



Employment and Social Development Canada

Indicators of **Well-being in Canada**

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Learning - Adult Literacy

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Relevance

In our increasingly information-driven society, information comes from many different sources and can be presented in simple or in complex ways. Literacy — the ability to understand and then use information — is a fundamental skill. It is essential not only for participating fully at work, but for everyday life as well (e.g., for choosing products when grocery shopping). With a more literate workforce, Canada is also better able to compete in the global economy.

The *adult literacy* indicator measures the proportion of the Canadian population aged 16 to 65 that is able to understand and use information, such as news stories or instruction manuals.

Adult literacy is measured along a continuum divided into levels of proficiency. See the methodology section for more details.

(See also [Adult Numeracy](#).)

Summary

- [National Picture](#) — About 51.5% of Canadians aged 16 to 65 had literacy scores at Level 3 or above in 2012.
- [Gender](#) — Average literacy skills were similar for men (274.6 points) and women (272.3 points) in 2012.
- [Age](#) — In 2012, the individuals aged 25 to 34 had the highest average literacy skills.
- [Aboriginal People](#) — For all regions where Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal literacy levels were compared in 2012, the proportion of [Aboriginal people](#) with literacy scores at or above Level 3 was consistently lower than the proportion for non-Aboriginal people.
- [Language Groups](#) — In 2012, the proportion of [Anglophones](#) with Level 3 literacy or above was higher than the proportion for [Francophones](#).
- [Regions](#) — Yukon had the greatest percentage of individuals with literacy levels at Level 3 or above

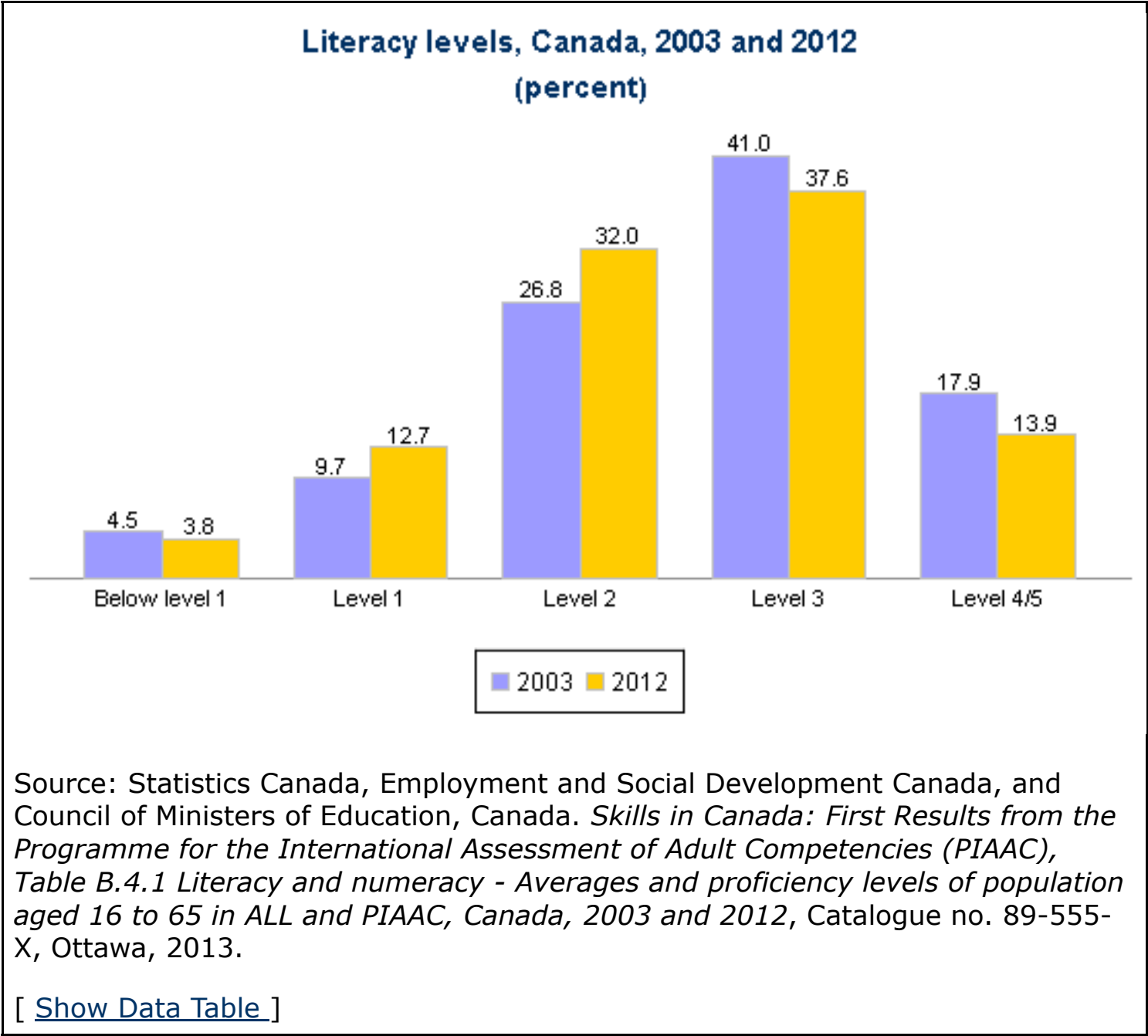
(55.6%) in 2012.

National Picture

In 2012, 51.5% of Canadians aged 16 to 65 had literacy scores in the Level 3 category or above.

When broken down by literacy levels, the highest proportion of Canadians had literacy scores in the Level 3 category (37.6%); the next highest proportion had Level 2 literacy scores (32.0%).

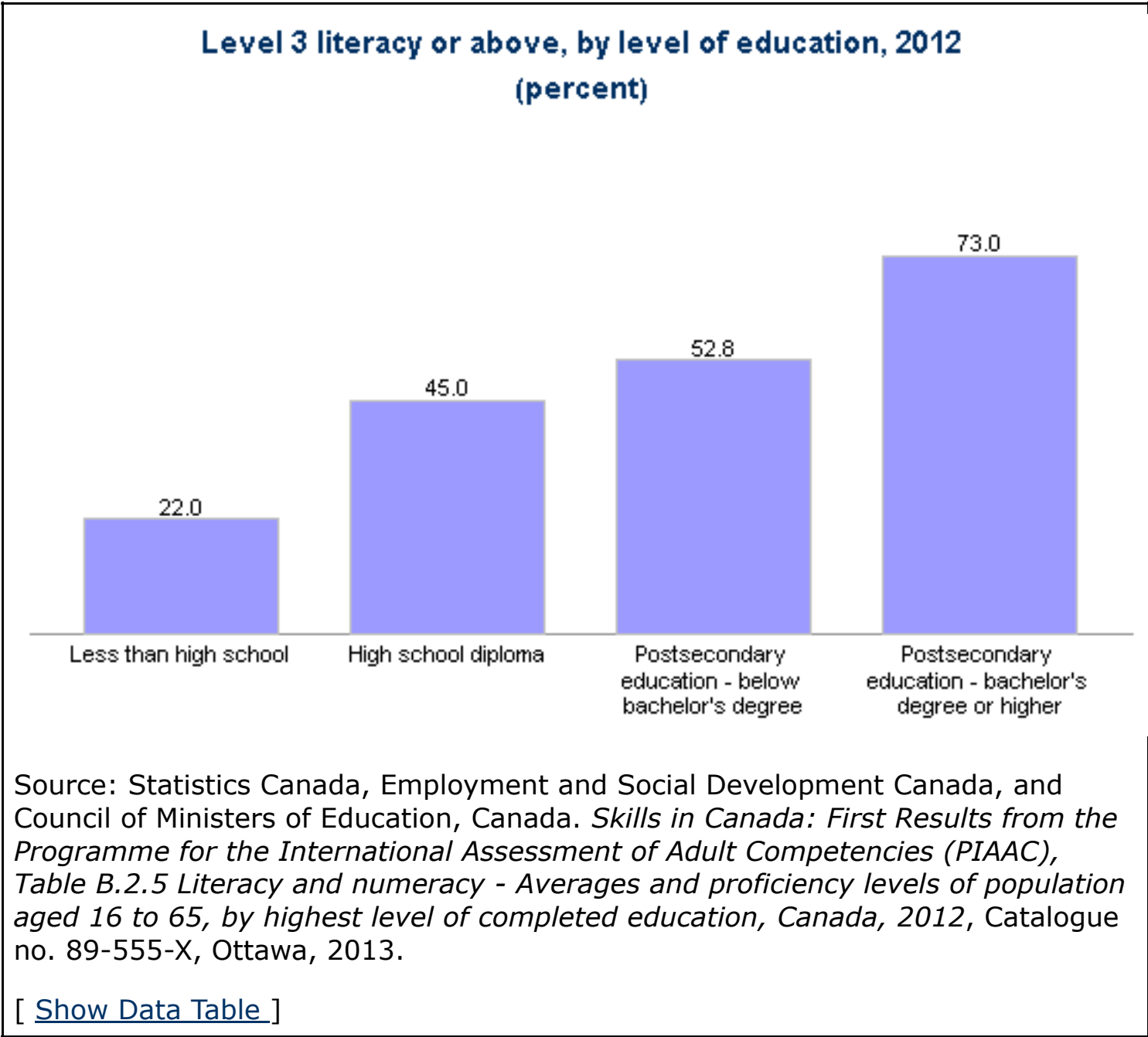
Comparing the results of the 2003 and 2012 literacy surveys, the proportions of Canadians with literacy scores in Level 1 and 2 increased while the proportion of Canadians with literacy scores in Level 3 and 4/5 decreased.



Overall, literacy levels increased with education levels. The proportion of individuals in Canada with literacy scores of Level 3 or above increased with the individuals' level of education. For the Canadian population with any postsecondary education, the percentage of individuals with literacy scores of Level 3 or higher exceeded the national average. Near three-quarters (73.0%) of individuals who reported having a bachelor's degree or higher as their highest level of education had literacy levels of 3 or greater.

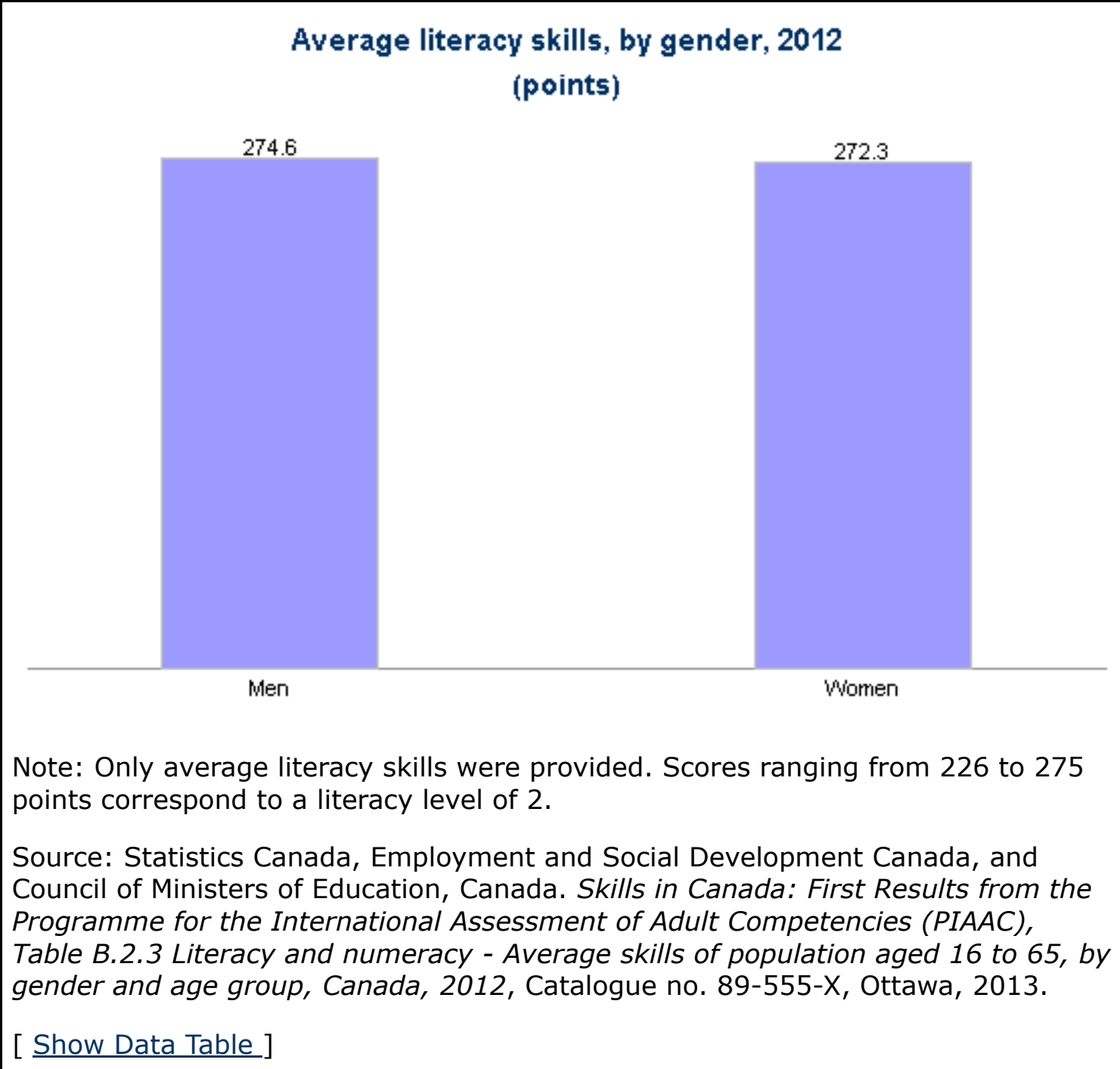
The biggest shift in the proportion of people with Level 3 literacy or above was observed between those

who had completed high school and those with less than a high school education. Whereas 45.0% of those who had completed high school had scores in the Level 3 category or above, only 22.0% of individuals who had not completed high school had scores of at least Level 3.



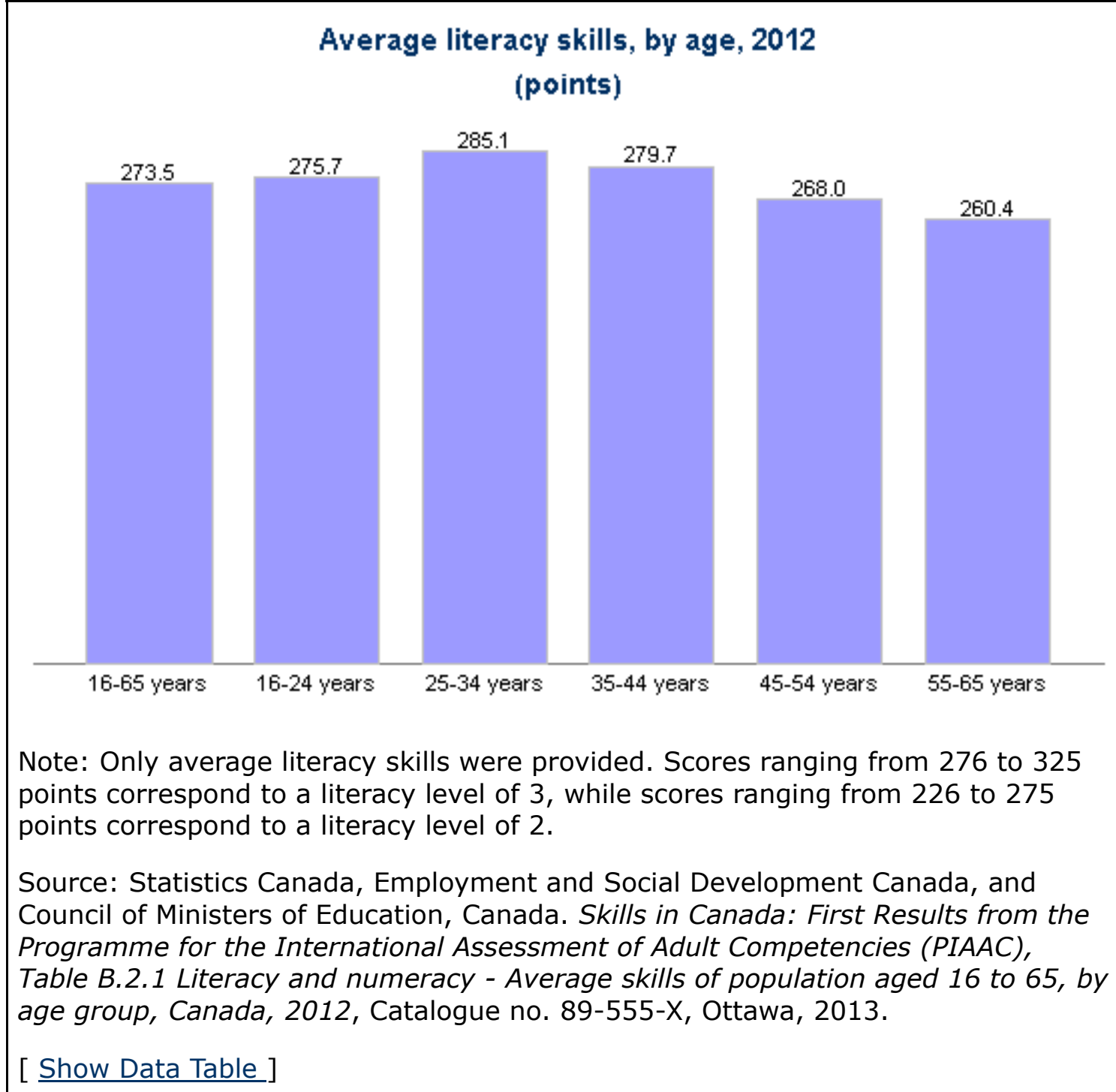
Gender

Both men and women achieved average literacy skills in the Level 2 range. The only statistically significant difference observed at the national level in literacy was for the 55 to 65 age group, men scored six points higher than women (263.6 points compared to 257.3 points).



Age

In 2012, average literacy skills were higher in the 25 to 34 age group, and lower among older age groups. The 45 to 54 and 55 to 65 age groups averages were below a literacy level of 3.



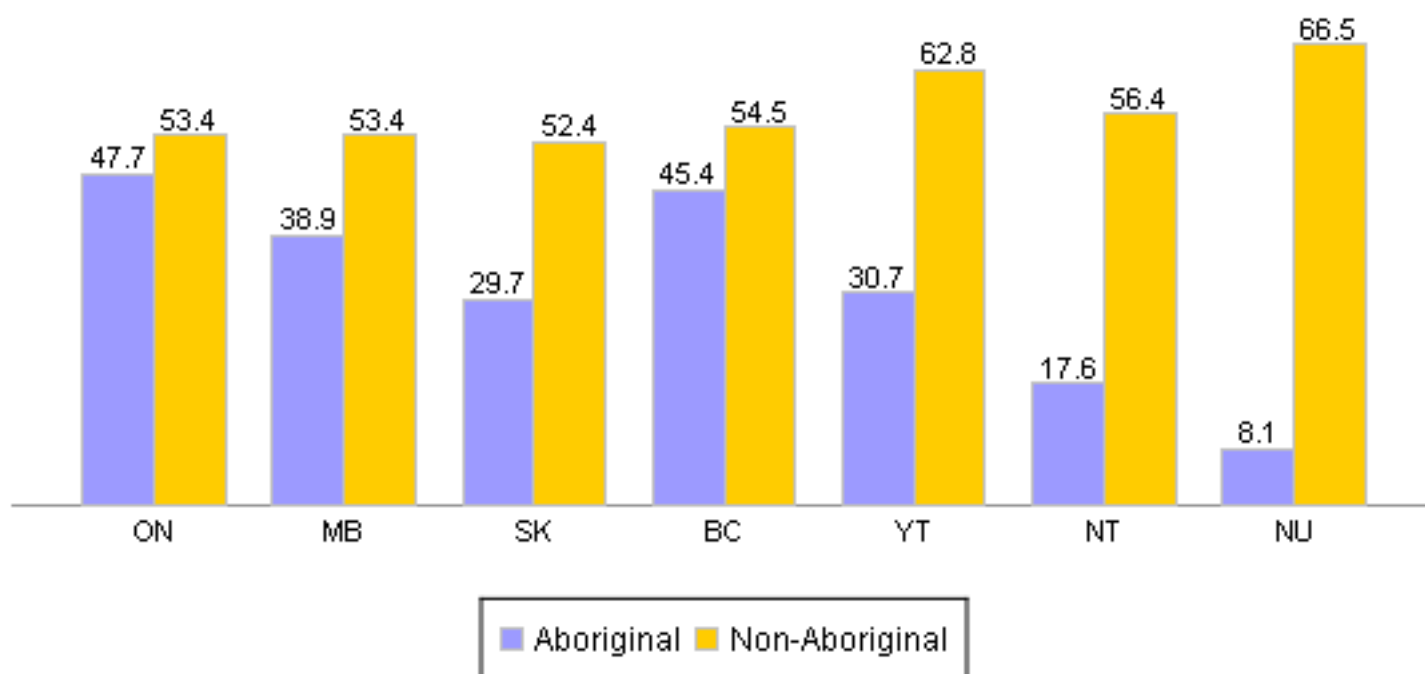
Aboriginal People

Literacy scores were generally lower for Aboriginal populations than for non-Aboriginal populations. Of the three territories, Yukon's Aboriginal population had the highest literacy scores, with 30.7% scoring at Level 3 or above, as compared with 62.8% of non-Aboriginal people.

Disparities between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations were less marked for the urban Aboriginal populations than for the populations in the territories. The biggest disparity in an urban area was for the province of Saskatchewan, where 29.7% of Aboriginal people had literacy levels of 3 or above, compared with 52.4% of non-Aboriginal people.

Except for Ontario and British Columbia, the Aboriginal populations of the regions examined fell below the Aboriginal Canadian average for literacy levels of 3 or above (40.3%). All non-Aboriginal populations of the regions examined had higher literacy levels of 3 or above than the non-Aboriginal Canadian average (51.9%).

Level 3 literacy or above, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations, oversampled populations, 2012
(percent)



Note: 1) The *Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies* (PIAAC) was administered in English and French, thus, data should be interpreted with caution since for many Aboriginal people, neither of these languages is their mother tongue; and 2) oversamples of Aboriginal people were drawn in Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, British Columbia, Yukon, Northwest Territories and Nunavut.

Source: Statistics Canada, Employment and Social Development Canada, and Council of Ministers of Education, Canada. *Skills in Canada: First Results from the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), Table B.3.1 Literacy - Averages and proficiency levels of population aged 16 to 65, by Aboriginal identification, Canada and oversampled populations, 2012*, Catalogue no. 89-555-X, Ottawa, 2013.

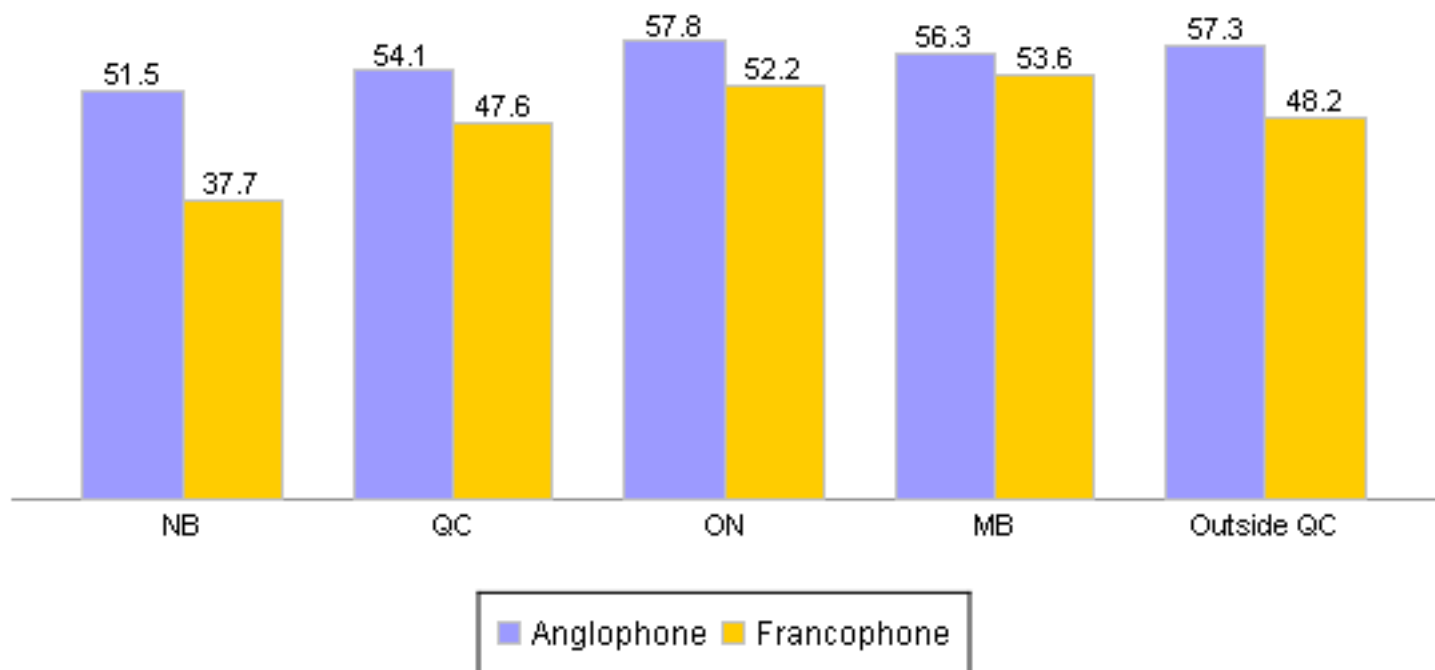
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Language Groups

For individuals whose mother tongue is English (Anglophones), 57.3% living outside Quebec and 54.1% living in Quebec had literacy scores at Level 3 or above in 2012. This was a higher proportion than for Francophones: 47.6% of those living in Quebec and 48.2% of those living outside the province had literacy levels of 3 or above.

Also, *immigrants* tended to have fairly low levels of literacy, with 37.1% of recent immigrants and 39.6% of established immigrants having literacy levels of 3 or above, compared with 55.9% of Canadian-born.[1]

Level 3 literacy or above, by official-language minority, oversampled populations, 2012 (percent)



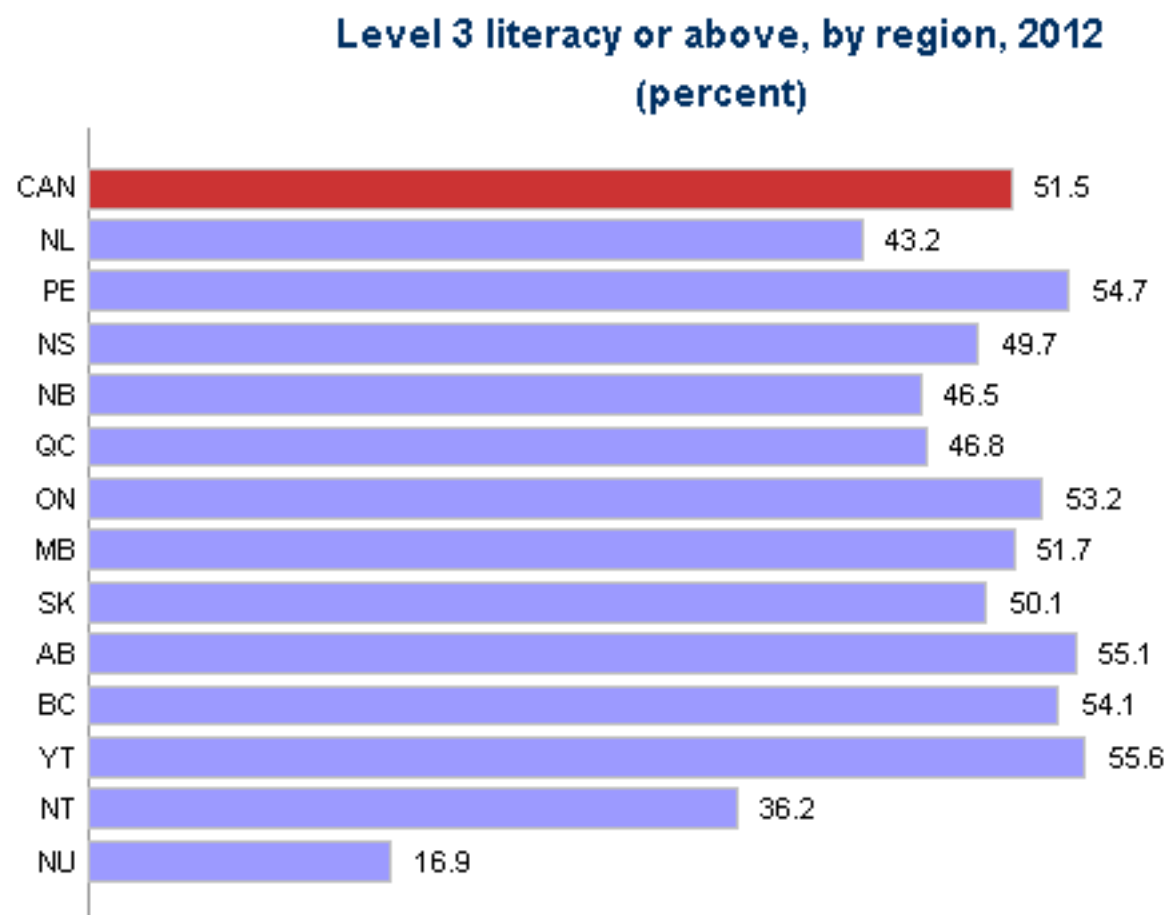
Source: Statistics Canada, Employment and Social Development Canada, and Council of Ministers of Education, Canada. *Skills in Canada: First Results from the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), Table B.3.7 Literacy - Averages and proficiency levels of population aged 16 to 65, by official-language minority, Canada and oversampled populations, 2012*, Catalogue no. 89-555-X, Ottawa, 2013.

[[Show Data Table](#)]

Regions

In 2012, performance at Level 3 literacy or above ranged from a low of 16.9% in Nunavut to a high of 55.6% in Yukon. In fact, Yukon fared well overall, with residents having literacy scores that were higher than the Canadian average, as well as the highest proportion of literacy scores in the Level 4/5 range (16.1%).

More than half of the populations of Newfoundland and Labrador (56.8%), New Brunswick (53.5%), Quebec (53.2%), Northwest Territories (63.8%) and Nunavut (83.1%) had literacy scores below Level 3.



Note: The *Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies* (PIAAC) was administered in English and French. Data should be interpreted with caution, particularly for the Territories where a large share of the population has neither of these languages as a mother tongue.

Source: Statistics Canada, Employment and Social Development Canada, and Council of Ministers of Education, Canada. *Skills in Canada: First Results from the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), Table B.1.2 Literacy - Comparative distributions of proficiency levels of population aged 16 to 65, countries, provinces and territories, 2012*, Catalogue no. 89-555-X, Ottawa, 2013.

[[Show Data Table](#)]

Footnotes

1. Statistics Canada, Employment and Social Development Canada, and Council of Ministers of Education, Canada. *Skills in Canada: First Results from the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), Table B.3.4 Litteracy - Averages and proficiency levels of population aged 16 to 65, by immigrant status, Canada and oversampled populations, 2012*, Catalogue no. 89-555-X, Ottawa, 2013.

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- [Download the data in Excel format](#) (.xls, 12288 bytes)
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