

# Functional Literacy of First Stage Researchers in Russia and the UK: Summary and Discussion of the Main Research Findings



Assoc.Prof. Dr. **Oksana Chigisheva**  
Senior Lecturer **Elena Soltovets**

Southern Federal University,  
Rostov-on-Don, Russia

CR&DALL Seminar  
School of Education, University of Glasgow  
October, 10, 2017





**What is the relevance  
of the research?**



**Marketization of higher education**

**Inadequate international visibility**

**High migration rates**

**Globalization of human life**

**Brexit and its consequences**

**Research funding**

**Internalization of education**

**Global competition phenomenon**

**Low HE global attractiveness**

**HE leadership agenda**

**Fast technological transformation**

**Insufficient international research integration**

**Advanced IT development**


**Poor English language skills**

The image is a collage of three photographs. The top photo shows a laptop screen on the left and an open book on the right, with a stack of books behind it. The bottom-left photo shows a person's hand typing on a laptop keyboard, with a watch visible on their wrist. The bottom-right photo shows a close-up of an open book. A black banner with red text is overlaid across the center of the collage.

What is the purpose of the study?

How different kinds of functional literacy allow researchers not to be left at the knowledge and professional periphery in the modern world?

Are they essential for successful global research career development?



**What are the key research objectives  
of the study?**

1. How is functional literacy determined in the sphere of educational research?
2. How are functional academic and foreign language literacies treated?
3. What are the factors influencing functional academic and foreign language literacies development?
4. Are functional academic and foreign language literacies necessary for global research career development?

*Positions 2 to 4 reflect the opinion of Russian and British PhD students (Education only)*





**What methodology was used to meet the research objectives?**

## **Key research approaches and methods:**

Phenomenological approach

Standardized open-end interviews with PhD students (Education only)

<b>N</b>	<b>Questions</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>What is functional literacy?</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>What is functional academic literacy?</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>How good is your functional literacy?</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>What are the positive factors contributing to the development of functional academic and foreign language literacy?</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>What are the negative factors adversely affecting the development of functional academic and foreign language literacy?</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>What changes in the teaching and learning process can be potentially beneficial for the development of academic and foreign language literacy?</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>Are functional academic and foreign language literacies a competitive advantage for the research career and why?</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>Where and how are you going to pursue your research career?</b>
<b>9</b>	<b>Are you planning to maintain the level of your functional academic and foreign language literacy in the future? If no, why? If yes, in what ways?</b>

Students interviewed:


**April-May 2017** - students of the Academy of Psychology and Educational Sciences at Southern Federal University (Rostov-on-Don, Russia).  
45 out of total 62 PhD students interviewed.

Group 1 - 22 first-year PhD students

Group 2 - 18 second-year PhD students

Group 3 - 5 third-year PhD students

**October 2-10, 2017** – 11 PhD students of the School of Education, University of Glasgow interviewed  
(different levels of PhD training).

The background is a dense collage of various business and innovation-related terms in a blue and white color scheme. The words are arranged in a way that they overlap and are partially obscured, creating a sense of depth and complexity. Some of the visible words include 'CREATIVITY', 'DEVELOPMENT', 'LINGUENITY', 'NEW STRATEGY', 'VISION', 'INSPIRATION', 'GO', 'ADVANTAGE', 'FUTURE', 'COMMUNICAL', 'SOLUTION', 'FETTER', 'PL', 'IMPROVEMENT', 'IDEAS', 'CREATIVITY', 'DEVELOPMENT', 'LINGUENITY', 'NEW STRATEGY', 'VISION', 'INSPIRATION', 'GO', 'ADVANTAGE', 'FUTURE', 'COMMUNICAL', 'SOLUTION', 'FETTER', 'PL', 'IMPROVEMENT', 'IDEAS'.

**What is the working definition  
of functional literacy for this  
research project?**

- Literacy (UNESCO, 1957)
- Functional literacy (Tehran, World Congress of Ministers of Education on the Eradication of Illiteracy, 1965)
- Functional literacy and minimum literacy (UNESCO, 1978)
- New literacy (Kolesnikova, 2013)
- Functional foreign language literacy (Chigisheva et al., 2016; Uhuegbu & Edung, 2015)
- adult literacy as a mechanism of social inclusion (Kuz`mina & Popov, 2015)
- financial literacy (Han et al., 2016)
- functional medical literacy (Tsubakita et al., 2017)

BROWNING, L., THOMPSON, K. & DAWSON, D.  
2017. From early career researcher to research  
leader: survival of the fittest? In: Journal of  
Higher Education Policy and Management, vol.  
39, n. 4. ISSN 1360-080X.

**Functional literacy** is the ability of a person to interact within the social environment, to adapt and function in it, integrating the connection between education and multidimensional human activity..

## ***Perceptions of functional literacy***

<b>Russian (out of total 45)</b>		<b>British (out of total 11)</b>
<b>27</b>	<b>Never heard of the term “functional literacy”</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>18</b>	<b>Adequate guesses</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>16</b>	<b>Functional literacy understood in terms of language command</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Totally wrong guesses</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>Functional literacy understood as literacy in its narrow sense</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Reported being fully functionally literate</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>31</b>	<b>Expressed concerns about the functional literacy level</b>	<b>9</b>



## ***Factors influencing functional literacy development***

<b>Russian</b>	<b>British</b>
<b>motivation</b>	<b>motivation</b>
<b>“real-life” demands</b>	<b>feeling of contributing to society, making life better</b>
<b>up-dated and efficient textbooks</b>	<b>being exposed to international academic communication</b>
<b>the sufficient number of classes and courses provided by the university</b>	<b>events and courses provided by the university</b>
<b>qualified teachers who are functionally literate</b>	<b>regular reading</b>
<b>regular practice</b>	<b>accessibility of the sources</b>
<b>modern, flexible and versatile teaching methods, tailored training activities</b>	<b>efficient communication with the supervisors</b>

## ***Functional literacy for global research career development***

<b>Russian</b>		<b>British</b>
<b>43</b>	<b>Acknowledged the direct connection between functional literacy and global research career</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>29</b>	<b>Wished to continue their research career</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>15</b>	<b>Positive about prospects of academic employment</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>9</b>	<b>No plans for research career</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>25</b>	<b>Intentions to maintain the level of functional literacy</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>17</b>	<b>Clear and numerous ideas of the ways how to sustain the level</b>	<b>3</b>

# Thank you

*The project is supported by the Russian Foundation for Basic Research grant  
N 17-36-01125 and Southern Federal University, Rostov-on-Don, Russia*

[ochigisheva@rambler.ru](mailto:ochigisheva@rambler.ru)  
[hsolt@mail.ru](mailto:hsolt@mail.ru)