LITERACY IN CYPRUS

COUNTRY REPORT
SHORT VERSION

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1 Introduction

This report on the state of literacy in Cyprus is one of a series produced in 2015 and 2016 by ELINET, the European Literacy Policy Network. ELINET was founded in February 2014 and has 78 partner organisations in 28 European countries[1]. ELINET aims to improve literacy policies in its member countries in order to reduce the number of children, young people and adults with low literacy skills. One major tool to achieve this aim is to produce a set of reliable, up-to-date and comprehensive reports on the state of literacy in each country where ELINET has one or more partners, and to provide guidance towards improving literacy policies in those countries. The reports are based (wherever possible) on available, internationally comparable performance data, as well as reliable national data provided (and translated) by our partners.

ELINET continues the work of the European Union High Level Group of Experts on Literacy (HLG) which was established by the European Commission in January 2011 and reported in September 2012[2]. All country reports produced by ELINET use a common theoretical framework which is described here: "ELINET Country Reports – Frame of Reference"[3].

The Country Reports are organised around the three recommendations of the HLG´s literacy report:

- Creating a literate environment
- Improving the quality of teaching
- Increasing participation, inclusion (and equity[4]).

Within its two-year funding period ELINET has completed Literacy Country Reports for all 30 ELINET member countries. In most cases we published separate **Long Reports** for specific age groups (Children / Adolescents and Adults), in some cases comprehensive reports covering all age groups. Additionally, for all 30 countries, we published **Short Reports** covering all age groups, containing the summary of performance data and policy messages of the Long Reports. These reports are accompanied by a collection of good practice examples which cover all age groups and policy areas as well. These examples refer to the **European Framework of Good Practice in Raising Literacy Levels;** both are to be found in the section "Good Practice"[5].

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[1] For more information about the network and its activities see: www.eli-net.eu.

[2] In the following, the final report of the EU High Level Group of Experts on Literacy is referenced as "HLG report". This report can be downloaded under the following link: http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/school/doc/ literacy-report_en.pdf.

[3] See: http://www.eli-net.eu/research/country-reports/.

[4] "Equity" was added by ELINET.

[5] See: http://www.eli-net.eu/good-practice/.

2 General Information on the Cyprus Education System

The Cyprus educational system is centrally managed by the Ministry of Education and Culture (MoEC). The MoEC is responsible for all the government educational institutions in Cyprus and also collaborates with the private ones. MOEC is responsible for the preparation and enforcement of new legislation concerning education, the national curriculum and the national textbooks. The Cyprus educational system consists of pre-primary and primary schools, secondary general and secondary technical/vocational schools, and special schools for the blind, deaf, and other teachable handicapped persons. The Cyprus Pedagogical Institute which is under the MOEC is responsible for the in-service training of teachers at all levels of education. The Education system in Cyprus consists of the following departments/stages/levels:

Pre-Primary education: Early Childhood Education and Care is offered in Cyprus for the ages 0-6. The Social Welfare Services Department which is part of the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance is responsible for the Care provided to children from the ages 0-3 and the Ministry of Education and Culture is responsible for the ages 3-6.

Pre-Primary Education is compulsory for all children between 4 8/12 – 5 8/12 years old. There are both Public and Private pre-primary schools and parents can choose the type of Pre-Primary school they wish their children to attend. Children are also accepted in public schools over the age of 3 presuming there are available spaces. Pre-primary education aims to the balanced development of children's personality in an experiential environment which enables them to recognize their capabilities and enhance their self-image.

Primary Education: Primary education is compulsory for all children over the age of 5 and has a duration of 6 years. The aim of Primary Education is to create and secure the necessary learning opportunities for children regardless of age, sex, family and social background and mental abilities.
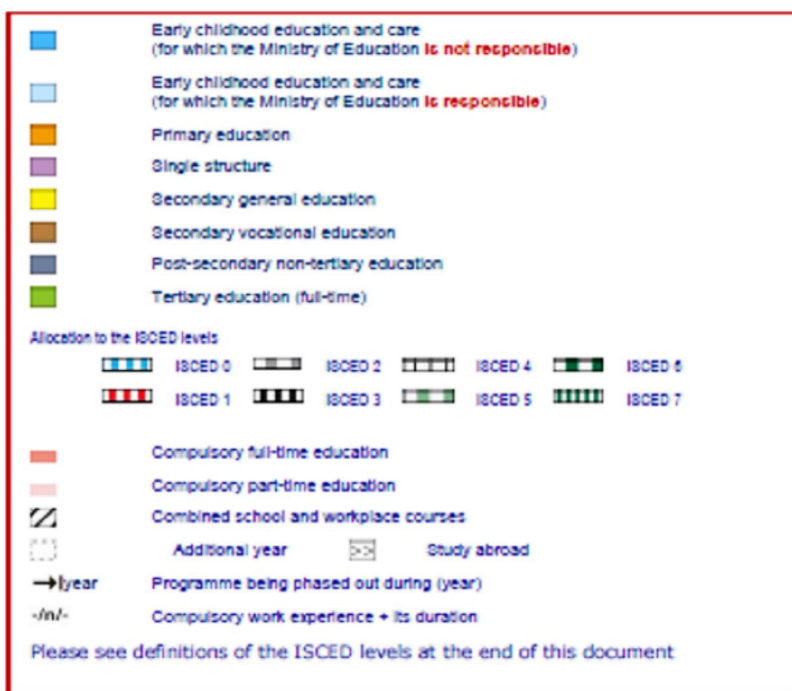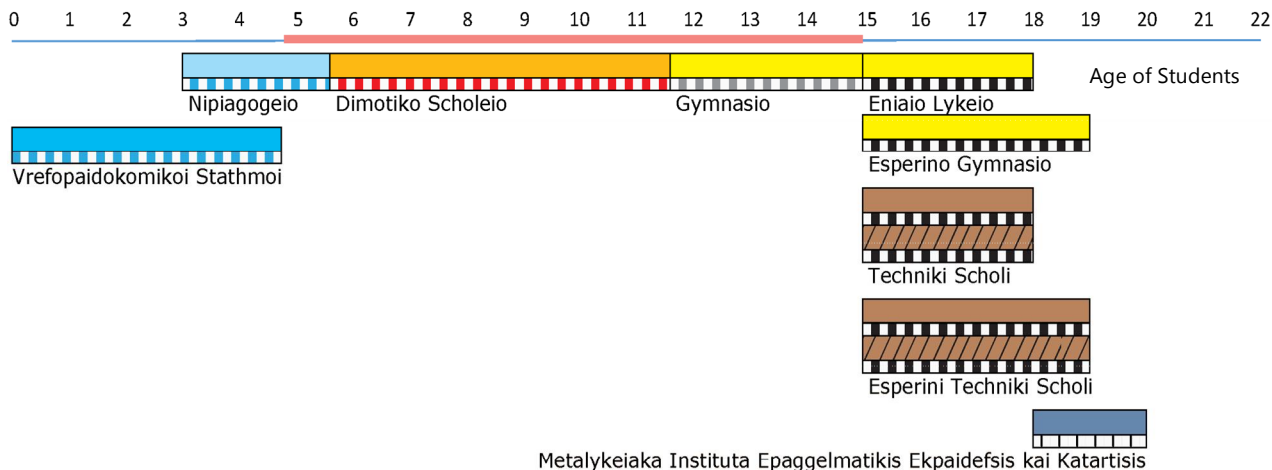
Secondary Education: Secondary General Education offers two three-year cycles of education – Gymnasium (lower secondary education) and Lyceum (upper secondary education) – to pupils between the ages of 12 and 18. The curriculum includes core and interdisciplinary subjects as well as a variety of extracurricular activities.

Pupils may also choose to attend Secondary Technical and Vocational Education. The programmes offered provides them with knowledge and skills which will prepare them to enter the workforce or pursue further studies in their area of interest.

Post-Secondary Vocational Education and Training (Post- Secondary Institutes of VET): Post-Secondary Vocational Education and Training offers all types of vocational education and training and provides students with the necessary qualifications by imparting academic and technical knowledge, as well as professional and practical skills. The duration of the programmes offered is two years, on a 5-day basis.

Higher Education: Both public and private universities operate in Cyprus.

Figure 1: Structure of the Cyprus School System

0   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10   11   12   13   14   15   16   17   18   19   20   21   22

Age of Students

Nipiagogeio

Dimotiko Scholeio

Gymnasio

Eniaio Lykeio

Vrefopaidokomikoi Stathmoi

Esperino Gymnasio

Techniki Scholi

Esperini Techniki Scholi

Metalykeiaka Instituta Epaggelmatikis Ekpaidefsis kai Katartisis

Early childhood education and care
(for which the Ministry of Education **is not responsible**)

Early childhood education and care
(for which the Ministry of Education **is responsible**)

Primary education

Single structure

Secondary general education

Secondary vocational education

Post-secondary non-tertiary education

Tertiary education (full-time)

Allocation to the ISCED levels

ISCED 0   ISCED 2   ISCED 4   ISCED 6

ISCED 1   ISCED 3   ISCED 5   ISCED 7

Compulsory full-time education

Compulsory part-time education

Combined school and workplace courses

Additional year   Study abroad

→/year   Programme being phased out during (year)

-/n/-   Compulsory work experience + its duration

Please see definitions of the ISCED levels at the end of this document

Source: http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/facts_and_figures/education_structures_EN.pdf.

3 Literacy Performance Data

Literacy performance data for primary school children from international surveys are limited to the results of PIRLS 2001 (when Cyprus last participated in PIRLS). As fourteen years have passed since then, these results are considered outdated. Literacy data for 15 year olds from PISA 2012 show that students in Cyprus achieved a mean score of 449 on PISA overall reading. This was significantly lower than the EU-27 average of 489. In terms of the percentage distribution of 15-year-old students on PISA levels, 32.9.9% students were identified below level 2 and therefore are considered low performing readers, and only a very small percentage of 4% were identified on the higher levels of the PISA reading literacy scale (levels 5 and 6). PISA 2012 results also reveal that the gap in reading performance between students in the top and bottom quarters of the socioeconomic scale (i.e. 85 points) is not significantly different from the EU-27 average. Furthermore, in Cyprus there is a wider gap between the two genders, in favor of girls, in relation to their reading performance (21% of girls and 45% of boys in Cyprus performed at or below level 2 on PISA reading literacy). In relation to the gap in reading performance between native students and those with an immigrant background, this was found to be quite small (i.e. 10 score points). The corresponding gap across EU-27 was 42 points.

As there is an absence of a national educational assessment and monitoring system, the only available data on primary school students' literacy skills on a national level come from the Program for Functional Literacy (PFL). PFL is conducted every year since 2007 by the Centre for Educational Research and Evaluation (CERE) of the MoEC. The PFL aims to identify pupils aged 8 (Grade 3) and 11 (Grade 6) at risk for low level skills in two key competencies (communication in mother tongue i.e. Greek language and Mathematics) in order to provide them with support.

Percentage of students with low level skills in Greek language

The PFL longitudinal results of students identified 'at risk' i.e. with low level skills in Greek language are presented in Figure 1. For Grade 3 students, results are reported only for four years as initially the PFL addressed only Grade 6 students. According to Figure 2 the proportion of students with low skills in Greek at Grade 3 the past four years ranged from 6%-11% and at Grade 6 ranged from 6% to 12.7% (CERE, 2015a, 2015b).

Figure 2: PFL longitudinal results for students identified with low level skills in Greek language
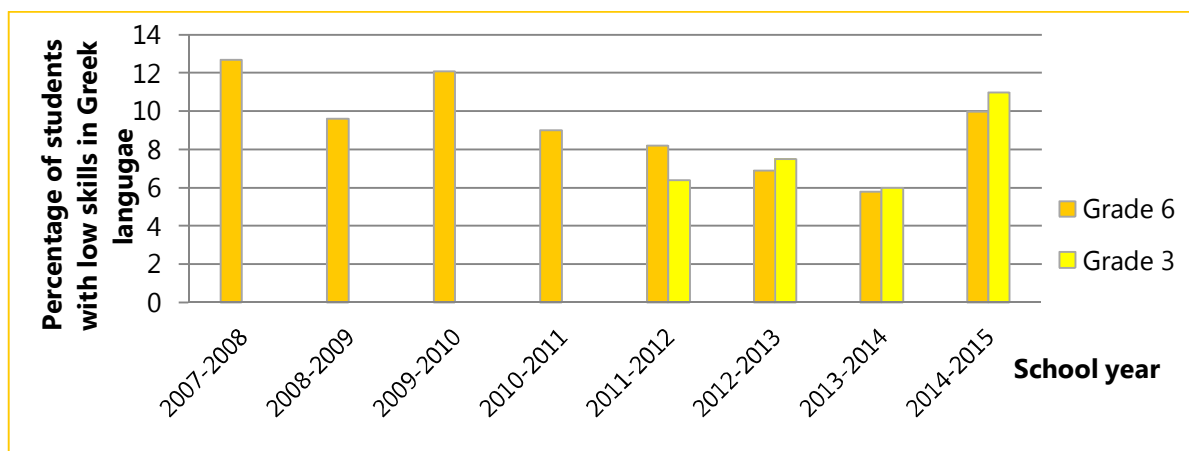
PFL findings also suggest that there is an association between gender and 'risk' with boys being more likely to be identified at risk than girls. Furthermore, an association is also evident between parents' educational level and 'risk' with students who reported that their parents have a low educational level (did not complete compulsory education) being more likely to be identified at 'risk' than students who reported that their parents had a high educational level (completed tertiary education). It is important also to note that 15% of pupils who reported that they spoke additional languages at home were identified as 'at risk' which is more than twice higher than the percentage of students at risk identified in the category of pupils that reported that Greek was the only language spoken at home.

Closing the achievement gaps between various groups of literacy learners is a major challenge in all European countries. In Cyprus the following gaps are identified through the PISA 2012 shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Performance Gaps in Cyprus and on Average across EU Countries - Post-Primary Level
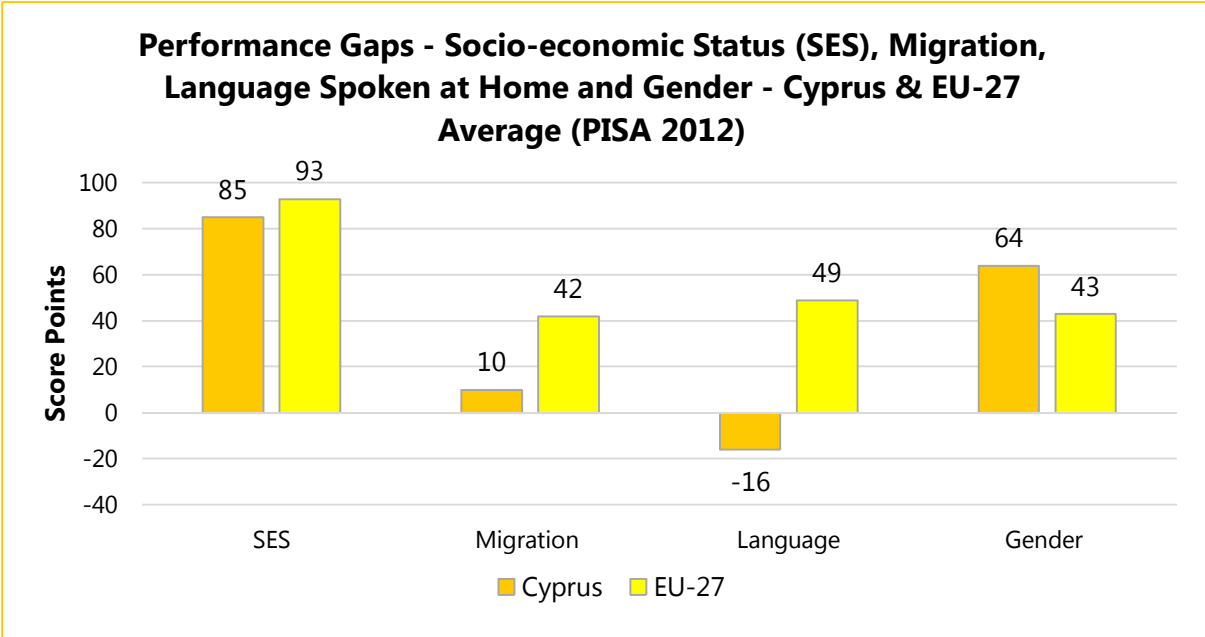
SES: Top – Bottom quartile on PISA ESCS scale; Migration: Native – first/second generation immigrants; Language: Speaks language of the PISA test at home – speaks another language; Gender: Girls - Boys

4 Key Literacy Policy Areas for Development (age-specific and across age-groups)

4.1 Creating a Literate Environment

Literate environment, at home, in the classroom, in the workplace and in the community can play a significant role in promoting the development of literacy skills and positive attitudes towards reading (EFA Global Monitoring Report 2006).

4.1.1 Pre-Primary Years

Creating a literate environment at home: As home learning environment, is considered of high importance (Brooks et al. 2012) the family role in the creation of a literate environment is investigated. In Cyprus the relationship between literate environment and literacy is being supported by the research conducted in the framework of the the context of Programme of Functional Literacy (PFL). Research evidence reveal that in the group of students that were identified as "at risk", a higher percentage of students reported as not having home educational resources compared to students in the 'not' at the risk group. Furthermore, students who reported as having none or few books at home (<25) had a higher percentage of students identified at risk than students who reported as having many books at home (>100) (CERE,2015).

Literacy data regarding the skills of primary (PFL data) and secondary school (PISA 2012) children are quite alarming. A significant percentage of students in Cyprus are lacking basic reading skills. Results also show that students coming from a low socioeconomic background and a poor home learning environment are more likely to lack basic reading skills. These findings suggest that the Cyprus educational system needs to implement system and school level policies to promote equity in terms of both inclusion (ensuring a basic minimum standard of education for all students) and fairness (personal and social circumstances should not be an obstacle to achieving educational potential). Therefore, there is a need for intervention programs at school and at home from preschool through elementary years that will provide support to students that fall behind and to their families.

4.1.2 Children and Adolescents

Creating a literate environment in school: In Cyprus Schools– mainly primary schools –many projects have already been developed to foster reading motivation and reading for pleasure by establishing school and classroom libraries. Both school and classroom libraries offer a variety of books mainly literature, story books and informational books. Teachers can utilise the classroom material in any way they wish in order to provide students with opportunities to read challenging and interesting material. Reading for pleasure is one of the aims of the language teaching in the Cyprus curriculum. Every classroom in primary schools is equipped with a library. Students are encouraged to borrow books, either to read in their free time, or to prepare some lesson-related work.

Students use a variation of reading material created and produced by the Curriculum Development Unit of the Pedagogical institute, books provided by the Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs of Greece and other supplementary material approved by the Ministry of Education and Culture.

It is important to notice that the Cyprus national curriculum has embedded reading for pleasure, in Greek language lesson in an effort to provide opportunities to students to interact with literacy texts. This change shifts the focus from school texts to literacy texts and other form of texts promoting reading practices in an effort to develop their overall literacy skills. Teachers utilise classroom libraries as a part of their teaching practises and student's' have the opportunity to lend books and are encouraged to reflect on the book through oral and written work.

Although there is an effort to utilise libraries and promote the love for reading there is still a challenge concerning the use of school libraries in a way that will engage all students in lending and reading more books from the classroom library. Another challenge is the utilisation of classroom libraries in every day teaching practises. Furthermore, there is a need for more programs that will help and support the development of home environment and parents' involvement as a mean to improve parents' and students' attitudes towards reading in general.

Offering digital literacy learning opportunities in schools (and other public spaces, e.g. libraries): Digital literacy opportunities to students have increased dramatically in schools of all levels in Cyprus from 2001 to 2012 (CYPRUS INFORMATION SOCIETY STATISTICS, 2012). This is due to the relation between Digital environment and literate environment, which can be enriched by incorporation of digital devices into the learning process and the school environment. Specifically, there was an increment in ccomputer usage, in the number of computers connected to the internet per 100 pupils and the computers connected to the internet with high speed connections (TABLE 52. COMPUTERS AND INTERNET IN EDUCATION, 2001 – 2012 Survey on Education of the Statistical Service 2012).

The challenge here is for Cyprus Educational System to be able to assess the way the digital environment in schools is being utilised in instruction in a way that promotes learning through enriched learning opportunities both at the primary and secondary level.

Digital environment of primary students: A digital environment and the use of digital devices into the school environment and learning process is foreseen by the Ministry of Education and Culture and thus was incorporated in the Cyprus Curricula (2010). Although in primary education, there is no ICT curriculum several strategies and practices about ICT (digital literacy) are proposed by the Curriculum as an effort to promote the utilisation of media education and the promotion of quality of teaching and learning through media in all subjects. Each classroom in primary schools is equipped with at least one computer and a projector. These can be used by the teachers to enrich their instruction or by the students for presentations, research and other lesson related tasks. The past 3 years, some classrooms are also equipped with interactive boards. Primary schools with a big number of students may also have a computer room where students work in groups on specific educational software (i.e. language. maths, science software). The Ministry Of Education and Culture (MOEC) provides educational software to primary schools and ICT counsellors visit the school at least twice a year to help teachers with the use of technology in their teaching

It is necessary to note the relation of digital literacy and literacy has been reported in the language curriculum. According to the language curriculum, students need to master discourse production skills in fields of new technologies (e-mail, YouTube, Facebook, learning through the internet, using Skype, etc.) to understand the different meanings in various contexts. Also, the language curriculum promotes comprehension and production of oral and written discourse in widely used means of new

technologies in order to investigate the characteristics of discourse and the ways in which mediators of communication produce literate identities.

Digital environment of secondary students: In secondary schools, there are Classrooms where specific school subjects are being taught (Languages, History) and Laboratories (Physics, Chemistry, Biology), that are equipped with computers and a projector. Also, in each school there are 2-3 laptops and 2-3 portable projectors that can be borrowed by teachers in order to be used in classroom. In secondary schools, there are Classrooms where specific school subjects are being taught (Languages, History) and Laboratories (Physics, Chemistry, Biology), that are equipped with computers and a projector. Also, in each school there are 2-3 laptops and 2-3 portable projectors that can be borrowed by teachers in order to be used in classroom. The ICT courses for the Gymnasium and the Lyceum aim in engaging students in a meaningful learning process with the use of the computer as a problem-solving tool and are being taught at ICT labs that are equipped with computers, printers, scanners, projectors and multimedia hardware. All computers in all ICT labs are connected to the Internet via ADSL lines.

The role of public libraries in reading promotion. Public libraries as an important agent in reading promotion: Many municipalities in Cyprus maintain a public library (i.e Nicosia, Strovolos, Limassol, Larnaca, Derinia, Paphos). Within these libraries, there are special sections dedicated to children attending primary schools. Public libraries with sections for children are also maintained by other organisations i.e. the British Council, the Goethe Foundation, the French Cultural Centre, the Russian Cultural Centre. These libraries however, offer book collections in other languages and are situated exclusively in the capital city, Nicosia.

One of the most important initiatives is the installation of the librarian system ABEKT 5.5 and 5.6 that supports cataloguing and management of libraries. The user interface of ABEKT is available in the Greek and English languages. In 2013, upgraded technical support was extended to the libraries of Primary and Secondary Education and the ABEKT system has been installed in 144 school libraries. Furthermore, the Cyprus Library Network, which has been developed and is evolving under the Ministry of Education and Culture in cooperation with the National Documentation Centre (EKT), provides access to the Catalogues of Public, Municipal, School and other Libraries[6].

Further form the above and some sporadic and minor efforts on behalf of the libraries to bring citizens of all ages nearer to the libraries (literature days, special events, presentation days, reading with authors etc.), it must be noted that there is an absence of programs for promoting the role of libraries and reading in everyday life.

Cooperation between secondary schools, families, libraries and other agents in literacy promotion for adolescents: A program fostered by the Pancyprian Organization for the promotion of Literacy in collaboration with the Cultural Services of the Ministry of Education and Culture is the programme "Supporting the Libraries". The main objective of the program was to assist the public library to develop reading strategies to community groups, to provide for the development of information literacy, to facilitate access to the internet, to help adults to become familiar with new technologies to support educational process, to provide social cohesion opportunities through various cultural activities organized, to cater for the inclusion of socially excluded persons (economic migrants, foreigners, repatriates, etc.) as culture is the means of approach in intercultural basis.

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[6] Available at: http://www.cln.com.cy/.

Unfortunately, apart of the program presented above, there are no family literacy programmes at a national level, further from initiatives by the municipalities and NGO's. Cyprus Educational System is facing a major challenge on ways to provide effective family literacy programs in a systematic and consistent way. Programs that will provide opportunities for families to understand the importance of literacy and their crucial role as parents in promoting literacy for their children, enabling them to act as basic agents for cultivation and development of literacy skills. It must also be noted there is a need for more actions and programs regarding the promotion of literacy with the cooperation of secondary schools, families, libraries and other agents. These actions and programmes must be developed in a broader and systemic way in order to be more effective and able to include more families and more students.

Improving literate environments for children and adolescents: Programmes, initiatives and examples: Organised campaigns to promote reading habits for primary school students are organised mostly by NGO's, local municipalities, private book publishers and bookshops in many cases with the collaboration with governmental agencies (i.e. the Ministry of Education and Culture). However, these campaigns are sporadic and therefore their impact cannot be considered as significant. Such an initiative is the program run by the Pancyprian Organization is the Athletic Training Book Clubs that promotes the creation of Reading Clubs by the Cyprus Sports Organization in cooperation with municipalities and communities throughout Cyprus. In this programme children participating in the Cyprus Sports Organization's program "Sports for all" will also participate in a book club where they will read books with contents that serves the ideals of athletic training on issues of fair play, the sporting ethics, the cultural dimension of sports and the athletes in connection with the affairs of the local communities of which they are members.

Furthermore, Adult Education Centers which mostly target to people with literacy difficulties, people with special needs, enclaved Cypriots, prisoners, mentally ill and elderly people, also offer Greek language courses to the children of repatriated Cypriots, political refugees and Turkish Cypriots.

4.1.3 Adults

There is very little adult literacy provision in Cyprus which lacks many aspects of the infrastructure required in order to offer high quality provision to adults with literacy needs.

The Adult Education Centres of the Ministry of Education and Culture (M.O.E.C)[7] is a significant programme, which provides general adult education in Cyprus within the framework of providing lifelong learning opportunities. The main objective of the Adult Education Centres is the general development of each adult's personality as well as the social, financial and cultural development of citizens and society in general. Their aims coincide with the State's developmental policy and the wider aims of the M.O.E.C. both in terms of the provision of Lifelong Learning opportunities for all the citizens of the Republic of Cyprus and to combat educational inequalities so that citizens may be successfully integrated and enabled to act efficiently in a united Europe.

Adult literacy programmes are offered by the Adult Education Centres and the Open Schools. Open schools are financed by the Ministry of Education and Culture (Government of Cyprus, 2012, p.10).

Another form of provision which addresses the literacy needs of the adult population is the Evening Adult School (Esperino Sxoleio). Evening Schools operate in every district of the island under the

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[7] See http://www.highereducation.ac.cy/en/.

administration of Secondary Education and offer second chance education to Early School Leavers. The programme targets adults (17+) of all ages who dropped out from school and want to re-enter education in order to finish their studies and obtain the School Leaving Certificate (Apolytirion).

There are no concrete mechanisms for the identification of those who face literacy problems in order to make them aware of the available opportunities to improve their literacy skills and practices.

Adult Education is an integral part of a comprehensive Lifelong Learning Strategy 2007-13. The national target for participation in lifelong learning is 12% in 2020. Within the Cypriot Lifelong Learning Strategy (CyLLS) the main aim of Adult Education is to increase the participation of adults in Lifelong Learning by: (a) upgrading the skills and competences of people at work in order to secure their employability and to meet the needs of the economy, (b) providing opportunities for training in basic skills and entrepreneurship for economically inactive adults, in order to facilitate their entry to the labour market and reduce the risk of social exclusion and (c) extending the scope of programmes offered in order to enhance active citizenship, civic education, as well as to build occupational skills mainly in literacy, foreign languages and computer literacy. However, there is little evidence that the strategy has had a positive impact on adult literacy education.

4.2 Improving the Quality of Teaching

To improve the quality of teaching, important aspects need to be considered:
- the quality of preschool
- coherent literacy curricula
- high-quality reading instruction,
- early identification of and support for struggling literacy learners
- highly qualified teachers (cf. Frame of Reference for ELINET Country Reports).

Very crucial is the quality of teaching and of teachers, as the McKinsey report "How the world best performing school systems come out on top" (McKinsey et al. 2007) states: "The quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers." (McKinsey et al. 2007).

4.2.1 Pre-Primary Years

Improving the quality of preschool education: It is important to notice that the quality of pre-school educational programmes are based on two main variable categories: (a) Variable concerning the structural characteristics of the programme (i.e. class size, teacher/student ration, teachers educational level, syllabi and time spent on the implementation of programmes etc) and (b) variables concerning the processes of the programme (i.e. motivation, student / teacher interaction, guidance and support of social interaction between students, degree and level of language use opportunities etc.) (Pianta, Barnett, Burchinal & Thornburg, 2009).

In Cyprus the maximum number of students in the classroom per teacher – Teacher Assistant with no educational qualifications is 25 (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2015)**.** Regarding pre-school teachers' qualification, the minimum required level to become a qualified pre-school teacher is Bachelor level (ISCED 5). Length of study 4 years (European Commission/ EACEA/Eurydice/Eurostat 2014, p. 101).

Continuing Professional Development is not obligatory (Eurostat 2014, pp. 104–105) although School Inspectors do provide pre-school teachers with opportunities for professional development. Furthermore, seminars are being provided centrally to pre-school teachers in collaboration with the

Ministry of Education and Culture. Pre-school teachers have also the opportunity to participate voluntarily at professional development seminars and workshops.

Although Initial teacher education provides opportunities for future teachers to learn and practise how to address literacy issues it is believed that future teachers are not well prepared to address challenges that they will face on teaching in mixed – ability and multicultural classrooms. In order for future teachers to be ready for teaching literacy in mixed- ability and multicultural classroom their initial education could be altered and focused in the development of literacy instructional practises in such classroom setups. Furthermore, a more focused and integrated approach to teaching literacy can be introduced in teachers' initial university syllabus that will be in accordance with the new curriculum and the methodology proposed.

Pre-School Curriculum: The developmental objectives set for primary education by the Cyprus curriculum are classified based on the distinction between language and emergent literacy skills. Regarding language, children are motivated to participate in activities which enable them to develop their listening and speaking skills. Regarding emergent literacy, children are encouraged to participate in activities which aim to the development of reading, writing and text comprehension skills (Ministry of Education and Culture 2010, p. 35-40).

The provision of a print rich classroom environment constitutes one of the main emergent literacy objectives of the Cypriot curriculum and thus students should be exposed to a variety of literature genres, such as stories, myths and poems, and diverge texts, such as magazines and newspapers, in order to develop their reading, writing and comprehension skills (Ministry of Education and Culture 2010, p. 38-39).

Children should understand the direction of print, the stability of the written language, that print carries the message, be able to recognize letters in various texts, understand the "technical language of print" and the various symbols from the environmental print (Ministry of Education and Culture 2010, p. 38-39). Furthermore, children should be able to read simple sentences or simple texts independently (Eurydice 2011, p. 56).

Children should be able to recognize the rhymes in a poem and the initial phoneme in a word (Ministry of Education and Culture 2010, p. 37), as well as to link sounds to letters, name and sound the letters of the alphabet (Eurydice 2011, p. 55).

Since all children in Cyprus from the age of 4 years and 8 months on the 1st of September have the right to free public education can attend to public schools. Only a small number of younger children (younger than 4 years and 8 months) may attend free public and low cost communal kindergartens (according to socioeconomic criteria), while the rest of the children may attend private kindergartens (high cost) or stay at home. This shows that while the quality of Early Childhood education is high, with well-trained staff in all settings, there are insufficient places for younger students. The Cyprus Educational System is facing a challenge of increasing participation of children of younger age (from the age of 3 years and 8 months old) in public pre-primary schools.

4.2.2 Children and Adolescents

Improving Literacy Curricula and Reading instruction in schools: Literacy in the New Cyprus curriculum is approached through a broader and research-based perspective. More specifically, an approach of integrated language and Literacy instruction is employed, which aims to balance and synthesize different aspects from various linguistic theories and practices. The integrated language and

Literacy instruction consists of the following four aspects, approached correspondingly: (a) the recognition and use of the basic linguistic structures (i.e. alphabet, spelling, grammar, text conventions), b) understanding of the multiple language functions within a variety of texts and contexts, c) comprehension and production of various lingual and non-lingual texts (written, oral, multi-modal) within various socio-economic and cultural contexts, d) critical interpretation and analysis of texts.

The Language Lesson for primary education aims to develop reading and writing skills as part of a broader literacy agenda. Language skills are addressed in the subject "ELLINIKA" (including Language and Literature). Reading is taught as part of language instruction. Language is considered as an integrated subject, which also includes listening, speaking, reading, writing, orthography, grammar, studying skills, and skills for acquisition of information. ELLINIKA is taught in every grade of the elementary school.

The same curriculum framework consists also for secondary education. The organization of the Curricula on the basis of both axes, Expected Learning Outcomes and the syllabus for achieving them, provides teachers a tool for pursuing and teaching what is necessary in each stage of the student's development. It also sets teaching in a new direction, which goes from the "teaching of the syllabus and the pages of the book" to the "teaching of the student", meeting his/her learning and broader developmental needs. At the same time, the organization based on Indicators, although are in a pilot phase, facilitates the exercise of pedagogical autonomy of teachers, allowing them to diagnose both the students' weaknesses and their special skills, and to organize a successful learning context for all of them.

The Ministry of Education and Culture promotes the application of contemporary pedagogical methodologies (constructivism, differentiation of class work, team work and collaboration/ investigative/cross-curricular integration, exploratory learning, learning through active participation and involvement, utilization of information and communication technologies, integration of language education and real life) for literacy instruction, though a student-oriented approach, in order to achieve the main objective of linguistic development, which is the mastering, understanding and excellent use of the Modern Greek language.

Although, as shown above, guidelines, various activities and instructional practises are suggested by the official curricula, teachers have the autonomy to choose the teaching methodology best suited to their particular circumstances.

It is a fact that Cypriot teachers are highly educated and they have good knowledge of the most recent research and practices regarding learning and pedagogy. It must be noted that literacy expertise should become a clear standard for teacher education in all grades and subjects, not only for primary teachers, but also for secondary teachers. Given that the new national curriculum introduces disciplinary literacy in the framework of multiliteracy as a cross-curricular competence which all subjects integrate with their content, teacher training programs need to integrate literacy as part of all teachers' training, not only to the training of class teachers and mother tongue teachers. In addition, teachers already in the profession need in-service training or other type of professional development in this area.

Digital literacy as part of the curriculum for primary and secondary schools: Integration of ICT in primary and secondary education curricula has been on the agenda for a number of years. In order to assist the use of ICT in the educational process the Technology Integration Plan suggests the

enrichment of the national curriculum and development of essential educational material like software and others. In the curriculum for primary education, ICT is today not treated as a separate subject, but it is used as a dynamic tool for the teaching and learning Country Report: Cyprus 10 / 21 processes. The main role of ICT here is to secure a more effective implementation of the school curriculum and the development of skills such as problem solving, decision making, communication and information handling. In the curriculum for secondary education, an ICT course is taught for two teaching periods per week in each of the three grades of all lower secondary schools. The main objective of these courses is to cover all seven ECDL modules. Additionally, the courses cover also eSafety, algorithms and programming issues. (p. 9-10 e-SKILLS IN EUROPE, Cyprus Country Report, 2014)[8].

Although of the above is forseen by the curriuclum there is still a need for further development of teacher's and student's digital literacy skills. A stronger emphasis on teachers digigal skills is essential and prominant in order for all teachers to be able to use media to support their quality of teaching and promote students' digital literacy.

Early identification of and support for struggling literacy learners: Screenings for reading competence are performed by individual teachers to determine the readiness level of their students and act accordingly. In addition, since 2007, the Centre for Educational Research and Evaluation (CERE) of the Ministry of Education and Culture conducts the "Functional Literacy Program" (PLF). In the context of this programme tests and assessments are developed every year in order to identify students at risk and provide them with additional support. The program at first was addressed to students attending Year 6 of public primary schools and since 2011 it also included Year 3 students.

Kinds of support offered to struggling learners: In order to address the needs of students at risk, the Functional Literacy Committee of the Ministry of Education and Culture provided schools and teachers with list of good practices to help students at risk and struggling readers (Ministry of Education and Culture Circular dde3839a and dde3839b). Teachers are encouraged to follow these good practises in addition with other instructional practises (activities, individual work etc). It must be noted that there is no consistent monitoring of the progress of these students year by year, nor they receive any extra further support apart from their teachers support during regular lesson hours.

Students with learning difficulties/or other mother tongues are supported by their teacher during the classroom time (who provides custom made material) or are "pulled out" and attend instruction in smaller groups (or even individual instruction). Since 2008, in schools with a large percentage of immigrant population, specialized groups for teaching Greek have been formed. No extra instructional time is provided. Students attend supportive instruction during their normal time schedule. Usually support is provided by the teachers of the schools, thus there is no provision for the employment of specialized personnel. However, in schools with large percentage of immigrants (schools inducted into the program Schools of Educational Priority) teaching assistants with specialized qualifications can be employed on an hourly basis.

In an effort to promote "learning for all" one of the main principles of the National Curriculum 2010 (MOEC, 2009) is Differentiated Instruction as a way to address Student's Readiness Level, providing all students opportunity to learn.

Improving the quality of pre-service and in-service teacher training: The Cyprus pedagogical Institute (C.P.I.) is the main provider of CPD courses. CPD courses are being offered to teachers as a

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[8] Available at: file:///C:/Users/pi007/Downloads/Country_Report_Cyprus.pdf.

part of their in-service training during school time but also available for free on voluntary basis in the afternoon. It is important to notice for some years now the CPI offers seminars and support to teachers on a school basis according to the needs of each school. As from the year 2014-2015 the professional learning of teacher is supported by a school based professional leaning programme offered by the CPI. Teachers' professional leaning through action research is the main aim of the programme. This programme is in an experimental phase and it is actually associated with a pilot study to monitor teachers' professional development through a personal portfolio. Teachers' CPD at school level is formulated according to the school's and teacher's needs. It is interesting to note that most of the elementary schools are focusing on the development of teachers' literacy instruction skills and more general on effective teaching. The establishment of a solid and consistent CPD program is one of the challenges that the Cyprus Educational System faces and as shown above there is a growing effort towards it.

Although CPD is provided to teachers as shown above, time spent on Professional development programs related to literacy cannot be calculated exactly since, no specific time is allocated through legislation and educational policy for CPD.

Improving the quality of literacy instruction: Programmes, initiatives and examples: As mention above professional learning of teachers (Programme for Professional Learning) that will enable them to be more effective is established and running from (2014). Furthermore, the identification of students at "risk" by the programme of Functional Literacy (see section 5.2.4 long country report) achieve a fairer and more inclusive participation in literacy learning. These groups of students gain access to language screening and flexible language learning opportunities in school, tailored to individual needs. The focus is on preventing literacy difficulties among members of these groups.

Cyprus national curricula as presented above constitute a contemporary and comprehensive curriculum for literacy from pre-primary to Secondary education (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2010). In the framework of this fairly new curriculum different school and grade levels emphasize literacy in an age and competences appropriate way. Teaching methodologies and instruction practices are perceived as highly corresponding and dynamic according to students' level and needs (differentiated instruction as a means to social justice). The challenge for implementing the new curriculum lies in the training of teachers and also the teaching materials and aids provided to teachers. Provision for systematic and focus teachers training in literacy instruction based on instruction methodologies proposed in the curriculum are a must. Cyprus PISA results on literacy (2012) indicate the need for a more effective literacy instruction for all students. Thus teachers must be supported from the educational system to develop effective instructional practices to improve literacy skills for all.

Additionally, the new national curriculum introduces literacy in the framework of multiliteracy as a cross-curricular competence which all subjects integrate to their content, Teachers that teach other subjects, further from language must also be trained in how to integrate literacy skills development activities in their courses. Furthermore, since Cyprus classrooms are becoming more and more culturally diverse teachers' training programs also need to develop teacher literacy instruction skills in teaching Greek as a foreign language to students that are not native speakers.

4.2.3 Adults

As noted above, Cyprus lacks many aspects of the infrastructure required in order to offer high quality provision to adults with literacy needs. There is no adult literacy curriculum, teachers are not trained in working with adults and there is no inspection service to ensure quality of the little provision that exists.

The trainers employed in the Adult Education Centres are secondary and primary level teachers, either seconded or paid an extra fee to teach in the State Institutes of Further Education. There are no initial teacher education programmes for teachers of adult literacy.

Assessment at the Adult Education Centres is mainly informal with no final examinations or practice tests required for certification purposes. Participants receive a Certificate of Attendance for the successful completion of each level and of any subject offered by the Adult Education Centres.

4.3 Increasing Participation, Inclusion and Equity

4.3.1 Pre-Primary Years

Encouraging preschool attendance, especially for disadvantaged children: Pre-Primary Education is compulsory for all children between 4 8/12 – 5 8/12 years old and is offered by public pre-primary of the Ministry of Education and culture for free. Children are also accepted in public schools over the age of 3 presuming there are available spaces, based mainly on socioeconomical and other family criteria. Parents of children 3 - 4 8/12 years old, enrolled in public kindergartens, pay fees per month dependent on their family income level (Eurypedia 2014).

Against the general EU trend, the participation in early childhood education has stagnated since 2006 and remains below EU average (83.8% compared to 93.9% in 2012 and 84.3% compare to 93.2% in 2013) and far below the EU benchmark for 2020 and thus constitute a challenge for the Cyprus Educational System.

4.3.2 Children and Adolescents

Screenings for reading competence to identify struggling readers: Screenings for reading competence are performed mainly by school teachers in order to determine the level of readiness of their students. At a national level, the PFL conducted by CERE is the only national program in the context of the Cyprus Educational System which assesses basic skills in Greek language (reading and writing) at two stages in compulsory education i.e. at Year 3 (age 8) and Year 6 (age 11), so that pupils who lack basic skills to get support (CERE, 2012a). There is no other national screening mechanism in the kindergarten for early language and literacy.

Early identification and providing systematic help to those who fall behind is considered one important step to promote equity (OECD, 2008). The Program of Functional Literacy resembles such an initiative but it is a screening mechanism addressed to primary school children. Early childhood screening measures (i.e. from preschool) are also needed in order to identify early literacy disparities and provide early intervention. Early intervention is considered crucial as according to Van Vechten (2013) without early intervention struggling readers will suffer academically throughout their formal schooling.

Support for children with special needs: Children with special needs are educated in public schools equipped with suitable infrastructure, either in mainstream classrooms or in Special Units within mainstream schools. Children attending Special Units are also assigned to a mainstream class, where

they can attend integrated lessons and participate in celebratory or festive events. Special educators encompassing a wide variety of specialties (teachers for learning, intellectual, functional and adjustment difficulties, teachers for the deaf and the blind, teachers for special physical education, music therapy, occupational therapy, speech and language therapy, educational psychology, audiology and physiotherapy) work to support and meet the educational needs of children with special needs. Moreover, educators from the secondary and technical education sectors are seconded to provide education and prevocational training to pupils attending special schools. Only children with severe difficulties are educated in Special Schools, equipped with the appropriate staff (teachers for learning, intellectual, functional and adjustment difficulties, psychologists, speech therapists, nurses, physiotherapists and other specialists, as well as auxiliary staff) in order to receive high quality therapy, education and support.

Support for migrant children and adolescents whose home language is not the language of school: Primary schools in Cyprus, based on the framework of the "Program of Supportive Instruction" are allocated with extra time for supportive instruction, which varies according to the size of the school and the number of reported students with learning difficulties and/or students with mother tongues other than Greek. Since 2008, in schools with a large percentage of immigrant population, specialized groups for teaching Greek have been formed in order to receive supportive instruction during their normal time schedule. Usually support is provided by the teachers of their school.

In order to address low level literacy skills among immigrant students, a series of legislations and regulations were undertaken by the MoEC. The implementation of zones of educational priority implemented in deprived areas (ZEP) was among the most significant of these legislations. ZEP aimed to target schools in disadvantaged areas, aiming to tackle school underachievement, mainly in literacy, and early school leaving. Students at risk are provided with tailored support in literacy and mathematics, and they also receive help in facing social and behavioral problems. In order to address literacy inadequacy and low achievement, in 2011, afternoon courses were also offered by the Ministry of Education and Culture. These courses included Greek language learning and, teaching of mother tongue for children with an immigrant background.

In the school year 2015-2016, a new programme has been implemented for schools in order to address the needs of disadvantaged student not restricted only to disadvantage areas called 'Scholl Actions of Social Integration". This programme is co-funded by the EU and aims to support immigrants and disadvantage students in way to prevent school failure, early leaning and promote students' social integration. Another initiative that started the current school year (2015-2016), as part of the program of Learning Greek as a Second Language, seven (7) Gymnasiums created and operated «transitional classes», aiming at the intensive teaching of the Greek language to foreign language speaking students.

Also, the Department of Primary Education has implemented several measures to promote multicultural education. It provides all schools with educational material, which includes books for the teaching of the Greek language, activity and exercise books, as well as teachers' books with methodological instructions and a variety of suggestions for mainly communicative activities. The Department also realizes the need to provide teachers with the opportunity to further develop their learning and teaching approaches. Within this context, it regularly organises in-service training seminars and conferences for teachers who teach non-native speaking pupils. Furthermore, the Council of Ministers has approved the MOEC's "Policy Report on Multicultural Education" (2008) which included a lot a new measures and action to promote multicultural education.

Preventing early school leaving: Based on the findings and the upcoming conclusions of the EU Council on the issue of School Leaving, the MoEC evaluates the existing system and its structures, in order to meet the need for creating an integrated and evidence-based strategy to address Early School Leving (ESL) and improve the quality of the school. The MoEC has successfully implemented several projects that serve the issue, but it is required that they should be integrated into an integrated strategy that will also engage the services of other ministries, and that would involve the elements of evaluation and continuous improvement and responsiveness to changing data.

Cyprus has already reached the Europe 2020 national target, while still continuing to make significant progress in tackling this phenomenon. In 2014, the early school leaving rate was 6.8% (compared to an EU-28 average of 11.1%), down from 12.7% in 2010 (Education and Training Monitor Cyprus, 2015).

4.3.3 Support for adult second-language learners/migrants

The "Programme for Greek Language Teaching Applicable to Migrants and Other Foreign Language Speaking Residents" is implemented by the Adult Education Centres of the Ministry of Education and Culture. The training programmes take place between November and May of each school year. Greek Language Courses are offered free of charge during 50 to 90-minute sessions which take place twice a week for each group (10-15 persons).

The Pedagogical Institute has developed a series of training courses for teachers working with this cohort. In some cases, specific training is offered to adult trainers for the Greek Programme to migrants. For instance, teachers participated in a three-day-course offered by the University of Cyprus. The training included among others topics such as intercultural education, teaching Greek as a second language, teaching adults, ICT etc. (Government of Cyprus 2012, p.29).

> **Conclusion:** Cyprus is currently on a road of reforming its educational system to a more contemporary and more effective system that will be able to face the challenges of contemporary societies and differential needs of students in mixed ability and multicultural classrooms. The main objective and target of this effort is to provide all students and adults with opportunities to develop their overall literacy skills. Research data reveal that Cyprus has indeed a long way to go regarding the improvement of literacy skills (CERE, 2015, PISA, 2012). The challenge that Cyprus faces has not only to do with formal education provided by schools but also the informal education provided by the family, the community and other non-formal forms of education that shape their culture towards reading. The provision for pre-school literacy opportunities for children younger than 4 years and 8 months together with a continuous and systematic professional development on teachers' literacy instructional practices will be some of the changes that need to be employed. Early identification, monitoring and support of strangling readers and their families constitutes another main challenge towards improving literacy levels and preventing early school living rates.

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