The role of L1 literacy in adult L2 learning: The case of adult learners of English in Australia

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Abstract

This paper investigates the role of L1 literacy in the proficiency gains of adult learners of English in the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) in Australia. Data for 13,957 adult learners, who attended the AMEP between 2003 and 2007, were extracted from the AMEP Reporting Management System (ARMS) database and analysed considering the learners’ level of prior education, their home language, the type of script used in that language, their level of English on entry into the program and the time spent by the learner in the program. The analysis reveals that, while having L1 literacy is an advantage for learners with some prior knowledge of English, it plays a minor role among those who had little or no proficiency in English on entry to the program. Findings also highlight the complex role of the script type used in the home language in acquiring proficiency in English by adult learners. Implications are discussed with respect to the need to tailor English language training programs for adult learners with various needs and backgrounds.

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Summary

This paper discusses the role of L1 literacy in adult learners of English on the basis of a large quantitative database. Findings suggest the complex role of L1 literacy in adult L2 learning as related to the type of script used in the home languages.