimate, the historically industrialised regions of the North of France showing the highest proportion of people living in a situation of *illettrisme*. The implication for policy is that the fight against illiteracy should be directed at the level of regions rather than nationally

Figure 3: “Illettrisme”: Regional comparisons

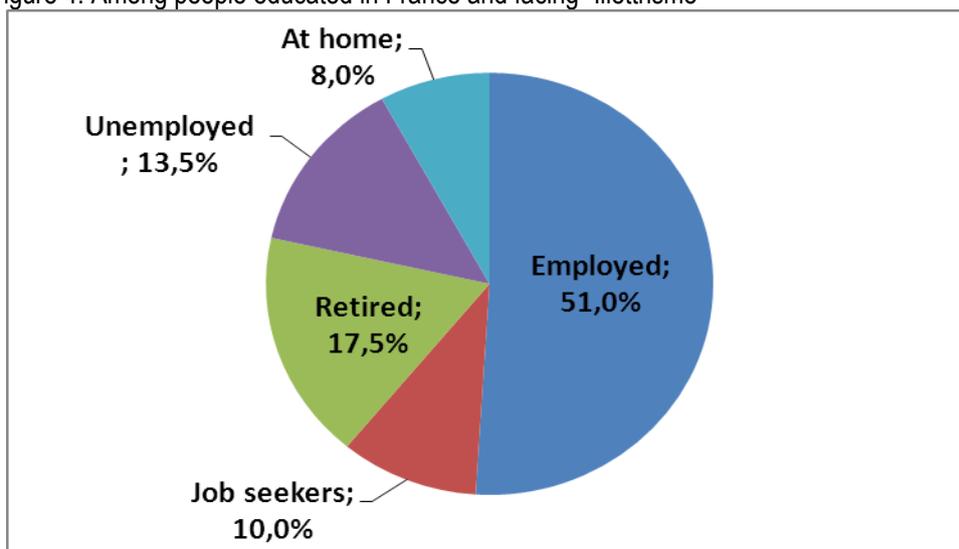


IVQ Survey 2011/2012, INSEE data, computed by author

### Among people educated in France and facing “Illettrisme

It is generally recognised that it is difficult to identify people who are in a situation of “illettrisme”, because they try, often successfully, to hide their difficulties. Figure 4 suggests that the most efficient place to identify and help adults facing literacy problems is the workplace, since the majority of individuals with literacy problems are in work. It is possible to identify them with the help of tools for observing their activity and the ways in which they carry out tasks, and as mentioned earlier funds exist which can help them to improve their reading, writing and numeracy ability.

Figure 4: Among people educated in France and facing “Illettrisme”



IVQ Survey 2011, INSEE data, computed by author

Figure 5 suggests how the political campaign to counter illiteracy or to improve the learning of French might best be carried out. It shows, for example, that those with writing difficulties working in the hotel/restaurant sector would benefit more from help with learning French than general help with literacy while the opposite is true for people working in agriculture and food production.

*FLE means that those persons have not been educated in France and probably the courses they should attend should be focused on learning French as foreign language)*

Reading note: 12% of the whole population face strong literacy difficulties, 7% have been educated (initial) in France (“Illettrisme”) and 5% abroad. In the hotel/restaurant sector, 16% of employees are estimated to face strong literacy difficulties, 5% were educated (initial) in France (“Illettrisme”) and 11% abroad. In agriculture 11% of employees are estimated to be facing strong literacy difficulties, 10% were educated (initial) in France (“Illettrisme”) and 1% abroad

### Employment, “Illettrisme” and gender

In the whole population aged 16 to 65, 65% are employed : 69% of men and 62% of women (Table 1). Among people facing literacy difficulties who were initially educated in France the estimated rate is 51% (56% of men and 42% of women), a much lower figure. One can say that writing difficulties are very handicapping. Nevertheless, if we look in greater detail at the picture, by breaking the data down by age group (Table 1 and Figure 6), we see that the employment rates for men and women aged 36-45 suffering literacy problems or not are quite close: 93% of literate men, 87% of functionally illiterate men, and 79% of FLE versus 81%, 52% and 51%, respectively, of corresponding groups of women. Illiteracy is therefore detrimental mainly for women, young men finding work where they can sell their manual labour.

Table 1: Literacy results broken down by gender and age

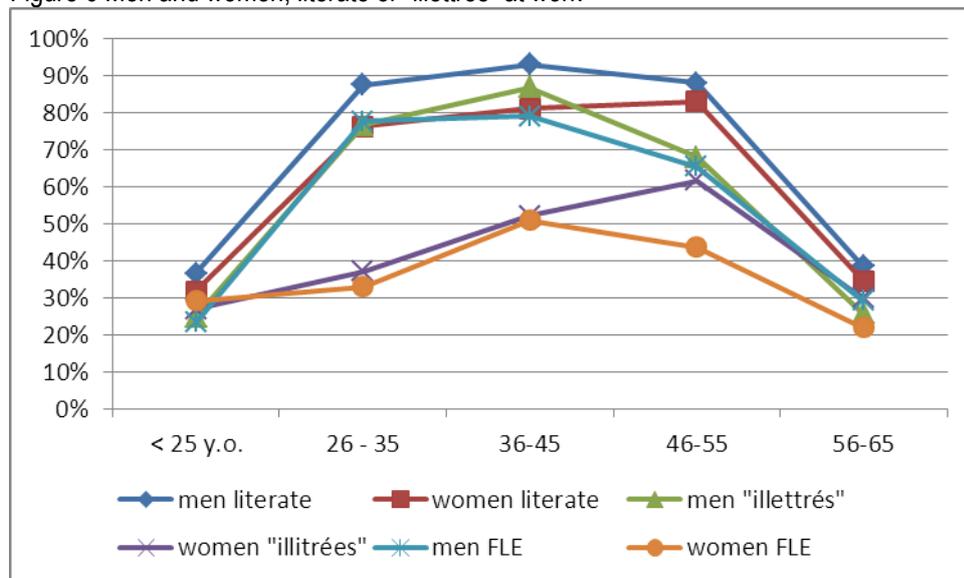
%	< 25.	26 - 35	36-45	46-55	56-65	Total
Literate men	37	87	93	88	38	69
Literate women	32	76	81	83	34	62
Illiterate men	25	76	87	68	26	56
Illiterate women	27	37	52	62	30	42
Men FLE	23	78	79	65	29	56
Women FLE	29	33	51	44	22	36

IVQ Survey 2011, INSEE data, computed by author

One also sees that the differences between men and women with literacy problems and those without is higher among 46-55 year olds, while women with literacy problems reach the employment rate of men (the children have

left the home and the women need to prepare for their future; separations also mean that they take up work again).

Figure 6 Men and women, literate or “illettrés” at work



IVQ Survey 2011, INSEE data, computed by author

*FLE means that those persons have not been educated in France and probably the courses they may attend belongs with French as foreign language)*

Practically the same results emerged in the 2004 survey (Jeantheau 2011).

### **Survey outcomes and adult education policy**

Issues surrounding the potential impact of surveys on levels of adult literacy and numeracy should for the most part be addressed before the survey is actually carried out. The most effective strategy is to involve policy makers in the process from the design stage. The task of the survey professional should be to facilitate implementing the expectations of decision makers, who themselves often set out with only a vague notion of what they hope to learn from the survey, and then, once the goals of the survey have been clearly formalised, to suggest appropriate technical solutions. In France, for example, there is no specific educational policy which is targeted on persons with medium to high literacy levels. In effect, these are not considered to constitute a problem for everyday life, and such persons are expected to be capable of undertaking normal career-oriented adult education and training. The only group of adults who are deemed to be potentially problematic are those whose literacy level is inadequate to support normal vocational training (usually leading to certification of some kind); consequently they have difficulty finding employment outside of specific sectors such as catering for both men and women, or construction, agriculture or transport in the case of men, care services and sales in the case of women.

It is therefore important that the survey should aim to determine the number of people in this category. In the absence of any programme designed specifically for them, other groups are not considered to be of interest. With the help of specialised test designers and policy makers the survey should seek to define a threshold of literacy or numeracy below which individuals are unable to participate effectively in the life of their community (*cf.* the UNESCO definition of literacy). The test tasks and items should therefore form a coherent set corresponding to the target level, without needing to address all the levels which it would theoretically be possible to define, but for which no specific programmes or policy exist. Once a suitable pool of items has been constructed, one should proceed to define which scores on the test correspond to the different skill levels represented by the items. It will clearly also be necessary to check the internal validity (coherence) and external validity of the item pool, through tests, comparison of test results with external observations (other calibrated tests, professional judgements, etc.).

While on a national level the tests are taken by a sample of the entire population, for the purposes of surveys which are restricted geographically or to specific subpopulations we can still use national survey results to rationalise and reduce costs. Given that we know from national surveys that only in extremely rare cases (less than 1%) do holders of a general baccalaureate diploma demonstrate inadequate literacy levels, we can reasonably exclude members of this group from a targeted survey and limit collection of information to biographical details taken over the telephone. Survey costs can often be substantially reduced depending on the target population.

Another useful cost reduction strategy is to restrict the duration of testing by excluding items which do not contribute to the determination of literacy or numeracy competence thresholds (modules relating to oral language competence, for example). Adapting the national biographic module to meet the requirements of specialised surveys can also substantially reduce survey time. For example, prison authorities already have on file extensive biographical details of their inmates, so that there is no need to gather the same information again in a survey involving the prison population.

In the light of these possibilities for flexibility and cost management, the authorities responsible for the promotion of literacy are able to benefit from a survey structure based on the same instruments as the national reference surveys (which, incidentally, also offers a ready basis for comparison). Working together with ANLCI it is possible to tailor numerous aspects of a survey: when, how, why and at what cost. In this perspective, questions regarding policy impact can be asked *after* and not *before* the survey itself. Experience has shown that when the survey is adapted to their needs, whilst respecting all the conditions necessary for achieving high quality comparable results, political decision makers are the first to exploit the results to the benefit of their own policy management.

### ***Towards a system of indicators***

In recent years real progress has been made to coordinate the efforts of the different players involved in the fight against illiteracy in France. Decision-makers have become aware of the multi-faceted nature of the issue and the necessary diversity of actions to be implemented in order to reach a wide public. Many policies have been implemented and all are justified in their context. No single policy can make significant progress alone in the fight to improve access to the written word for all. The effectiveness of these policies can only be reinforced by coordinating the actions they deploy. Each partner or group of partners, along with the national coordinators and public authorities, needs information about "illettrisme". Some bodies have already set up indicators that correspond to their needs, such as the Military Registration Day tests of the Ministry of Defence, the prison entry tests for the Ministry of Justice, recruiting tests for vocational training organizations, etc. Other bodies have requested indicators, such as the National Employment Agency, the National Training Centre for Local Civil Servants (CNFPT), and certain NGOs.

One of the ANLCI's current tasks consists of harmonizing existing indicators using the new ones (IVQ survey). To this end, in 2008 and 2009 the ANLCI carried out studies intended to create links between the IVQ surveys and the surveys of both the Ministry of Defence (JAPD) and the Ministry of Justice (LPP)<sup>6</sup>. One consequence of this comparative study was the plan to carry out an IVQ-style survey at the end of 2013 using a large sample of the prison population.

Seven regions already financed regional extensions during the 2004/2005 or the 2011/2012 surveys, and since then four others have financed their own survey: Martinique in 2006 (1600 people surveyed), Reunion Island in 2007 (3000 people) and Guadeloupe in September 2008 (2000 people), Guyana and again Reunion in 2011. IVQ surveys are running in two other overseas regions: Mayotte and New Caledonia. Twelve metropolitan regions indicated via their Prefect or President of the Regional Council that they were candidates for an extension in 2011, and only administrative rules reduced the number of participants.

As for the national training agencies, the Vocational Training Agency (AFPA) was the first to use the IVQ tools in 2006 (ANLCI modules) in a study of 1000 candidates entering training courses. Other training organizations, such as the National Training Centre for Local Civil Servants (CNFPT), representing several million local civil servants,

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<sup>6</sup> [http://www.insee.fr/fr/insee\\_regions/haute-normandie/themes/dossiers/illettrisme/Publication\\_illettrisme.pdf](http://www.insee.fr/fr/insee_regions/haute-normandie/themes/dossiers/illettrisme/Publication_illettrisme.pdf)

have expressed their need for diagnostic tools to help them identify individuals who could benefit from basic skills training. The CNFPT has chosen to align itself with the ANLCl's definition of illiteracy, and has since November 2007 been developing an assessment tool, named EVADO, that is compatible with the IVQ survey and designed to be used on the Internet or with a DVD, in collaboration with the ANLCl and the Caisses d'Epargne Foundation for Solidarity. In 2011 IVQ tests were used in a survey focusing on the workplace in Mayotte and in 2012 in a survey carried out by the Ministry of Internal affairs (ELIPA Survey). In 2010 the ANLCl developed an IVQ compatible test to be use in the selection process of Overseas Adapted Regiments (RSMA) which wanted to recruit at least 40% of young French adults facing literacy difficulties (illiterate following the ANLCl definition). Since 2009, EVADO has been used in several studies focusing on young adults, including apprentices in vocational training centres or in the EPIDE (training centre for social insertion of young adults facing difficulties)

## **Conclusion**

The development of tools to assess low literacy levels in adults is fairly recent in France. It was inspired by recognition of the need to implement a national literacy policy and to encourage cooperation between stakeholders. The system is mainly designed to supply information to help manage public policies, even if it also assesses other subjects. It concentrates on the fraction of the population that is the focus of a public policy. This approach is fairly similar to the future PIAAC<sup>7</sup>, even if it is more radical and more in-depth, and therefore in the end simpler, more pragmatic, and less expensive. In addition to this method, it appears that rather than a national (or international) survey conducted with intervals that are often quite long, it would be extremely useful to have access to a large number of comparable surveys that could regularly or continuously supply reliable information concerning the different policies deployed. The "large-scale surveys" could then be used to place local indicators in better perspective. The cost of such a method, where the participants enter a tool-sharing process, could be lower than the cost of a national survey and considerably lower than that of an international survey, and at the same time be more immediately useful.

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<sup>7</sup> Project for International Assessment of Adult Competencies

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