LITERACY IN THE NETHERLANDS

COUNTRY REPORT

CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

March 2016

Lifelong Learning Programme

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1 Introduction

This report on the state of literacy in the Netherlands 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 about Children and Adolescents 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].

[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 Executive Summary

LITERACY PERFORMANCE DATA

The Netherlands participated in IEA's PIRLS (4th graders reading comprehension) in 2001, 2006 and 2011, in OECD's PISA (15 year-olds' reading literacy) since 2000, and in OECD's PIAAC (adults' reading literacy) in 2012. This means it is possible to describe the changes over time in average reading proficiency, according to different characteristics of the readers, and to compare relative reading levels of proficiencies for different age groups.

The Netherlands performed above the EU average both in PIRLS 2011 (546 vs 535 EU-average) and in PISA 2012 (511 vs 489 EU average). The performance in PIRLS decreased slightly between 2001 and 2006 (- 7 score points) but was about the same in 2006 and 2011. So, between the first and the third cycles of PIRLS, a decrease of 8 score-points was observed. In PISA, even if it remained above the EU mean, the scores of the Netherlands show a significant decrease between 2000 and 2012 (-21 score-points), namely the equivalent of about a half-year of schooling.

In PIRLS, a proportion of 10% of pupils can be considered as low-performing readers; in PISA, this proportion reaches 14%. This is less than in EU countries on average (20% on both levels). These students can read simple texts, retrieve explicit information, or make straightforward inferences, but they are not able to deal with longer or more complex texts, and are unable to interpret beyond what is explicitly stated in the text.

The proportion of low-performing readers remained about the same through the three cycles of PIRLS (between 9.5 and 9.9%) and tended to increase in PISA, from 9.5% to 14% between 2000 and 2012. This increase was slightly higher among girls than among boys (+5.2% vs +4%), which is an unusual pattern. The proportion of top-performing readers was 7% in PIRLS (vs 9% in EU) and 10% in PISA (vs 7% in EU).

The gap according to the pupils' socioeconomic background was much lower than the EU average in PIRLS (46 vs 76 on average), and lower In PISA (79 vs 89 on average). However, the indices of socioeconomic background are not the same in PIRLS and PISA, so the comparison should be taken with caution.

In PISA 2009, the gap between native students and students with a migrant background was higher than in EU countries on average (46 vs 38 EU-average). In PIRLS, the mean score difference between those who always spoke the language of the test at home, and those who sometimes or never did so was slightly lower than in EU countries (21 vs 26). Similarly, in PISA, this gap was lower than the EU average (39 vs 54).

In the Netherlands, the gender gap (in favour of girls) was lower in PIRLS (7 vs 12 on average) and much lower in PISA (24 vs 44 on average) than the corresponding EU average differences. The gender difference in the Netherlands tended to decrease since 2001 in PIRLS: from 15 to 7 points-score. In PISA, the decrease in reading performance observed between 2000 and 2012 was a bit higher among girls (- 22 score points) than among boys (- 19 score points), resulting in the relative stability of the gender gap (30 points in 2000, 27 in 2012).

In conclusion, the Netherlands have slightly decreased their 4th grade pupils' performance in reading over time. As far as 15 year-olds are concerned, Netherlands still perform better than EU countries on average but with a drastic decrease between 2000 and 2012. Its proportion of low-performing readers is lower than the EU countries on average at both levels. The spread of achievement (gap between low and top performing readers) is smaller in the Netherlands than in the EU on average at both levels. The gap according to socioeconomic status is much lower in PIRLS and lower in PISA than in the EU on average. The trends are the same for the gap according to language spoken at home.

KEY LITERACY POLICY AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT (AGE-SPECIFIC AND ACROSS AGE-GROUPS)

Creating a Literate Environment

Pre-Primary Years

Providing a supportive home environment: Compared to the European average, the number of pupils in the Netherlands whose parents have a positive attitude toward reading is slightly higher. The importance of parental attitudes to reading is shown by the fact that there are significant differences in reading performance at grade 4 between children whose parents like to read (average achievement 563) and those who do not (average achievement 541).

The Dutch Database Effective Youth Interventions[6] provides an inventory of parenting programmes that have been acknowledged by a committee of experts, because they were proven to be effective and/or are theoretically well grounded. The Database is updated regularly, in response to new programmes or interventions being added, existing interventions being modified (in which case they need to be assessed again), or due to the fact that an intervention is no longer on offer.

Home Educational Resources: Eleven percent of parents in the Netherlands reported having few home resources for learning. This is well below the EU Average of 25%. Similarly, a 10 percentage points gap between the EU Average (25) for many resources, and the Dutch average (35) suggests that pupils in the Netherlands have greater access to home resources. The association between home resources and reading achievement is weaker in the Netherlands than on average across the EU-24.

Number of children's books in the home: Compared to the European average the availability of children's books in the home is quite high in the Netherlands. The achievement gap between those with 0-10 books and those with 200+ books is 38 points. This gap is considerably lower than the EU average of 82 points.

Challenge: Even though data on the factors creating a literate environment in pre-primary years looks favourable for the Netherlands, there is still a need for ongoing well-implemented family literacy programmes with a focus on supporting migrant parents and care givers in understanding and fostering their children's' literacy development. The relatively large migrant group of Moroccans in the Netherlands is from a traditionally more oral than written culture, where reading to and with young children is not a common practice, as it increasingly is in most of the Dutch monolingual families. Also,

[6] See: http://www.nji.nl/nl/Databanken/Databank-Effectieve-Jeugdinterventies.

there is an ongoing need for programmes to raise awareness in all parents that literacy is a key to learning and life chances and that the basis for good literacy achievement is laid in early childhood.

Children and Adolescents

Creating a literate environment in school: Based on data provided by their teachers, PIRLS shows that 86.1% of students in the Netherlands are in classrooms which have class libraries – above the corresponding EU-24 average of 72.9% (ELINET PIRLS 2011 Appendix, Table H2). In the Netherlands, 58.8% of students were in classrooms with more than 50 books, which is above the EU-24 average of 32.1% (ibid.).

Offering digital literacy learning opportunities in schools: According to teachers' reports, 85.2% of students in the Netherlands have a computer available for reading lessons, compared to the EU-average of 44.9% (ELINET PIRLS 2011 Appendix Table I6). In the Netherlands, 77.6% use a computer at least monthly to look up information. This is well above the corresponding EU-24 average at 39.0% (ibid). In the Netherlands, 68.3% of students are in classrooms whose teachers report that they use computers to write stories or other texts at least monthly. The corresponding EU-24 average is under half of this proportion (33.1%). The use of computers and other ICT equipment in primary education is not laid down by law, but nearly all teachers use digital learning materials. Some 75% of primary school classrooms have an electronic blackboard and schools have, on average, one computer for every five pupils. Software makes up 29% of teaching materials in primary schools.

The number of secondary school teachers using computers rose by 3% between 2009 and 2010. At this rate, it will take another 10 to 15 years before all teachers have adopted ICT teaching aids. There is an average of one computer for every six pupils. This figure has not changed greatly over the last few years. Many schools have a digital library and computer work areas for groups. Many secondary schools have electronic blackboards.

Challenge: In secondary education, the (innovative) use of of ICT, new media and innovative teaching aids is, unfortunately, more often than not linked to preferences and skills of individual teachers. Pre-service and in-service teacher training should and could be the place where ongoing professionalisation of teachers on the use of ICT as an innovative tool for their teaching is linked with knowledge of appropriate didactic craftsmanship.

Strengthening the role of public libraries: Throughout The Netherlands, the involvement of public libraries with schools and parents is paramount. There are numerous ways in which libraries are an important agent in reading promotion in programs and initiatives, both for parents and for reading specialist and regular teachers in schools. The Dutch government (i.c. the Ministry of Education) funded the action programme The Art of Reading in two periods: 2008-2011 and 2012-2015. As a result of this programme, a developmental line for reading with accompanying developmental and learning goals was linked with (internationally) successful activities such as Bookstart for babies, Bookstart in daycare and the Library in the School (both primary and secondary schools). The Art of Reading ensures that all children and adolescents are introduced to books and literacy promotion activities.

Improving the Quality of Teaching

Pre-Primary Years

Improving the quality of preschool education: In the Netherlands, the minimum required level to become a qualified teacher is Bachelor level (ISCED 5), and length of training is 4 years. Pre-primary or kindergarten years are an integral part of primary education.

Early Childhood Education Programmes are usually carried out at day nurseries, playgroups and/or primary schools (years 1 and 2). Some early childhood education programmes focus on only one developmental domain, usually language (narrow programmes). Broad programmes address multiple developmental domains and require parents' active participation. In both kinds of programmes, the need for high quality support of language and literacy acquisition and development is appropriately recognised and well worked out in the activities and materials, to be used by the care professionals. Playgroups providing early childhood education are in principle open to all children between 2-2½ and 4 years of age. However, early childhood education is intended primarily for children with socio-medical problems and children suffering from, or at risk of, developmental delay. Individual municipalities may give these children priority at playgroups where demand is high.

Children in early childhood education programmes are monitored using observation lists and assessments of development. The various developmental domains are usually assessed three times a year, or more often for children whose development is abnormal.

Children and Adolescents

Improving the quality of literacy instruction: Formal reading and writing instruction begins in Grade 1, with approximately 75% of schools implementing an indirect phonics method called Learning to Reading Safely. Most children are able to decode simple Dutch words halfway through Grade 1. In the second half of Grade 1, there is an increased emphasis on reading short texts to increase fluency as well as decoding skills. There are no data on the relative emphasis on decoding skills as students progress through the primary grades.

It should be noted that, unlike in many European countries, schools in the Netherlands have considerable freedom in deciding which specific curriculum elements to teach. Hence, core curriculum targets (core objectives) describe attainment targets only, and schools decide how the targets should be reached, and which instructional elements to implement (Netten & Verhoeven, 2012). In practice, the Dutch language curriculum at primary levels includes three broad components: oral education, written education and linguistics. Textbooks are available that cover integrated, as well as separate, language and reading education. The curriculum does not outline specific reading strategies that must be taught. However, the core objectives for reading and writing education suggest a need to focus on specific reading comprehension strategies. In addition, long-range attainment goals for both language and maths were laid down in 2010 by the Dutch government. These developmentally described reference levels state the kind of reading, writing and oral tasks, with accompanying knowledge and skills, children should have acquired at several places on their route through the educational system.

In secondary education, every school must have a school plan, updated every four years, describing the steps being taken to monitor and improve quality and indicating the school's policy on educational matters, staffing and internal quality assurance.

Challenge: The engagement of students in the Netherlands in learning in general, and in applying reading comprehension strategies on a regular basis, lags behind EU-24 average levels. A review to approaches to promoting reading comprehension in classrooms might help to explain how reading comprehension is promoted in Dutch schools, and whether any adjustments are needed.

Digital literacy as part of the curriculum for primary and secondary schools: The Flemish Government has implemented an ongoing policy of promoting ICT in education since 1996. This means that the government aims to encourage schools to integrate ICT in their class practice by means of information and awareness-raising campaigns, in-service training, infrastructure and project funding. In this respect, the emphasis is on the educational use of the new media and cross-curricular final objectives and developmental aims of ICT in education.

Early identification of and support for struggling literacy learners: teachers in the Netherlands, including remedial teachers, internal counsellors and speech therapists, are guided by a protocol, the Reading Problems and Dyslexia Protocol, which is available for Grades 1-8, and contains guidelines for a structured school-wide dyslexia policy whereby regular assessments facilitate early identification, prevention and intervention of reading difficulties. To a growing extent, in secondary education there is also more emphasis and attention to school-wide language policy: with an internal counsellor and specified means to aid and assist pupils with language and reading difficulties, including dyslexia.

Dutch primary schools are required to use a Student Tracking System (*Leerling en onderwijs volgsysteem*) that enables them to assess and track the competence of students in Grades 1-8. The system enables teachers and schools to monitor and improve the development of individual students as well as larger groups. Because tests are administered on a regular basis, problems can usually be identified at an early stage, and subsequently examined to devise a remedial action plan. A comparable STS is also available for, and widely used in, secondary education.

Standards as basis of assessment of reading difficulties: There are no detailed standards at each grade which form the basis of assessments allowing early identification of reading difficulties in the Netherlands. Not all Dutch schools have specific reading specialists besides the ' Interne Begeleider': the professional charged with internal quality control. Students with reading difficulties are often helped by the IB-er, a remedial teacher or speech therapist associated with the school or school advisory service. There is a trend in primary education toward employing coordinators who are responsible for a certain subject or age group (e.g., internal student counsellors, junior department coordinators, senior department coordinators, language coordinators, and arithmetic coordinators).

In the context of secondary education, attainment targets again specify the standards of knowledge, understanding and skills pupils are required to attain in the lower years of secondary school. The Secondary Education Act (WVO) states, for the upper years of each type of education, which subjects must in any event be included in the curriculum. The Secondary Education (Organisation of Teaching) Decree prescribes the number of periods to be spent on each subject or group of subjects in the form of a study load table.

Improving the quality of in-service teacher training: The Netherlands apply specific selection criteria for admission to initial teacher education, besides the general entrance requirements for entry to tertiary education. The Netherlands require primary teachers to have a bachelor's degree which takes four years' study. Typically, primary teachers' education routes are through a four-year university

bachelor's degree programme in primary education. According to an analysis of guidelines for Initial Teacher Education institutions, generic skills or methodology for teaching reading is not a topic in ITE.

In the Netherlands, 46% of the fourth grade students had reading teachers with an educational emphasis on language, 45% had teachers with an emphasis on pedagogy/ teaching reading, and 25% had teachers with an emphasis on reading theory. These figures are below the corresponding EU-24 means.

Challenges: Initial teacher education in The Netherlands could benefit from a compulsory focus on developing literacy expertise among future primary and secondary teachers. Continuing professional development should be improving in quality and participation rates and become more targeted at building literacy expertise of teachers.

Increasing Participation, Inclusion and Equity

Pre-Primary Years

Encouraging preschool attendance, especially for disadvantaged children: Pre-primary education is free for children from 4 to 6 years old. The Netherlands belongs to the half of the European countries where this entire period of ECEC is free. The Netherlands reaches the European benchmark for at least 95% of children between age 4 and the start of compulsory education participating in ECEC. According to OECD 2014 statistical data, the participation rate is 99.3% for 5-year-olds, 99.5% for 4-year-olds, and 28.3% for 3-year-olds.

Children and Adolescents

Supporting children with special needs and migrant children and adolescents whose home language is not the language of school: Dutch schools with a large minority student population devote more attention to vocabulary and verbal communication than schools whose student populations consist of mostly native Dutch-speaking students. Initiatives have been launched to enhance language proficiency for students lagging behind, such as bridging classes for primary school students who are disadvantaged because of poor Dutch language skills. These classes can be part-time or out- of-school classes or entirely separate from mainstream school, with students required to spend a year learning Dutch before returning to regular classes.

Preventing early school leaving: The Dutch Early school leaving-programme has been successful in implementing various measures at national level. Young people are staying longer in full-time education, according to research by Statistics Netherlands. The education participation rate among 15 to 18-year-olds rose to 98% in the 2011/2012 school year. In the same year, six out of ten people between the ages of 18 and 25 were involved in some form of education. Early school leaving declined. The number of men aged between 15 and 25 years leaving school without a basic qualification dropped from 15.6% in 2001 to 8.9% in 2011. The percentage of women drop-outs fell in the same period from 13.2% to 6.1%. This reduction is probably due to new legislation making it compulsory for pupils to remain at school until they have obtained a basic qualification. Pupils with a non-Western immigrant background still drop out of school more often than Dutch pupils, and boys drop out more often than girls.

Increasing amounts of young people are opting for senior general secondary education (HAVO) and pre-university education (VWO). Also, an increasing number of young people with a pre-vocational education certificate (VMBO) are staying in school in order to get a HAVO qualification.

3 General Information on the Dutch Education System

The general information on the Dutch Education System is derived from Eurydice[7].

The education system in the Netherlands is decentralised. Until their fourth birthday, children can attend a day nursery or crèche. Playgroups cater for two to four-year-olds and fall under the responsibility of the local authorities. There are programmes for early childhood education, but these are aimed at two to five-year-olds at risk of educational disadvantage. Every child must attend school full-time from the age of five; however, nearly all children start going to school at the age of four.

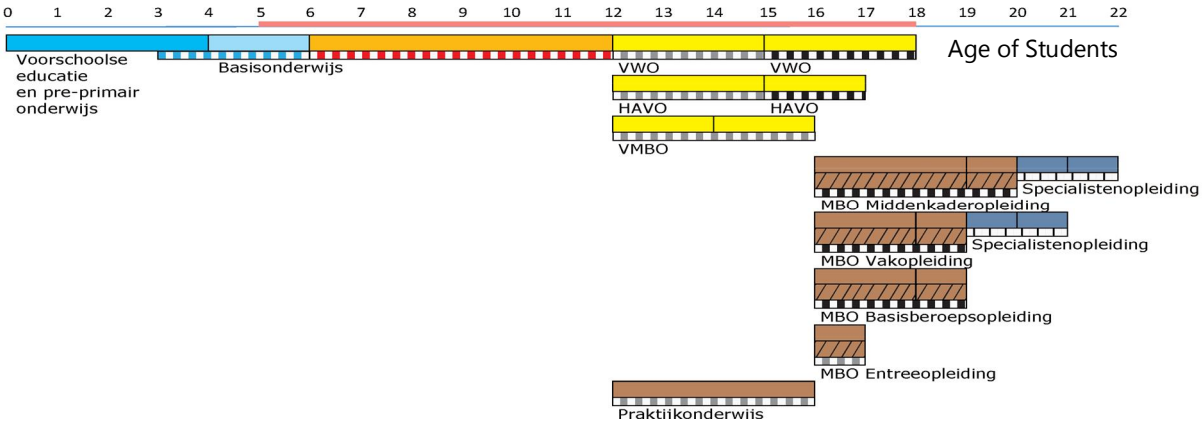
Primary education lasts eight years, after which, around the age of 12, pupils opt for one of three types of secondary education: pre-vocational secondary education (VMBO, which takes 4 years), senior general secondary education (HAVO, 5 years) or pre-university education (VWO, 6 years). Most secondary schools are combined schools offering several types of secondary education so that pupils can transfer easily from one type to another. Young people aged 18 or over can take adult education courses or higher distance learning courses.

In addition to mainstream primary and secondary schools there are special schools for children with learning and behavioural difficulties who – temporarily at least – require special educational treatment. Pupils who are unable to obtain a VMBO qualification, even with long-term extra help, can receive practical training, which prepares them for entering the labour market.

Overall responsibility for the education system lies with the State, specifically the Minister of Education, Culture and Science and the State Secretary (junior minister) for Education, Culture and Science. The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science lays down statutory requirements for early childhood education, primary and secondary education and secondary vocational education, and has overall control of adult general secondary education (VAVO). The government lays down the framework within which higher education institutions (higher professional education and universities) have to operate, but it is the responsibility of the competent authority of each institution to expand on the government framework in the teaching and examination regulations. The provincial authorities' role in education is limited to supervisory and legal tasks. The administration and management of primary and secondary schools and schools for secondary vocational education is locally organised.

[7] https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Netherlands:Overview.

Figure 1: Structure of the Netherlands School System[8]



[8] See: http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/facts_and_figures/education_structures_EN.pdf.

4 Literacy Performance Data for Children and Adolescents

4.1 Performance Data for Primary Children

The performance data for primary children are derived from the IEA´s PIRLS studies.

Inaugurated in 2001 and conducted every 5 years, **PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study)** is an assessment of pupils' reading achievement at fourth grade organized by the Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA). The survey was administered in 35 countries in 2001, 45 education systems in 2006, and 50 in 2011. PIRLS assesses different purposes for reading (literary and informational) and different reading processes (retrieve explicit information, make inferences, interpret and integrate ideas and information, examine and evaluate content, language, and textual elements). Both multiple choice and open-ended questions are used.

Combining newly developed reading assessment passages and questions for 2011 with a selection of secure assessment passages and questions from 2001 and 2006, PIRLS 2011 allowed for measurement of changes since 2001. PIRLS 2011 also examined the national policies, curricula and practices related to literacy in participating countries, and included a set of questionnaires for students, parents/caregivers, teachers, and school principals to investigate the experiences that young children have at home and school in learning to read, in particular their attitudes and motivation towards reading.

For all PIRLS data used in this report, detailed tables with data for all participating countries in ELINET are provided, together with the EU averages (see Appendix C: ELINET PIRLS 2011 Data, Appendix D: ELINET PIRLS 2006 Data).

4.1.1 Performance and variation in reading: proportion of low and high performing readers

Pupils in the Netherlands achieved an overall mean reading score of 546 in PIRLS 2011 (Table 1). This was significantly higher than the EU-24 average. Performance in the Netherlands was broadly similar across reading purposes (Literary, Informational) and reading processes (Retrieve & Inference) although students in the Netherlands did slightly better on Interpret, Integrate & Evaluate (543) than on Retrieve and Inference (549) (Appendix Tables A2-A5).

Table 1: Overall Performance on PIRLS 2011 – Netherlands and EU-24 Average

	Overall Reading – Mean Score
Netherlands	**546**
EU-24	535

Significant differences (relative to the EU-24 Average) are shown in bold.

In the Netherlands, 10% of students performed at the Low benchmark on overall reading, and no students scored at the Very Low benchmark ('below 400'). The Netherlands had half the proportion of students at or below the 'Low benchmark' as the EU-24 average (20%). Though the Netherlands is marginally behind countries such as Finland (8%), in terms of the proportion of students performance

at or below the Low benchmark, the Netherlands' standing relative to most EU countries on this indicator is strong (see Appendix Table A.6). In the Netherlands, 7% of students achieve at the Advanced benchmark. This is slightly though not significantly below the EU average of 9%.

Table 2: Performance by Overall PIRLS Reading Benchmarks 2011 - Percentages of Pupils

	Below 400	400-475 Low	475-550 Intermediate	550-625 High	Above 625 Advanced
Netherlands	0	10	42	42	7
EU-24	5	15	36	35	9

The Netherlands' standard deviation of 54 is 16 points lower than the EU-24 average (70) indicating a smaller spread of achievement (Table 3). The difference between the scores of students at the 10th and 90th percentiles in the Netherlands – 139 points – is 41 points below the corresponding EU-24 average of 180, again confirming a narrower spread. This arises because of the relatively high score of students performing at the 10th percentile, and the relatively low score of those performing at the 90th.

Table 3: Spread of Achievement – Standard Deviation, 10th, 90th Percentiles, and Difference between 90th and 10th Percentiles on Overall Reading – Netherlands and EU-24 Average

	Standard Deviation	10th Percentile	90th Percentile	90th-10th
Netherlands	54	475	614	**139**
EU Avg	70	441	621	**180**

Performance on PIRLS in the Netherlands dropped significantly, by 8 points, between 2001 and 2011. This contrasted with the EU-24 average, where performance rose by 1 point (Table 4). Much of the decline in the Netherlands occurred between 2001 and 2006 (a drop of 7 points), while performance fell by just 1 point between 2006 and 2011.

Table 4: Trends in Performance 2001-2011 (Overall Scale) – The Netherlands and EU-24 Average

	2001	2006	Change (2006-2001)	2006	2011	Change (2011-2006)	2001	2011	Change (2011-2001)
Netherl'ds	554	547	**-7**	547	546	-1	554	546	**-8**
EU Countries	534	534	0	534	535	1	534	535	1

Significant differences in **bold**

Girls in the Netherlands achieved a mean score on overall reading that was higher than boys by 7 points in 2011 (Table 5). This was just over half the EU-24 average difference of 12 points (Table 5), and was also smaller than the gender gap of 15 points in the Netherlands in 2001.

Table 5: Trends in Performance by Gender 2001-2011 (Overall Scale) – The Netherlands and EU-24 Average

	Netherlands			EU		
	Girls	Boys	Girls-Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls-Boys
2011	549	543	**7**	541	529	**12**
2006	551	543	**7**	541	528	**13**
2001	562	547	**15**	542	525	**17**

Significant differences in **bold**

Challenge: Overall performance on PIRLS dropped significantly in the Netherlands between 2001 and 2011. While performance has been stable between 2006 and 2011, a reasonable goal might be to return to 2001 levels. Plans to this effect like the Basis for Performance initiative, a plan implemented in 2011 with the goal of raising standards at school level, should be modified as needed.

4.1.2 Gaps in reading

As in every European country there are achievement gaps between different groups.

Parents' educational achievement

Students in the Netherlands whose parents attended University or Higher achieved a mean score (572) that was some 46 points higher than students whose parents completed Lower Secondary or below (527) (Table 6). The average difference across the EU-24 was 76 points, indicating a relatively weaker relationship between parents' educational level and performance in the Netherlands.

Table 6: Percentages of Parents Whose Highest Level of Education was Lower Secondary, and Percentages who Finished University or Higher

Level of Education	Lower Secondary or Below		University or Higher		Difference (Univ or Higher – Lower Sec)
	%	Mean	%	Mean	
Netherlands	12	527	41	572	**46**
EU-24	18	495	30	571	**76**

Statistically significant mean score differences in **bold**.

Language Spoken at Home

In the Netherlands, 78% of pupils reported that they always spoke the language of the PIRLS reading test at home – only slightly below the corresponding EU-24 Average (80). Twenty-two percent said they sometimes or never spoke the language of the test at home. The difference in achievement between pupils in the Netherlands reporting that they always or sometimes/never spoke the language of the test was 21 score points – marginally lower than the corresponding EU-24 average difference (26).

Table 7: Percentages of Students Reporting that They Always or Sometimes / Never Spoke the Language of the PIRLS Test at Home, and Associated Mean Score Differences – Netherlands and EU-24 Average

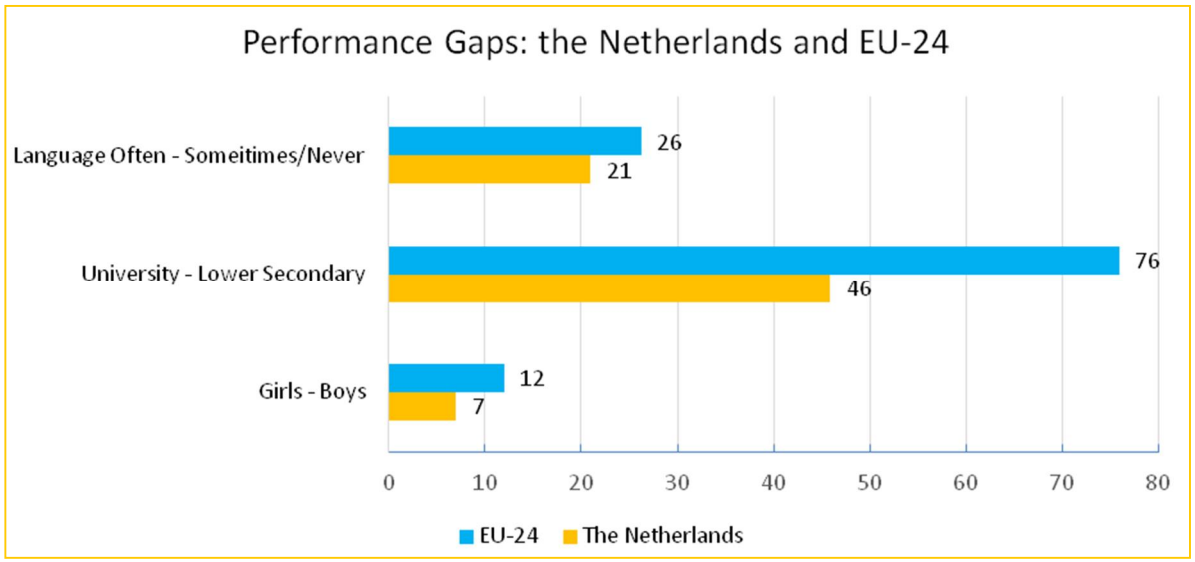
Language of the Test Spoken at Home	Always		Sometimes /Never		Mean Score Difference (Always – Sometimes/Never
	%	Mean	%	Mean	
Netherlands	78	551	22	530	**21**
EU-24 Avg	80	541	20	519	**26**

Statistically significant mean score differences in **bold**.

Gender

The gender difference in the Netherlands (in favour of females) (7 score points) is less than the corresponding gap across the EU-24 (12 points).

Figure 2: Score-point Difference between Students Who Always Speak the Language of the PIRLS Test, and Those Who Sometimes or Never Do So, between Students of Parents with University Education and Students of Parents with Lower Secondary or Below, and between Girls and Boys – Netherlands and EU-24 Average



Source: ELLINET PIRLS Appendix Tables C1-C3, F1 and G1

Attitudes to Reading

There was a difference of 41 points between students at the top (567) and bottom (526) quartiles of the composite Like Reading scale in the Netherlands in 2011 (Table 8). On average across the EU-24, the difference between students in the top and bottom quarters of the Like Reading scale was 52 points, indicating a relatively weaker relationship between liking reading and performance in the Netherlands.

Twenty percent of students in the Netherlands 'agreed a lot' that they liked reading in PIRLS 2011. This was lower than the EU-24 average of 29% (ELINET PIRLS 2011 Appendix Table D4).

Table 8: Mean Overall Reading Scores of Students in the Top and Bottom Quartiles of the PIRLS Like Reading Scale – Netherlands and EU-24 Average

	Overall Reading Score		
Like Reading	Top Quartile	Bottom Quartile	Difference (Q4-Q1)
Netherlands	567	526	**41**
EU-24	563	511	**52**

Students in the Netherlands in the top quarter of the Confidence in Reading scale achieved a mean score (568) that was some 47 points higher than students in the bottom quarter (521) (Table 9). The average difference across the EU-24 was 80 points, again indicating a relatively weaker relationship between Confidence and performance in the Netherlands.

Table 9: Mean Overall Reading Scores of Students in the Top and Bottom Quartiles of the PIRLS Confidence in Reading Scale – Netherlands and EU-24 Average

	Overall Reading Score		
Confidence in Reading	Top Quartile	Bottom Quartile	Difference (Q4-Q1)
Netherlands	568	521	**47**
EU-24	570	490	**80**

Challenge: Although the Netherlands is successful in addressing the needs of lower-achieving students, with just 10% performing at the Low PIRLS benchmark, and no students categorised as 'Very Low', the proportion at the Advanced benchmark (7%) is about the same as the EU-24 average (9%). Higher performance among good readers might be achieved by a national programme that aims to improve the reading standards of all students, or a targeted programme aimed at motivating the more-able students (those at the PIRLS High and Advanced benchmarks) to achieve higher levels.

The relatively small gap between students performing at the 10th and 90th percentile in the Netherlands is indicative of equity in reading outcomes. Efforts to raise overall performance should seek to ensure that this gap does not increase substantially.

The Dutch Education Inspectorate collects, reviews and reports on quantitative and qualitative data on the performance of pupils in all sectors of compulsory education, including primary education. Language teaching and learning and maths are the major content areas the reports are focused on. The most recent report reflects on data from school year 2013-2014 (Dutch Inspectorate, 2016). In summary, the message is that general achievement levels are satisfactory to good. The Dutch are good at reading, maths and problem solving. Dutch pupils also perform well compared with pupils from other countries. However, it is also noted that while relatively few pupils have low achievement levels, there are also few exceptionally high-performing pupils. There is room for improvement on the upper side of the scale, and schools are challenged by the government accordingly.

Performance levels in reading and maths at the end of primary school have been more or less stable in recent years. Pupils' maths and reading skills are of the same standard as they were in 2012-2013. Primary school pupils do have more competencies however by the end of primary school than they did

when this was first monitored seven years ago. The Netherlands has relatively few pupils with poor reading or maths skills and their number appears to be falling. While in recent years final achievement levels in primary education have stabilised, pupils' interim performance levels rose during the most recent academic year – especially at larger schools. Schools are devoting more attention to improving interim performance levels in language and maths. Pupils and parents can also be seen to focus more on improved results during interim tests, especially tests which influence the transition to secondary school.

Finally, the recent report goes into the matter of the observed lack of motivation generally observed throughout all stages of education. Compared with pupils in other countries, Dutch pupils have little motivation to learn. A lack of motivation can result in them having to repeat a year, transferring down to a lower level of education or leaving school without any qualifications. Several studies have revealed a strong connection between motivation and educational performance. The Inspectorate report duly stresses the need for professionals in education to address this matter consistently and comprehensively.

Additional research into results of teaching language and maths in primary education are also available from survey studies that focus on the attainment of the 'Referentieniveaus Taal en Rekenen', reference levels for Language and Arithmetic, marking the knowledge and skills for Language on two levels pupils should grow to by the end of grade 6, after 8 years of compulsory Primary Education. The most recent show a growing level of attainment: in 2014-2015, 90 % of all pupils in grade 6 have mastered the first set level of proficiency for both Reading and Spelling & Grammar (Inspectie van het Onderwijs, 2016b).

After completing primary education, pupils do not receive a certificate but an advisory educational report describing their level of attainment and potential and advising on the most suitable type and level of secondary education[9].

In addition, from school year 2014/2015, all pupils in the final year of primary school will have to sit some form of attainment test, containing at least the required components: language and arithmetic. Schools are obligated to use one of three available tests. These tests are approved for a period of four years. Every year the quality of the tests will be checked.

[9] See: https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Netherlands:Assessment_in_Primary_Education.

4.2 Performance Data for Adolescents

The performance data are derived from the OECD PISA study.

The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) led by OECD[10] **assesses the skills and knowledge of 15-year-old students every three years in all OECD countries and** in a number of partner countries.

Since 2000, PISA has been testing students in reading, mathematics and science. The OECD assessment also collects information on students' backgrounds and on practices, motivational attributes and metacognitive strategies related to reading.

The PISA tests assess different aspects of reading literacy – retrieve information, interpret, reflect and evaluate on texts – and use a variety of texts – continuous (prose) and non-continuous (texts including graphs, tables, maps…). About half of the questions are multiple-choice, the other half open-ended (short or constructed answers). Results are reported on scales defining different levels of proficiency ranging from 1 (low performing) to 6 (high performing). Level 2 is considered as the level all 15 year-olds should reach, and will enable them to participate effectively to society. Since 2015, PISA has been administered on computers only in most participating countries.

The follow-up of students who were assessed by PISA in 2000 as part of the Canadian Youth in Transition Survey has shown that students scoring below Level 2 face a disproportionately higher risk of poor post-secondary participation or low labour-market outcomes at age 19, and even more so at age 21, the latest age for which data from this longitudinal study are currently available. For example, of students who performed below Level 2 in PISA reading in 2000, over 60% did not go on to any post-school education by the age of 21; by contrast, more than half of the students (55%) whose highest level was Level 2 attended college or university (OECD 2010, S. 52).

Netherlands has participated in PISA since 2000. It is therefore possible to describe the change in reading performance over twelve years on average, according to different characteristics of the readers.

4.2.1 Performance and variation in reading; proportion of low and high performing readers

Table 10: Reading performance in PISA 2012

	Mean	S.E.
Netherlands	**511**	(3.5)
EU-27	489	(0.6)

S. E. = standard error; Significant differences between the country and the EU's average are shown in **bold**

Netherlands performed well above the EU's average in PISA 2012.

[10] See: http://www.pisa.OECD.org.

Table 11: Trends in reading performance - PISA 2000-2012

	2000		2009		2012		Change 2000–2009		Change 2009–2012		Change 2000–2012	
	Mean	S.E.	Mean	S.E.	Mean	S.E.	Mean	S.E.	Mean	S.E.	Mean	S.E.
Netherlands	532	(3.4)	508	(5.2)	511	(3.5)	**-24**	(7.9)	3	(6.7)	**-21**	(7.6)
EU-27	489*	(0.7)	486**	(0.6)	489***	(0.6)	-3*	(5.0)	**5****	(2.7)	3*	(6.0)

Significant differences between assessment cycles in **bold** *EU21 **EU26 ***EU27

However, despite this good relative performance, a decline has been observed between 2000 and the last two PISA cycles (2009 and 2012).

Table 12: Spread of achievement. Difference between 10th and 90th percentiles on the reading scale, all students and by gender – PISA 2012

	Difference 90^{th}–10^{th} for all students		Difference 90^{th}–10^{th} for girls		Difference 90^{th}–10^{th} for boys	
	Score diff.	S.E.	Score diff.	S.E.	Score diff.	S.E.
Netherlands	239	(7.5)	230	(9.6)	244	(8.9)
EU-27	251	(1.3)	230	(1.2)	259	(1.6)

Significant differences between the country and EU in **bold**

In Netherlands, the spread of achievement is smaller than in the EU countries on average.

Table 13: Percentage of low-performing (below level 2) and high-performing (levels 5 and 6) students - PISA 2012

	Below level 2		Levels 5 and 6	
	%	S.E.	%	S.E.
Netherlands	**14.0**	(1.2)	**9.8**	(0.8)
EU-27	19.7	(0.2)	7.0	(0.1)

Significant differences between the country and EU in **bold**

In PISA 2012, in Netherlands, there are less low-performing readers and more top-performing readers than in the EU on average.

Table 14: Trends in the proportion of low-performers (below level 2) in reading, all students, and by gender – PISA 2000-2012

	Proportion of students below level 2 in reading					
	All students		Girls		Boys	
	%	S.E.	%	S.E.	%	S.E.
2000	9.5	(1.3)	5.8	(1.2)	13.2	(2.0)
2009	**14.3**	(1.5)	**10.8**	(1.4)	17.9	(1.9)
2012	14.0	(1.2)	10.6	(1.4)	17.2	(1.5)

Significant differences between assessment cycles in **bold**

Between 2000 and 2012, the proportion of low-performing readers has increased in Netherlands (by 4.5 %): among boys a + 4% increase is observed, while among girls it is +5. 2%. This pattern is quite unusual.

4.2.2 Gaps in reading performance

Gaps in literacy (PISA 2009)

Table 15: Difference in reading performance between bottom and top national quarters of the PISA index of economic, social and cultural status – PISA 2009

	Difference between bottom and top national quarters of the PISA index of economic, social and cultural status
	Score diff.
Netherlands	**79**
EU-26	**89**

Significant differences in reading performance between bottom and top national quarters in **bold**

In Netherlands, the gap in reading performance according to the students' socioeconomic background is by less important than in the EU countries on average. Netherlands is more performant but also slightly more equitable than the EU's average.

Table 16: Mean reading performance by gender and gender differences – PISA 2009

	Boys		Girls		Difference (B – G)	
	Mean	S.E.	Mean	S.E.	Score diff.	S.E.
Netherlands	496	(5.1)	521	(5.3)	**-24**	(2.4)
EU-26	463	(0.5)	506	(0.4)	**-44**	(0.5)

Significant differences between boys and girls in **bold**

Gender difference in reading performance in Netherlands is lower than in EU countries on average.

Table 17: Trends in reading performance by gender – PISA 2000-2012

	Netherlands				EU-27			
	Girls		Boys		Girls		Boys	
	Mean	S.E.	Mean	S.E.	Mean	S.E.	Mean	S.E.
2000	547	(3.8)	517	(4.8)	506*	(0.8)	473*	(0.9)
2009	**521**	(5.3)	**496**	(5.1)	507**	(0.7)	464**	(0.8)
2012	525	(3.5)	498	(4.0)	511***	(0.6)	468***	(0.8)

Significant differences between assessment cycles in **bold** *EU21 **EU26 ***EU27

The average decrease in reading performance observed between 2000 and 2012 is equally important among girls (- 22 score points) and among boys (- 19 score points). The trend is different in EU countries on average: between 2000 and 2012 the girls' performance increased by 5 score points while the boys' decreased by the same value.

Table 18: Percentage of students and reading performance by immigrant status – PISA 2009

	Native students				Students with an immigrant background (first- or second-generation)				Difference in reading performance between native and students with an immigrant background	
			Performance on the reading scale				Performance on the reading scale			
	Percentage of students	S.E.	Mean	S.E.	Percentage of students	S.E.	Mean	S.E.	Score dif.	S.E.
Netherlands	87.9	(1.4)	515	(5.2)	12.1	(1.4)	470	(7.8)	**46**	(8.0)
EU-26	91.7	(0.0)	490	(0.4)	8.3	(0.0)	452	(6.4)	**38**	(6.4)

Significant differences between native and students with an immigrant background in **bold**

In Netherlands, the percentage of students with an immigrant background is slightly higher (12.1 %) than in the EU countries on average. The gap between native students and those with an immigrant background is 46 score points, which is equivalent to more than one year of schooling. The gap between native students and those with an immigrant background is slightly higher than the EU countries on average.

Table 19: Percentage of students and reading performance by language spoken at home – PISA 2012

	Speak test language at home				Speak another language at home				Difference in reading according to language spoken at home	
			Performance on the reading scale				Performance on the reading scale			
	Percentage of students	S.E	Mean	S.E.	Percentage of students	S.E.	Mean	S.E.	Score dif.	S.E.
Netherlands	93.6	(0.8)	513	(5.1)	6.4	(0.8)	474	(11.4)	**39**	(10.8)
EU-27	86.7	(0.0)	494	(0.4)	13.3	(0.0)	441	(5.4)	54	(5.4)

Significant differences according to language spoken at home in **bold**

In Netherlands the gap between students speaking the test language at home and those who do not (6.4 % of the students) is lower (39 score points) than the EU's average. It is equivalent to one year of schooling.

Reading engagement and reading literacy

Table 20: Mean reading scores between students poorly engaged and highly engaged in reading – PISA 2009

	Low quarter		Top quarter		Difference
	Mean	S.E.	Mean	S.E.	
Netherlands	470	(5.0)	560	(5.4)	**90**
EU-26	444	(0.8)	543	(0.8)	**99**

Significant differences according to the level of reading engagement in **bold**.

In Netherlands, there is a gap of 90 score points – which is equivalent to more than two years of schooling - between the students reporting being highly engaged in reading (top quarter), and those reporting being poorly engaged (bottom quarter) in that activity. Not surprisingly, students who report being engaged in reading perform better in the PISA test. The difference between the most and the least engaged readers in Netherlands is higher than the EU's average.

Table 21: Mean reading scores between students in low and top quarters of understanding and remembering strategies

	Low quarter		Top quarter		Difference
	Mean	S.E.	Mean	S.E.	
Netherlands	458	(4.7)	563	(4.1)	**105**
EU-26	433	(0.8)	531	(0.8)	**98**

Significant differences according to the degree of awareness of efficient reading strategies (understanding and remembering strategies) in **bold.**

In Netherlands there is a gap of 105 score points - equivalent to more than two years and a half of schooling- between the students who know which strategies are the most efficient to understand and remember a text, and those who have a limited knowledge of that. On average, in the EU, the gap is somewhat lower (98 score points). This huge difference reflects how closely reading proficiency and awareness of efficient reading strategies are linked.

Table 22: Mean reading scores between students in low and top quarters of summarizing strategies

	Low quarter		Top quarter		Difference
	Mean	S.E.	Mean	S.E.	
Netherlands	455	(4.6)	556	(4.2)	**102**
EU-26	440	(0.8)	530	(0.7)	**90**

Significant differences according to the degree of awareness of reading strategies (summarizing strategies) in **bold.**

In Netherlands, there is a gap of 102 score points – which is equivalent to more than two years and a half of schooling - between the students who know which strategies are the most efficient to summarize a text, and those who have a limited knowledge of that. On average, in the EU-26, the gap is somewhat lower (90 score points). This huge difference reflects how closely reading proficiency and awareness of efficient reading strategies are linked.

5 Policy areas

The High Level Group of Experts on Literacy (2012, p. 38) recommended that all EU Member States should focus on the following areas as they craft their own literacy solutions:

1) Creating a more literate environment
2) Improving the quality of teaching
3) Increasing participation, inclusion and equity (with the term "equity" was added by ELINET).

The following parts refer to these three key issues, however some overlapping may occur.

In order to achieve as much comparability as possible across countries, quantitative and qualitative indicators for which information from international data are available are reported. Appendix A provides more information on criteria for the choice of indicators and the chosen indicators for the pre-primary age group. For each of these indicators Appendix B contains a table with numbers of the European countries participating in ELINET. Appendix C has been created using the international database for PIRLS 2011 – and contains separate tables for all information reported. If countries did not participate in PIRLS 2011, data for PIRLS 2006 are referred to. Appendix D offers this information for the PIRLS 2006 data.

5.1 Creating a literate environment for children and adolescents

The EU High Level Group of Experts on Literacy stated the following in relation to **creating a more literate environment**:

> "Creating a more literate environment will help stimulate a culture of reading, i.e. where **reading for pleasure** is seen as the norm for all children and adults. Such a culture will fuel reading motivation and reading achievement: people who like to read, read more. Because they read more, they read better, and because they read better they read more: a virtuous circle which benefits individuals, families and society as a whole." (HLG report 2012, p. 41).

Parents play a central role in children's emergent literacy development. They are the first teachers, and shape children's language and communication abilities and attitudes to reading by being good reading role models, providing reading materials, and reading to the child.

Schools play an important role in offering a literate environment for students. Schools may foster reading motivation and reading for pleasure by establishing school and classroom libraries, offering a wide variety of books and other reading material in different genres, providing sheltered and comfortable spaces for individual reading activities (like reading clubs), and not forcing children into having to express and exchange their individual (intimate) reading experiences.

However, schools do not have sole responsibility. A broad range of actors may shape literacy motivation, from parents and peers to libraries. Parents may provide role models and influence children's attitudes towards literacy practices. Also, libraries have a vital role if they offer free books, especially for families who cannot afford to buy books. Regional or national campaigns may inspire children and their parents to engage in reading activities. (Cf. ELINET Country Reports, Frame of Reference, pp. 29ff.)

Adolescence is a crucial phase in life where young people develop long-term *identities and self-concepts* which include media preferences and practices (*media identity*). In this perspective, it is of

great importance that families, schools and communities offer young people rich opportunities to encounter the *culture of reading* and develop a stable *self-concept as a reader/writer* and member of a literary culture. This includes access to a broad variety of reading materials (in print and electronic forms) and stimulating literate environments in and outside of schools; it also includes opportunities to get actively involved in engaging with texts, and communicating, reflecting on and exchanging ideas about texts with peers and ´competent others´, such as teachers or parents (Ibid., pp. 45f) .

5.1.1 Providing a literate environment at home

The **home learning environment**, particularly in the first three years, is extremely important (Brooks et al. 2012). It determines the quantity and quality of interactions between the infant and the primary caregivers, who are the most powerful agents of language development, both receptive and expressive, in the context of everyday activities and experiences. During these years, experience-dependent creation of synapses is maximal. We know that the more words the children are exposed to, the more they can learn. Caregiver-child relations in their turn strongly influence the ability to learn, by influencing self-esteem, general knowledge and motivation.

Several indicators are used to describe the literate home environment of very young children in this report, drawing on data from international sources (PIRLS) that are comparable across countries. It is important to acknowledge that some of the PIRLS data are self-reported and may be biased by social desirability and the ways in which questions are interpreted by parents within countries.

Parental attitudes to reading

PIRLS 2011 used the "Parents Like Reading Scale" according to their parents' responses to seven statements about reading and how often they read for enjoyment. The figures are presented below with the percentage of students whose parents "like", "somewhat like" or "do not like" reading" as reported by PIRLS 2011 (Mullis et al. 2012a, Exhibit 4.4 – Parents Like Reading, p. 120).

- Like: 44.7% (European average 35.3 %)
- Somewhat like: 44.7% (European average 52.6 %)
- Do not like: 10.6% (European average 17.9 %)
  (For an overview of European countries see table B1 in Appendix B).

Compared to the European average, the number of pupils in the Netherlands whose parents have positive attitude toward reading is slightly higher. The importance of parental attitudes to reading is shown by the fact that there are significant differences in reading performance at grade 4 between children whose parents like to read (average achievement 563) and those who do not (average achievement 541).

Home Educational Resources

Eleven percent of parents in the Netherlands reported having few home resources for learning (based on a scale that includes number of books at home, number of children's books at home, access to a quiet room to study, Internet access, and parent education and job status) This is well below the EU Average of 25%. Similarly a 10 percentage points gap between the EU Average (25) for many resources, and the Dutch average (35) suggests that pupils in the Netherlands have greater access to home resources.

Students in the Netherlands with 'few' home educational resources had a mean score on PIRLS reading literacy that was significantly lower, by 50.3 points, compared with those described as having many resources (ELINET PIRLS 2011 Appendix, Table E2). The corresponding difference on average across the EU-24 was 78.9, indicating that the association between home resources and reading achievement is weaker in the Netherlands than on average across the EU-24.

Table 23: Percentages of Pupils Whose Parents Reported Having Few or Many Home Resources for Learning, and Corresponding Mean Overall Reading Scores – Netherlands and EU-24 Average

Level of Home Resources	Few Resources		Many Resources		Difference (Many - Few)
	%	Mean	%	Mean	
Netherlands	11	519	35	575	**50**
EU-24	25	495	25	573	**79**

Statistically significant mean score differences in **bold**.

Number of children's books in the home

PIRLS 2011 offers two sets of data concerning books in the home: The first refers to numbers of children's books in the home (based on reports by parents); the second refers to books in the home (regardless of whether they are children's books or not), as reported by students.

The PIRLS 2011 database provides the figures below about the number of children's books in the home based on the report of parents:

- 0-10: 5.2% (European average 11.8%)
- 11-25: 19.2% (European average 19.7%)
- 26-50: 32.2% (European average 29.4%)
- 51-100: 28.2% (European average 23.4%)
- >100: 25.3 % (European average 15.7%).

Compared to the European average (for an overview of European countries see table B2 in Appendix B) the availability of children's books in the home is quite high in the Netherlands.

In the Netherlands, 8% of pupils report having 10 or fewer books at home, compared with an EU-24 average of 11% (Table 24). Similar numbers of pupils in the Netherlands (11%) reported having over 200 books, as on average across EU countries (12%). The achievement gap between those with 0-10 books and those with 200+ books is 38 points. This gap is considerably lower than the EU average of 82 points. It suggests that the number of books in the home has a weaker relationship with reading performance than on average across the EU-24 countries.

Table 24: Mean Overall Reading Scores of Pupil with 0-10 books at Home, and those with More than 200 Books – Netherlands and EU-24 Average

Books in the Home	None or Few Books (0-10)		More than 200 Books		Mean Score Difference (More than 200 – None or few)
	Percent of Students	Mean Reading Score	Percent of Students	Mean Reading Score	
Netherlands	8	521	11	559	**38**
EU-24	11	482	12	563	**82**

Statistically significant mean score differences in **bold**.

Early Literacy Activity Scale

PIRLS 2011 reports the percentages of students whose parents (often, never or almost never) engaged in literacy-relevant activities with them before the beginning of primary school (Mullis et al. 2012a, exhibit 4.6 - Early Literacy Activities Before Beginning Primary School, p. 126). Nine activities are considered: reading books, telling stories, singing songs, playing with alphabet toys, talking about things done, talking about things read, playing word games, writing letters or words, reading signs and labels aloud.

The figures for the Netherlands in the composite score for all these activities are below (for an overview of European countries see table B3 in Appendix B):

- Often: 39.6% (European average 40.7%)
- Sometimes: 59.7% (European average 57.4)
- Never or almost never: 0.7% (European average 1.9%).

This means that there are a few parents who never or hardly ever engage in the nine activities. The Early Literacy Activity Scale correlates with later reading performance in grade 4. The average reading score of pupils who were engaged often in these activities was 559, as compared with 551 for those pupils who sometimes were engaged in these activities with their parents before the beginning of primary school.

While the Early Literacy Activity Scale is a composite score it is of interest to look at single items. If only the category "often" is considered, the percentage of pupils in the Netherlands whose parents engaged in literacy-related activities with them before the beginning of primary school is comparatively high compared with the European average, especially for what concerns reading books, singing songs and playing:

- read books to them often: 73.9% (European average 58.4 %)
- told stories to them often: 46.8% (European average 51. 5%)
- sang songs to them often: 64.8% (European average 50.6%)
- played games involving shapes (toys and puzzles) with them often: 69.6% (European average 63.5%).
  (For more details and an overview of European countries see table B 4 – B 7 in Appendix B).

Challenge: There is a need for more family literacy programmes with a focus on supporting migrant parents and care givers in understanding and fostering their children's' literacy development. The relatively large migrant group of Moroccans in the Netherlands are from a traditionally more oral than written culture, where reading to and with young children is not a common practice, as it increasingly is in most of the Dutch monolingual families. Also, there is an ongoing need for programmes to raise awareness in all parents that literacy is a key to learning and life chances and that the basis for good literacy achievement is laid in early childhood.

5.1.2 Providing a literate environment in school

Availability and use of classroom library

Based on data provided by their teachers, PIRLS shows that 86.1% of students in the Netherlands are in classrooms which have class libraries – above the corresponding EU-24 average of 72.9% (ELINET PIRLS 2011 Appendix, Table H2). In the Netherlands, 58.8% of students were in classrooms with more than 50 books, which is above the EU-24 average of 32.1% (ibid.).

5.1.3 Providing a digital environment

Digital environment of primary students

A literate environment can also be created by incorporating digital devices into the school environment.

According to teachers' reports, 85.2% of students in the Netherlands have a computer available for reading lessons, compared to the EU-average of 44.9% (ELINET PIRLS 2011 Appendix Table I6). In the Netherlands, 77.6% use a computer at least monthly to look up information. This is well above the corresponding EU-24 average at 39.0% (ibid). In the Netherlands, 68.3% of students are in classrooms whose teachers report that they use computers to write stories or other texts at least monthly. The corresponding EU-24 average is under half of this proportion (33.1%).

The use of computers and other ICT equipment in primary education is not laid down by law, but nearly all teachers use digital learning materials. Some 75% of primary school classrooms have an electronic blackboard and schools have, on average, one computer for every five pupils. Software makes up 29% of teaching materials in primary schools. Teachers and head teachers use ICT tools, such as the Education Database (BRON; in Dutch only), to improve the organisation of education, and pupils' progress is commonly recorded in online pupil monitoring systems.

Knowledge Net (*Kennisnet*) is the main body responsible for supporting the use of ICT in schools at all levels in the Netherlands. It provides schools with services to support the effective use of ICT in teaching and learning.

Digital environment of secondary students

Over the last few years, the number of schools making intensive use of computers has grown steadily. More than half of them have set down their views on the use of ICT in an ICT policy plan, which they are also implementing. On average, teachers use computers as teaching aids for about four hours a week, primarily for word processing or finding information on the internet. The number of secondary school teachers using computers rose by 3% between 2009 and 2010. At this rate, it will take another 10 to 15 years before all teachers have adopted ICT teaching aids. There is an average of one computer for every six pupils. This figure has not changed greatly over the last few years. Many schools have a digital library and computer work areas for groups. Many secondary schools have electronic blackboards.

Challenge: In secondary education, the (innovative) use of ICT, new media and innovative teaching aids is, unfortunately, more often than not linked to preferences and skills of individual teachers. Pre-service and in-service teacher training should and could be the place where ongoing professionalisation of teachers on the use of ICT as an innovative tool for their teaching is linked with knowledge of appropriate didactic craftsmanship.

5.1.4 The role of public libraries in reading promotion

Cooperation between libraries, families, primary and secondary schools, and other agents in literacy promotion

Throughout The Netherlands, the involvement of public libraries with schools and parents is paramount. There are numerous ways in which libraries are an important agent in reading promotion in programmes and initiatives, both for parents and for reading specialist and regular teachers in

schools. The national action programme The Art of Reading (related to the larger national 'action plan low literacy') plays an important role in this regard. The Dutch government (i.c. the Ministry of Education) funded the action programme The Art of Reading in two periods: 2008-2011 and 2012-2015. As a result of this programme, a developmental line for reading with accompanying developmental and learning goals was linked with (internationally) successful activities such as Bookstart for babies, Bookstart in daycare and the Libray in the School (both primary and secondary schools). The Art of Reading ensures that all children and adolescents are introduced to books and literacy promotion activities, and the programme was evaluated through research as well (Van den Berg & Bus (2015)).

5.1.5 Improving literate environments for children and adolescents: Programmes, initiatives and examples

Family literacy programs

The Database Effective Youth Interventions[11] provides an inventory of parenting programmes that have been acknowledged by a committee of experts, because they were proven to be effective and/or are theoretically well grounded. The Database is updated regularly, in response to new programmes or interventions being added, existing interventions being modified (in which case they need to be assessed again), or due to the fact that an intervention is no longer on offer. The inventory comprises six general parenting programmes, particularly programmes that target parents with parenting problems due to various possible risk factors. Note that the list also includes programmes focused on crisis intervention and on so-called 'multi-problem families' in which children are at risk of being placed in care, but these will not be described here. The six programmes are:

1) *Basic Trust* is a short intervention for two- to five-year-olds with behavioural and/or emotional problems and their parents, who are also characterised by attachment problems[12] Basic Trust uses Video Home Training (recordings of parent-child interactions and feedback sessions) to train parents to use supportive interaction skills.
2) *Home-Start* targets families with at least one child under six, that have signalled to be in need of support[13]. Experienced volunteers visit these families once a week and help parents increase their self-confidence, find strategies to deal with child-rearing issues, and strengthen support from parents' social networks.
3) *KopOpOuders-online* (Chin-Up-Parents-online) is an online course for parents with psychological problems and/or substance addictions and their partners, with at least one child in the age range 1-18[14]. The course aims to promote children's well-being by stimulating parenting skills. The course comprises eight weekly meetings in a protected chatbox.
4) *Kortdurende Video-Hometraining (K-HVT)* (Short Video Home Training) is a behavioural intervention for parents with children in the age range 0-4[15]. The aim of the programme is to promote children's socio-emotional development and prevent behavioural and developmental problems by strengthening parenting skills and improving parent-child relationships. In eight home visits feedback is given on the basis of video-recordings of parent-child interactions.

[11] See: http://www.nji.nl/nl/Databanken/Databank-Effectieve-Jeugdinterventies.
[12] See: http://www.basictrust.com.
[13] See: http://www.home-start.nl/.
[14] See: https://kopopouder.online.nl.
[15] See: http://www.aitnl.org/.

5) *Praktisch Pedagogische Gezinsbegeleiding (PPG)* (Practical Pedagogical Family Support) targets families with children in the age range 0-18, in which parents experience parenting problems[16]. Social workers visit families once a week over a period of 15 to 20 weeks and give parents advice to strengthen their parenting skills.
6) *Triple P* is aimed to prevent (severe) emotional and behavioural problems in children in the age range 0-18 by promoting parenting skills[17]. Dependent on their needs, parents receive a combination of various types of support: information brochures, counselling, targeted advice, parenting skills training, and intervention.

The Opstap Opnieuw programme is a home-based intervention developed from the Israeli Home Instruction Programme for Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY) for the Dutch context. The two-year programme aims to improve the cognitive and language skills, numeracy, mother-child interactions, and socio-emotional development of young children, aged 4 to 6, who are at risk of early academic failure based on low socio-economic background or ethnic minority status. The programme materials were particularly developed for Turkish and Moroccan families, in their native languages. The programme consists of a structured "curriculum" of short-term goals and related activities that increase in complexity over time. The curriculum is presented in textual and pictorial weekly instructions and worksheets along with supplemental materials such as audiotapes and pencils, totalling 150 planned 20-minute activities for 30 weeks of the year, for two years. The mothers are supported by paraprofessional aides who were also mothers from the local and ethnic community. The paraprofessionals visit the families biweekly while the programme is in session to give instruction, support, monitor that programme activities are taking place, and monitor the progress of the mother and child. A few paraprofessionals conduct meetings of a small group of mothers instead of visiting their homes. There are additionally monthly group meetings for participating mothers to provide information about authoritative, emotionally supportive, sensitive-responsive mother-child interaction styles. The programme was developed in the Netherlands in the 1990's and continues to operate today. The programme is operated by the Averroès Foundation[18].

Programmes for introducing parents and children to libraries and bookshops and initiatives to foster reading engagement among children and adolescents

The abovementioned programme The Art of Reading is leading in these areas, with a very successful implementation of a variety of tailored literacy programmes and activities.

[16] See: http://www.werkenstudie.hu.nl/totaalaanbod/Basisopleiding-PPG-Adviserend-samenwerken-met-ouders/Opleidingsinhoud.
[17] See: http://www.triplep-nederland.nl/nl-nl/home/.
[18] See: http://www.nji.nl/nl/Databank/Databank-Effectieve-Jeugdinterventies/Erkende-interventies/Opstap.html and http://europa.eu/epic/practices-that-work/practice-user-registry/index-country_en.htm#topic_0801262488646df3.

5.2 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).

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

5.2.1 Quality of preschool

While early childhood education has long been neglected as a public issue, nowadays early childhood education and care (ECEC) has been recognised as important for "better child well-being and learning outcomes as a foundation for lifelong learning; more equitable child outcomes and reduction of poverty; increased intergenerational social mobility; more female labour market participation; increased fertility rates; and better social and economic development for the society at large" (OECD 2012 *Starting Strong III,* p. 9). In all European countries pre-primary education is an important part of political reflection and action.

The EU High Level Group of Experts on Literacy stated:

> "Increasing investment in high-quality ECEC is one of the best investments Member States can make in Europe's future human capital. 'High quality' means highly-qualified staff and a curriculum focused on language development through play with an emphasis on language, psychomotor and social development, and emerging literacy skills, building on children's natural developmental stages" (High Level Group Report, 2012a, p. 59).

While there is no international or Europe-wide agreed concept of ECEC quality, there is agreement that quality is a complex concept and has different dimensions which are interrelated. In this report we focus on *structural quality* which refers to characteristics of the whole system, e.g. the financing of pre-primary education, the relation of staff to children, regulations for the qualifications and training of the staff, and the design of the curriculum. There are some data concerning structural quality, but there is a lack of research and data about process quality, practices in ECEC institutions, the relation between children and teachers, and what children actually experience in their institutions and programmes.

Annual expenditure on pre-primary education

According to Eurostat (2014, Figure D3), the total public expenditure per child in pre-primary education as a percentage of GDP in the Netherlands is 0.4%. The range is from 0.04% in Turkey and 0.1% in Ireland to 1.01% in Denmark (for an overview of European countries see table D1 in Appendix B).

Ratio of children to teachers in pre-primary school

According to Education at a Glance 2014 (OECD 2014, p. 451) the student/teacher ratio in pre-primary schools for children at the age of four is 15.5. For the other European countries OECD (2014 p.324)

provides information about the student/teacher ratio in pre-primary schools (for an overview of European countries see table D2 in Appendix B).

Percentage of males among pre-primary teachers

According to Pordata (2014), 12.8% of the Kindergarten teachers in Netherlands are males. The range is from 0.2% in Bulgaria and Hungary to 17.7% in France (for an overview of European countries see table D3 in Appendix B).

Preschool teachers' qualifications

The minimum required level to become a qualified teacher is Bachelor level (ISCED 5) Length of training is 4 years (European Commission/ EACEA/Eurydice/Eurostat 2014, p. 101). In the Netherlands, pre-primary or kindergarten years are an integral part of primary education.

Data on Continuing Professional Development specifically for the first two Kindergarten years in the Dutch primary educational context are not available (Eurostat 2014, pp. 104–105).

Preschool language and literacy curriculum

The design of the kindergarten curriculum is an important aspect of quality. Therefore it is included in this section and not in the next section "Literacy curricula in schools". It also takes into consideration that young children have learning needs than are sometimes different to those of school children. Pre-school programs should focus on developing children's emergent literacy skills through playful experience rather than systematic training in phonics or teaching the alphabet. There is no evidence that systematic instruction of reading in preschool has any benefit for future learning (Suggate 2012).

Fostering the development of emergent literacy skills through playful activities is an important function of pre-school institutions, providing a basis for formal literacy instruction in primary school. We consider the following to be key components: oral language development, including vocabulary learning and grammar, familiarisation with the language of books (e.g. through hearing stories read and told), being engaged and motivated in literacy-related activities, experiencing a literacy-rich environment, developing concepts of print, and language awareness (for more information see the frame text of country reports).

In the Netherlands, the educational system is such that children can enroll in primary education at the age of four: Kindergarten years are effectively an integral part of primary education, which lasts 8 years, accordingly. Playgroups providing early childhood education are in principle open to all children between 2-2½ and 4 years of age. However, early childhood education is intended primarily for children with socio-medical problems and children suffering from or at risk of developmental delay. Individual municipalities may give these children priority at playgroups where demand is high. Potential developmental delays are often identified by baby and toddler clinics. These municipal clinics are part of the child health service and are responsible for basic medical care and prevention for children up to the age of four. Parents may tell the municipality what playgroup they would prefer their child to attend. Such requests are usually met.

There are no regulations on the annual timetable in childcare. With regard to early childhood education, however, municipalities are required by law to provide an adequate range of programmes. Outside of school holidays, children participating in a preschool programme must attend at least four half-days, of 2½ hours each, a week, or ten hours of activities aimed at stimulating their development.

There are no regulations on the daily or weekly organisation of childcare. As each nursery or playgroup follows its own timetable, it is impossible to give a general description here.

Children participating in a preschool education programme must attend at least four half-days a week. From the age of four, children can go on to primary schools, where attainment targets apply. In the Netherlands, the compulsory school-starting age is five. Dutch is the language of communication in both day nurseries and out-of-school care in childcare centres. In places where Frisian or another regional language is widely spoken, this language may be spoken alongside Dutch. Children from a non-Dutch background may likewise be spoken to for part of the time in their own language to aid comprehension.

Early childhood education aims to enhance children's development through play. Preschool programmes are provided by day nurseries and playgroups. In order to ensure continuity of learning, children who have participated in a preschool programme should ideally, at the age of four, transfer to a primary school with a special early childhood education programme. Continuity of learning also depends on municipal authorities, playgroups, day nurseries and schools making agreements on early childhood education.

Teaching methods and materials; focus on literacy

There are different programmes for early childhood education in the Netherlands. Some are used throughout the country, others – such as Taalrijk, Speeltaal and Kinderklanken – only locally. Programmes are usually carried out in ECEC at day nurseries, playgroups or primary schools (years 1 and 2). Some early childhood education programmes focus on only one developmental domain, usually language (narrow programmes). Broad programmes address multiple developmental domains and require parents' active participation. In both kinds of programmes, the need for high quality support of language and literacy acquisition and development is appropriately recognised and well worked out in the activities and materials, to be used by the care professionals.

Two organisations in the Netherlands are authorised to recognise early childhood education programmes: Erkenningscommissie Interventies (the NJI committee for the recognition of child intervention programmes) and Panel Welzijn en Ontwikkelingsstimulering (the panel on welfare and developmental stimulation). Programmes must satisfy strict conditions in order to attain national recognition. So far, only five programmes are nationally recognised: Piramide[19], Kaleidoscoop[20], Startblokken/Basisontwikkeling[21], KO Totaal[22], and the Reggio Emilia approach Sporen[23]. Most of these programmes incorporate key principles from the programme Language Route (De Taallijn, NJI-registered as well), which was specifically designed with enhancing the quality of daily literacy activities in mind.

The aim of early childhood education is to provide continuity of learning and support over an extended period of time, i.e. to deliver what professionals call a continuous developmental trajectory. This can be achieved by ensuring continuity in, for instance, the method used at playgroup and at primary school (same programme), parental involvement (playgroup and primary school inform and involve parents in more or less the same way) or learning climate (same rules of conduct at playgroup

[19] See: http://www.cito.nl/onderwijs/vroeg%20en%20voorschoolse%20educatie/piramide.aspx.
[20] See: http://www.nji.nl/nl/Producten-en-diensten/Methodieken-en-instrumenten/Projecten-Kaleidoscoop.
[21] See: http://www.startblokken.info/.
[22] See: ttp://www.cedgroep.nl/het-jonge-kind/vve/vve-programmas/ko-totaal.aspx.
[23] See: http://www.pedagogiekontwikkeling.nl/wat-doen-wij/.

and primary school; playworkers and teachers respond similarly in certain play and learning situations). Playgroups and primary schools can also use the same instruments for observation and diagnostics (continuity of observation and diagnostics). Municipalities and primary schools have joint financial responsibility for the methods and monitoring systems used.

Children in early childhood education programmes are monitored using observation lists and assessments of development. The various developmental domains are usually assessed three times a year, or more often for children whose development is abnormal. The monitoring system provides an overall picture of a child's development: is he lagging behind, or is he ahead of the other children? Monitoring information has many uses. It is:

- shared with other play-workers at handover;
- discussed at team meetings;
- used in managing a child's specific problems;
- used in planning children's activities;
- a tool in providing optimum support to children;
- discussed with parents;
- summarised in a handover form given to the primary school when the child reaches the age of four.

5.2.2 Literacy curricula in schools

Curricula provide a normative framework for teachers and a guideline for their teaching aims, methods, materials and activities. However one should keep in mind that there is a difference between the intended curriculum, as outlined in official documents, and the implemented curriculum – what actually happens in the schools.

Primary schools curricula

According to Mullis et al. 2012b (Vol.1, exhibit 5, p. 30, 31), reading is a separate curriculum area in Netherlands. It is one of six European countries with a separate curriculum for reading. In all other countries reading usually is taught as part of the national language curriculum that also includes writing and other communication skills. In practice, the Dutch language curriculum at primary levels includes three broad components: oral education, written education and linguistics (Netten & Verhoeven, 2012). Indeed, Netten & Verhoeven note that textbooks are available to schools that cover integrated, as well as separate, language and reading education.

It should be noted that, unlike in many European countries, schools in the Netherlands have considerable freedom in deciding which specific curriculum elements to teach. Hence, core curriculum targets (core objectives) describe attainment targets only, and schools decide how the targets should be reached, and which instructional elements to implement (Netten & Verhoeven, 2012).

Reading for pleasure

According to PIRLS 2011 Encyclopaedia, there is some emphasis on reading for pleasure in the intended language/reading curriculum in the Netherlands. The Netherlands is among a group of 11 countries participating in PIRLS 2011 which reported some emphasis on reading for pleasure in the curriculum. Four of the EU-24 countries in PIRLS 2011 reported that reading for pleasure was given a little or no emphasis and 9 countries that it had major emphasis (Mullis et al. 2012b, Vol.1, exhibit 9, p. 36).

The Netherlands has a Reading Foundation (Stichting Lezen[24]) whose responsibility it is to promote reading for pleasure and a strong reading culture (Netten & Verhoeven, 2012). Furthermore, the Dutch language curriculum for written education includes the core objective that students derive pleasure from reading and writing stories, poems and information texts (Netten & Verhoeven, 2012) and schools are charged with identifying methods that will enable them to achieve this goal.

Some contents of literacy curricula in primary schools

The Eurydice report "Teaching Reading in Europe" offers a broad range of information about the content of reading literacy curricula and official guidelines (European Commission/EACEA/ Eurydice 2011). In order not to duplicate this work only two aspects were addressed in the ELINET country reports whose importance might not yet be acknowledged and therefore might be missing in the literacy curricula and official guidelines: explicit instruction of grapheme-phoneme correspondences (phonics), and reading strategies.

Explicit instruction of grapheme-phoneme correspondences

The Eurydice report on reading (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2011) indicates that a relatively small number of skills relating to phonological awareness, word identification/recognition, knowledge of phonics and fluency are taught at pre-primary or primary levels in the Netherlands.

According to Netten and Verhoeven (2012), formal reading and writing instruction begins in Grade 1, with approximately 75% of schools implementing an indirect phonics method called Learning to Reading Safely. Most children are able to decode simple Dutch words halfway through Grade 1. In the second half of Grade 1, there is an increased emphasis on reading short texts to increase fluency as well as decoding skills. There are no data on the relative emphasis on decoding skills as students' progress through the primary grades.

Teaching of reading strategies in primary schools

While literacy instruction in the early years is more focused on code-based skills, in later stages it is important to develop and foster a wide range of comprehension strategies with all children. Explicit teaching of comprehension strategies is effective for improving reading comprehension among readers with different levels of ability. These strategies include:

- Drawing inferences or interpretations while reading text and graphic data
- Summarising text and focusing selectively on the most important information
- Making connections between different parts of a text
- Using background knowledge
- Checking/monitoring own comprehension
- Constructing visual representations
- Pupils reflecting on their own reading process (Eurydice 2011, p. 55).

[24] See: http://www.lezen.nl/dutch-reading-foundation.

The Dutch language curriculum in the Netherlands does not outline specific reading strategies that must be taught. However, the core objectives for reading and writing education suggest a need to focus on specific reading comprehension strategies. They include:

- Retrieve information from informative and instructive texts, including diagrams, tables and digital sources
- Structure information and opinions when reading educational, study-orientated and other instructive texts, as well as systematically-structured sources, including digital ones.
- Compare and assess information and opinions in different textual forms
- Structure information and opinions when writing a letter, report, form, or paper, paying attention to syntax, correct spelling, legible writing, typed papers, as well as images and colour in some cases.

Literacy curricula in secondary schools

The attainment targets specify the standards of knowledge, understanding and skills pupils are required to attain in the lower years of secondary school. The Secondary Education Act (WVO) states, for the upper years of each type of education, which subjects must in any event be included in the curriculum. The Secondary Education (Organisation of Teaching) Decree prescribes the number of periods to be spent on each subject or group of subjects in the form of a study load table.

Every school must have a school plan, updated every four years, describing the steps being taken to monitor and improve quality and indicating the school's policy on educational matters, staffing and internal quality assurance. Through this document, the school accounts to the Inspectorate and the participation council for its policies. A school plan may cover one or more secondary schools and one or more other schools which share the same competent authority (school board). It must be approved by the participation council.

The school prospectus, which must be updated every year, contains information for parents and pupils about the school's objectives, how it intends to achieve them and the results already achieved. It also gives details about the voluntary parental contribution and the rights and obligations of parents and pupils. The prospectus has to be approved by the parents, staff and pupils before publication.

In addition, long-range attainment goals for both language and maths were laid down in 2010 by the Dutch government. These developmentally described reference levels state the kind of reading, writing and oral tasks, with accompanying knowledge and skills, children should have acquired at several places on their route through the educational system.

5.2.3 Reading Instruction

While most literacy researchers have clear concepts about effective literacy instruction, we do not know much about what is actually going on in classrooms in European countries. In order to describe the practice of reading instruction we would need extensive observational studies. However, there are only rare observational studies (Philipp 2014). There is a noteworthy shortage of data on actual reading instruction in school. Only PIRLS offer some data for primary schools, albeit based on self-reports by teachers (PIRLS) which might not be valid and may be biased by social desirability.

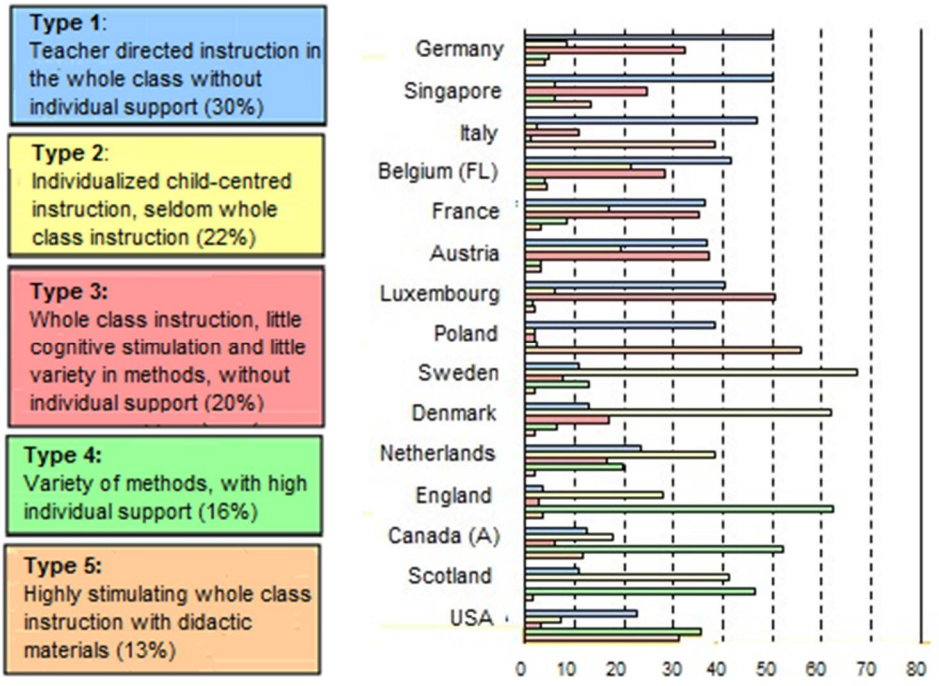
In PIRLS 2006, fourth-grade reading teachers reported about instructional materials, strategies and activities. In a latent class analysis Lankes and Carstensen (2007) identified 5 types of instruction:

Type 1: Teacher-directed instruction in the whole class without individual support
Type 2: Individualized child-centred instruction, seldom whole-class instruction
Type 3: Whole-class instruction with little cognitive stimulation and little variety in methods, without individual support
Type 4: Variety of methods with high individual support
Type 5: Highly stimulating whole-class instruction with didactic materials.

There were significant differences between countries concerning these types of instruction (Lankes and Carstensen 2007). Also, the analysis of PIRLS 2011 teacher self-reports revealed differences between the approaches to reading instruction in European countries (Mullis et al. 2012a, Tarelli et al. 2012).

As can be seen from figure 3 in the Netherlands the type used most often was individualized child-centred instruction, seldom whole-class instruction.

Figure 3: Distribution of types of Reading Instruction (PIRLS 2006 data)



Source: Adapted from Lankes & Carstensen 2007

In PIRLS 2011 principals and teachers provided some information on language and reading instruction. Concerning the **instructional time spent on language and reading**, the following results are of interest: In 2011, pupils in the Netherlands spent fewer hours per year at school (981 hours) than on average across EU-24 countries 1078 hours). Students in the Netherlands spent 358 hours (just over one-third of all instructional hours) on instruction in the language of the PIRLS test, compared to an EU-24 average of 241 hours. In the Netherlands, 111 instructional hours per year are spent on reading as part of language, compared with an EU-24 average of 68, though the EU-24 average is itself low relative to, for example, the United States and New Zealand (both 131 hours). Teachers in the Netherlands report allocating more time to teaching reading across the curriculum and in reading classes (188 instructional hours per year) than on average across EU-24 countries (147 hours).

Source: PIRLS 2011 (Mullis, Martin, Kennedy et al., 2012, p. 214, Exhibit 8.4). EU averages from PIRLS 2011 database (see ELINET PIRLS 2011 Appendix, Table I3).

According to Mullis et al., teacher response rates for items dealing with overall working time were at least 50%, while those for other items dealing with allocation of time did not reach 50%. Hence, additional care should be exercised in interpreting estimates reported above.

According to the PIRLS 2011 Encyclopaedia, the percentage of time to be allocated to language/reading is not specified in the curriculum in the Netherlands (Mullis et al., 2012, Vol. 1, Exhibit 6), though there is an overall requirement for 940 hours of instruction annually.

Activities of teachers to develop students' reading comprehension skills

PIRLS 2011 provides information on the frequency with which teachers in the Netherlands engage students in specific reading comprehension activities. The following are the percentages of students in Grade 4 in the Netherlands and on average across the EU-24 who engage in specified comprehension activities 'every day or almost every day' (ELINET PIRLS 2011 Appendix C, Table I1):

- Locate information within the text: 32.8% (EU-24 = 65.5%)
- Identify main ideas of what they have read: 10.1% (EU-24 = 55.5%)
- Explain or support their understanding of what they have read: 26.2% (EU-24 = 61.6%)
- Compare what they have read with experiences they have had: 15.8% (EU-24 = 34.7%)
- Compare what they have read with other things they have read: 6.5% (EU-24 = (22.4%)
- Make predictions about what will happen next in the text: 10.0% (EU-24 = 22.4%)
- Make generalisations and inferences: 19.9% (EU-24 = 36.5%)
- Describe the style or structure of the text: 2.4% (EU-24 = 22.7%)
- Determine the author's perspective or intention: 2.3% (EU-24 = 21.0%)

Source: PIRLS 2011 database. See Mullis et al. 2012a, Exhibit 8.8, p. 226 for data for 'at least weekly', s. also Table I.1 in Appendix C.

According to these data, considerably fewer students in the Netherlands than on average across the EU-24 are engaged in each strategy on a daily or almost daily basis. Notably, students in the Netherlands are engaged in strategies such as locating information within the text, identifying main ideas of what they have read and explaining or supporting their understanding of what they have read, markedly less than the average across the EU-24. Furthermore, a few strategies, such as describing the style or structure of the text and determining the author's perspective or intention, are practised by very low proportions of students in the Netherlands.

PIRLS also assessed which instructional practices teachers use to engage students in learning (for an overview of responses in Germany and other European countries S. Table I.2 in Appendix C). PIRLS 2011 demonstrates that students whose teachers used instructional practices to engage students learning in most lessons (items: summarising the lesson's goals, relating the lesson to students' daily lives, questioning to elicit reasons and explanations, encouraging students to show improvement, praising students for good effort, bringing interesting things to class) had higher scores in reading than those who used such practices in only about half the lessons or less (Mullis et al. 2012a, exh. 8.6, p.220).

Based on a scale summarising frequencies across all six items, 53.7% of students in the Netherlands were deemed to be taught by teachers who implemented instructional practices to engage learning in

"most lessons". The corresponding EU-24 average was 70% (ELINET PIRLS 2011 Appendix, Table I2). These findings, together with those based on frequency of student engagement in reading comprehension strategies, suggest a relatively low level of reading engagement in classrooms in the Netherlands.

It is well documented in research studies that explicit teaching of comprehension strategies may improve reading comprehension among readers with different levels of ability. While there are no data available for secondary schools, some PISA data also suggest that there is a need for explicit instruction of reading strategies

Problem area: The engagement of students in the Netherlands in learning in general and in applying reading comprehension strategies on a regular basis lags behind EU-24 average levels. A review to approaches to promoting reading comprehension in classrooms might help to explain how reading comprehension is promoted in Dutch schools, and whether any adjustments are needed.

5.2.4 Early identification of and support for struggling literacy learners

Effective assessment tools upon entry to primary school will help teachers identify literacy skills from the very beginning of formal education. Regular formative assessment throughout primary school will ensure that literacy problems do not continue to go unrecognised, and that students receive the support they need through education that matches their learning needs. This should prevent children leaving school with unrecognized literacy problems (EU High Level Group of Experts on Literacy 2012a, p. 67).

Standards as basis of assessment of reading difficulties

Standards of reading achievement allowing teachers, parents and school leaders to understand the rate of progress of learners and to identify individual strengths and needs should be integrated in the curriculum and should be the basis of assessments. The High Level Group pointed out that there is a need to establish minimal standards of literacy achievement (benchmarks) for each grade, and to administer regular tests based on these standards, to allow for identification of struggling readers/writers (EU High Level Group of Experts on Literacy 2012a, p. 43).

All EU countries have defined learning objectives in reading to be reached at the end of primary and secondary education cycles. However, only a few Member States have detailed standards (benchmarks) at each grade (school year) which form the basis of assessments allowing for early identification of reading difficulties and subsequent allocation of attention and resources. These standard-based assessments allow teachers and school leaders to judge children's progress and to target additional reading support.

In the Netherlands, the Cito primary school leavers' attainment test is already well-established for year 8 (grade 6) and is widely used to determine which type of secondary education will be most appropriate for the individual pupil. Cito is the main provider of educational tests and examinations. Approximately 80% of Dutch schools currently use the Cito primary school leavers' attainment test. The result of the test is often used to underpin recommendations for the pupil's choice of secondary school. Schools also use this test to determine the outcomes of their teaching and compare them with the results of other schools.

Assessment standards and methods were until very recently not prescribed by the language/reading curriculum in Netherlands (Mullis et al. 2012, Vol.1, exh. 7, p. 33). In half of the European countries that

participated in PIRLS 2011, assessment standards and methods are prescribed by the language/reading curriculum. With the introduction of the attainment levels for language education throughout a pupil's educational career, there is now also a compulsory moment, at the end of grade 6, where all pupils' reading proficiency is assessed.

In the context of secondary education, attainment targets again specify the standards of knowledge, understanding and skills pupils are required to attain in the lower years of secondary school. The Secondary Education Act (WVO) states, for the upper years of each type of education, which subjects must in any event be included in the curriculum. The Secondary Education (Organisation of Teaching) Decree prescribes the number of periods to be spent on each subject or group of subjects in the form of a study load table.

Challenge: There are **no detailed standards at each grade** which form the basis of assessments **allowing early identification of reading difficulties** in the Netherlands. Not all Dutch schools have specific reading specialists besides the 'Interne Begeleider': the professional charged with internal quality control. Students with reading difficulties are often helped by the IB-er, a remedial teacher or speech therapist associated with the school or school advisory service. There is a trend in primary education toward employing coordinators who are responsible for a certain subject or age group (e.g., internal student counsellors, junior department coordinators, senior department coordinators, language coordinators, and arithmetic coordinators) (Mullis et al. 2012b, Vol.2, p. 427).

Screenings for reading competence to identify struggling readers

In PIRLS 2011, 84% of students in the Netherlands were taught by teachers who reported that a major emphasis was placed on the evaluation of students' ongoing work to monitor students' progress in reading; the corresponding EU-24 average is also 84%. In addition, 70% of students were taught by teachers who reported placing a major emphasis on the use of classroom tests for this purpose (EU-24 average = 51%), and 74% were taught by teachers who reported placing a major emphasis on the use of national or regional tests (EU-24 average = 25%) (ELINET PIRLS Appendix, Table I8).

According to Netten and Verhoeven (2012), teachers in the Netherlands, including remedial teachers, internal counsellors and speech therapist, are guided by a protocol, the Reading Problems and Dyslexia Protocol, which is available for Grades 1-8, and contains guidelines for a structured school-wide dyslexia policy whereby regular assessments facilitate early identification, prevention and intervention of reading difficulties. To a growing extent, in secondary education there is also more emphasis and attention to school-wide language policy: with an internal counsellor and specified means to aid and assist pupils with language and reading difficulties, including dyslexia.

Netten and Verhoeven also point out that many schools use a Student Tracking System (*Leerling en onderwijs volgsysteem*) developed by CITO that enables them to assess and track the competence of students in Grades 1-8. The system enables teachers and schools to monitor and improve the development of individual students as well as larger groups. Netten and Verhoeven note that, because tests are administered on a regular basis, problems can usually be identified at an early stage, and subsequently examined to devise a remedial action plan. A comparable STS is also available for, and widely used in, secondary education.

Supporting struggling literacy learners

Number of struggling readers receiving remedial instruction

PIRLS offers some data concerning issues of remedial instruction in primary schools. One question was whether all pupils receive remedial instruction when needed. Based on a question that class teachers answered in PIRLS 2011, it is estimated that 25.2% of students in Fourth grade in the Netherlands are considered to be in need of remedial reading instruction. It is also estimated by teachers that 22.1% are in receipt of remedial reading instruction (ELINET PIRLS 2011 Appendix, Table K1). On average across EU-24 countries, 18.1% of students in Grade 4 are identified by their teachers as being in need of remedial teaching, while 13.3% are identified as being in receipt of such teaching.

In the Netherlands, 9.5% of students in Fourth grade performed at or below the PIRLS low benchmark on overall reading (ELINET PIRLS 2011 Appendix, Table A6). Hence, the percentages of students in the Netherlands in receipt of remedial reading instruction (22.1%) is higher than the percentage who performed poorly on PIRLS. According to Netten and Verhoeven, 10% of students in the Netherlands have reading difficulties, and this is consistent with the proportion at or below the PIRLS Low benchmark.

Kinds of support offered

It is crucial that teachers provide support measures to help struggling readers. European Countries differ widely in their approaches, from in-class support with additional support staff (reading specialists, teaching assistants or other adults) working in the classroom together with a teacher, to out-of-class support where speech therapists or (educational) psychologists offer guidance and support for students with reading difficulties.

PIRLS 2011 provides information about additional staff and availability of support persons for reading. Based on teacher responses to a series of questions in PIRLS 2011, 22% of students in the Netherlands are in classes where there is always access to specialised professionals to work with students who have reading difficulties, compared with an EU-24 average of 25% (Table 25). Five percent of students in the Netherlands are in classrooms where there is access to a teacher aide with the same frequency, while 6% are in classrooms where there is access to an adult/parent volunteer. Corresponding EU-24 averages are 13% and 3%. Hence, students in the Netherlands had similar access to specialised professionals, less access to teacher aides, and slightly more access to adult volunteers than on average across the EU-24.

Table 25: Percentages of Students in Classrooms with Access to Additional Personnel to Work with Children with Reading Difficulties, Netherlands and EU-24 Average

	Netherlands			EU-24 Average		
Access to...	Always	Sometimes	Never	Always	Some-times	Never
Specialised professional	21.8	55.1	23.1	24.9	41.8	33.3
Teacher aide	4.8	30.3	65.0	13.2	33.6	53.2
Adult/parent volunteer	5.8	36.9	57.4	2.8	17.5	79.7

Source: ELINET PIRLS 2011 Appendix C, Tables K2-K4

According to responses provided by teachers in PIRLS 2011, 46% of students in the Netherlands are in classes where the teacher arranges for students falling behind in reading to work with a specialised professional such as a reading professional (Table 26). The corresponding EU average is higher at 55%. Eighteen percent of students in the Netherlands are in classes whose teachers wait to see if performance improves with maturation – lower than the EU-24 average of 37%. Almost all of students in the Netherlands (98%) are taught by teachers who spend more time working on reading individually with a student who falls behind, a little above the EU-24 average (90%). Finally, 98% of students in the Netherlands and 97% on average across the EU-24 are taught by teachers who ask parents to provide additional support to a student who falls behind in reading.

Table 26: Percentages of Students in Classrooms Where Teachers Engage in Specified Activities to Support Students Who Begin to Fall Behind in Reading, Netherlands and EU-24 Average

	Netherlands (Yes)	EU-24 Average (Yes)
I have students work with a specialised professional	46.3	55.2
I wait to see if performance improves with maturation	18.3	36.6
I spend more time working on reading individually with the student	98.0	90.1
I ask the parents to help the students with reading	97.6	96.9

Source: ELINET PIRLS 2011 Appendix C, Tables K5-K8.

5.2.5 Initial Teacher Education (ITE) and Continuous Professional Development (CPD) of Teachers

Entry requirements for Initial Teacher Education

What are the entry qualifications for Initial Teacher Training?

European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice (2013, Fig. A5, p. 32) provides the following information:

- Certificate of final examination of upper secondary education (decided at the level of the education authority)
- Literacy and numeracy tests (decided at the level of the education authority)

Are there specific selection methods for admission to initial teacher education?

In the Netherlands – besides the general entrance requirements for entry to tertiary education – there are specific selection criteria for admission to initial teacher education. According to European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, (2013, Fig. A5, p. 32), a third of all European countries (including Finland, Italy, Lithuania and Scotland) have specific selection methods such as satisfactory performance in a specific aptitude test or interviews in which candidates are asked about their motives for becoming teachers.

What is the level of qualification for primary teachers and what is the length of the required training?

The Netherlands require primary teachers to have a bachelor's degree which takes four years' study. Typically, primary teachers' education routes are through a four-year university bachelor's degree programme in primary education. In ten European countries – Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Germany, France, Iceland, Portugal, Slovakia and Slovenia – initial education for primary teachers is at master's level and usually takes five years. In recent years an increase in the minimum length of initial teacher education can be noted for many countries (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2012, Fig. E2, p. 112).

More information about reading teachers' formal education is offered by PIRLS 2011 (Mullis et al. 2011, exh. 7.1, p. 188). 5% of fourth grade students have teachers who completed a Postgraduate University Degree, 89% had teachers who completed a Bachelor's Degree or equivalent but not a Postgraduate Degree, 5% had teachers who completed post-secondary education but not a Bachelor's Degree, and 1% had teachers with no further than upper secondary education. The EU-24 average for the last category is 6%.

Teaching practice for prospective teachers of reading

How long is the duration of in-school placement in Initial Teacher Training?

The minimum time allotted to in-school placements during ITE in Netherlands is not stated, there is institutional autonomy. There is considerable variation in Europe: For prospective primary teachers, this time ranges from 40 hours in Latvia to 900 hours in Austria (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2011, Fig. 2.6, p. 102).

The role of literacy expertise in Initial Teacher Training

Important teacher competences are a) the assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of each individual student they teach, b) selection of appropriate instructional methods and c) instruction in an effective and efficient manner. These topics should therefore be addressed in teacher training.

Do all teachers of reading (normally classroom teachers) have training in language/literacy?

According to an analysis of guidelines for Initial Teacher Education institutions, generic skills or methodology for teaching reading is not a topic in ITE (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2011, Fig. 2.5, p. 99).

To what extent does initial training particularly emphasise the teaching of reading?

In PIRLS 2011, teachers reported about their areas of specialisation in their formal education and training (Mullis et al. 2012a, exh. 7.2, p. 190). In the Netherlands, 46% of the fourth grade students had reading teachers with an educational emphasis on language, 45% had teachers with an emphasis on pedagogy/ teaching reading, and 25% had teachers with an emphasis on reading theory. **These figures are below the corresponding EU-24 means**. On average across the EU-24, 74% of the fourth grade students had reading teachers with an educational emphasis on language, 59% had teachers with an emphasis on pedagogy/teaching reading, and 30% had teachers with an emphasis on reading (PIRLS 2011 Database).

Is tackling reading difficulties a topic in Initial Teacher Training?

According to an analysis of guidelines for Initial Teacher Education institutions, tackling reading difficulties is not a topic in ITE (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2011, Fig. 2.5, p. 99).

Is assessing pupils' reading skills a topic in Initial Teacher Training?

According to an analysis of guidelines for ITE institutions, assessing pupils' reading skills is a topic in Initial Teacher Training (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2011, Fig. 2.5, p. 99).

Is teaching to read on-line texts a topic in Initial Teacher Training?

According to an analysis of guidelines for ITE institutions teaching to read on-line texts is not a topic in Initial Teacher Training (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2011, Fig. 2.5, p. 99).

Challenge: Initial teacher education needs a compulsory focus on developing literacy expertise among future primary and secondary teachers.

Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

Time spent on professional development related to literacy

No data are available concerning the participation rate of teachers in literacy-related professional development, with one exemption: In PIRLS 2011 teachers were asked how much time they had spent on reading professional development in the past two years before the study. In the Netherlands, 20% of students have teachers who spent 16 hours or more (EU-24 average: 18%), 60% had teachers who spent some time but less than 16 hours (EU-24 average 53%), and 21% had teachers who spent no time (EU-24 average 29%) (Mullis et al. 2012a, exh. 7.4, p. 196).

Are there courses for enhancing teachers' skills to deal with struggling readers?

No data available.

How is its quality assured?

There are no regulations in the Netherlands (Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2013, Fig. C6, p. 64).

Challenge: Improving the quality and participation rates of continuing professional development targeted at building literacy expertise of teachers.

5.3 Increasing participation, inclusion and equity

The High Level Group of Experts on Literacy drew attention to persistent gaps in literacy, namely the gender gap, the socio-economic gap, and the migrant gap (HLG Final report 2012, pp. 46–50). These gaps derive from the reading literacy studies that repeatedly show unequal distribution of results among groups of children and adolescents (PIRLS, PISA).

The **socio-economic gap** in literacy refers to the fact that children and adolescents from disadvantaged families have lower mean performance in reading than students from more advantaged families. However, the degree to which family background relates to the reading literacy performance varies from one country to another even in Europe. Family background measured as parents' educational level and/or occupation or measured as economic, social and cultural status is one of the

most important predictors of reading literacy performance. Family background also explains some of the performance differences between schools.

The **migrant gap** refers to unequal distribution of learning outcomes between the native students and immigrant students who in most countries have lower levels of performance in reading than the native students. In many countries the migrant gap is associated with the socio-economic gap but this explains only a part of it, because the migrant gap is also associated with home language differing from the language of instruction at school which increases the risk of low performance in reading. It is noteworthy that even language minorities with high status in the society (and above-average socioeconomic background) show below average performance if the language of school is not supported at home, which signals the importance of a good command of the language used at school.

Another alarming gap in reading literacy in many countries is the **gender difference,** which is more vital for adolescents than for children. In all PISA studies, 15-year-old girls outperformed boys in reading in all the European countries, and boys are frequently overrepresented among the low performers. PISA 2009 results showed that these differences are associated with differences in student attitudes and behaviours that are related to gender, i.e. with reading engagement, and not gender as such. Therefore the gender gap is also related to growing up in a family or in a school environment that values reading and learning and considers reading as a meaningful activity.

To achieve fairer and more inclusive participation in literacy learning we need to close these gaps, which already start in early childhood, by supporting children, adolescents and adults "at risk". The groups of students "at risk" must have access to language screening and flexible language learning opportunities in school, tailored to individual needs. Furthermore early support for children and adolescents with special needs is necessary.

In the section below we address the following questions:

- Compensating socio-economic and cultural background factors
- Support for children with special needs
- Promoting preschool attendance, especially among disadvantaged children
- Provisions for preschool children with language difficulties
- Support for children and adolescents whose home language is not the language of school.
- Preventing early school leaving
- Addressing the gender gap among adolescents

This section refers to children and adolescents who out of different reasons can be considered as a group "at risk" (from disadvantaged homes, those whose home language is not the language of school, or those with "special needs"). The focus is on preventing literacy difficulties among members of these groups. There is a certain overlap with the topic "Identification of and support for struggling literacy learners", dealt with in the section, "Improving the quality of teaching", which is concerned with those who have already developed literacy difficulties (s. 5.2.4).

5.3.1 Compensating socio-economic and cultural background factors

The child's **socioeconomic and cultural background** has a strong impact on literacy. Material poverty and educational level, particularly of the mother, are well-recognized main factors influencing literacy. Socio-economic background also influences biological risks to children, by determining early exposure to risk factors and increased susceptibility (Jednoróg et al. 2012). The primary language spoken at home also influences literacy development.

In order to describe the socioeconomic and cultural factors that influence emergent literacy, several indicators were used which stem from international surveys, thus providing comparability across Europe (for more information concerning the concepts and indicators s. Appendix A).

Gini index

The Gini index is the most commonly used measure of inequality, and represents the income distribution of a nation's residents with values between 0% (maximum equality) and 100% (maximum inequality). In the European countries participating in ELINET the range is from 22.6% in Norway to 35% in Spain (for an overview of European countries see table A1 in Appendix B). With 25.4% the Netherlands is at the higher end of the distribution indicating a relatively low level of inequality.

Child poverty

An indicator of child poverty is the percentage of children living in a household in which disposable income, when adjusted for family size and composition, is less than 50% of the national median income. With 6.1% of households in this position, the Netherlands is significantly above the average of the European countries participating in ELINET. The range is from 4.7% in Iceland to 25.5% in Romania (for an overview of European countries see table A2 in Appendix B).

Mother's education level

The PIRLS 2011 database offers information about mother`s level of education referring to ISCED levels. The figures for the Netherlands are presented below and point to a significant proportion of mothers with low level of education (ISCED 2), compared with the average figures for the European countries participating in PIRLS (shown in parentheses) (for an overview of European countries see table A3 in Appendix B).

- No schooling: 0.3% (0.6%)
- ISCED 1: primary education: 8.9% (5.3%)
- ISCED 2: Lower secondary education: 9.0% (16.7 %)
- ISCED 3: Upper secondary education: 44.6% (36.1%)
- ISCED 4: Post-secondary non-tertiary education: 2.9% (7.1 %)
- ISCED 5B: Tertiary education (first stage) with occupation orientation: 5.0% (9.5%)
- ISCED 5A: Tertiary education (first stage) with academic orientation 18.2% (13.9%)
- BEYOND: 10.4% (10.1%)
- Not applicable: 1% (0.9%).

Teenage mothers

According to UNICEF (2001) the percentage of teenage mothers is 6.2 for the Netherlands. The range is from 5.5% in Switzerland to 30.8% in United Kingdom (for an overview of European countries see table A4 in Appendix B).

Single parent

According to Eurostat (2012, Figure A 7), in the Netherlands the percentage of children living mainly with a single parent is 8.1%. The range for the European countries participating in ELINET is from 1.4% in Croatia to 30% in Denmark (for an overview of European countries see table A5 in Appendix B).

Migrant parents

According to PIRLS 2006 (Mullis et al. 2007, Exhibit 3.12 – Students' Parents Born in Country), the proportion of children with parents born outside the country (12%) or only one parent born outside the country (11%) is rather high compared to the European countries participating in Elinet (for an overview about European countries see table A6 in Appendix B).

Primary language spoken at home different from language used at school

According to PIRLS 2011 (Mullis et al. 2012a, exhibit 4.3 - Students Spoke the Language of the Test Before Starting School, p. 118), the proportion of children speaking a different language at home from the one used at school is close to the European average in the Netherlands, at 3.3% (for an overview of European countries s.ee table A7 in Appendix B). However, there is a quite significant performance gap in reading competence at grade 4 between children who spoke the language of the test before starting school (mean reading score 554) and those who did not speak the language (mean reading score 531).

5.3.2 Support for children with special needs

Not only children from culturally disadvantaged families are "at risk" in their literacy development but also those with very low birth weight and severe prematurity, factors that are associated with developmental disabilities, including reading and writing disabilities. Also cognitive and sensory disabilities must be considered.

Very low birth weight and severe prematurity

According to PERISTAT (2010, Figure 7.11, p.149) the percentage of live births with a birth weight under 2500 grams in the Netherlands was 5.2%. The range is from 3.0% in Iceland to 8.8% in Cyprus (for an overview of European countries see table E1 in Appendix B).

According to PERISTAT (2010, Figure 7.14, p.155) the percentage of live births with a gestational age <32 weeks is 1.1% in (with a range from 0.7% in Iceland to 1.4% in Hungary). The percentage of live births with a gestational age between 32 and 36 weeks was 6.4% (with a range from 4.5% in Lithuania to 7.5% in Hungary (for an overview of European countries see table E2 in Appendix B).

Trained specialists for children with special needs available

Not mentioned explicitly for the provision of trained specialists in the mainstream school. However, there are specialized professionals in the special schools

5.3.3 Promoting preschool attendance, especially among disadvantaged children

According to European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice/Eurostat (2014, Figure C1 p.62), the enrolment rate at age 4 is 99.6%. The Netherlands reaches the European benchmark for at least 95% of children between age 4 and the start of compulsory education participating in ECEC (for an overview of European countries see table C1 in Appendix B). OECD Family Database (2014) offers more differentiated figures of participation rates at age 3, 4 and 5. According to 2010 statistical data, the participation rate is 99.3% for 5-year-olds, 99.5% for 4-year-olds, and 28.3% for 3-year-olds (OECD 2014) (for an overview of European countries see table C2 in Appendix B).

Pre-primary education is free for children from 4 to 6 years old (EURYDICE[25]). The Netherlands belongs to the half of the European countries where the entire period of ECEC is free.

The benefits of attending preschool institutions have been proven in many studies. The duration of attendance is associated with greater academic improvement (Mullis et al. 2012b).

PIRLS 2011 (Mullis et al. 2012a, Exhibit 4.7, p. 128) provides information about the relationship between the length of preschool education attendance and average reading score in grade 4. These are the figures:

3 years and more: 3% (average reading score 538)

Between 1 and 3 years: 91% (average reading score 556)

1 year or less: 3% (average reading score 531)

Did not attend: 3% (average reading score 533)

(For an overview of European countries s. table C3 in Appendix B).

5.3.4 Provisions for preschool children with language problems

Literacy competence strongly builds on oral language proficiency, word knowledge, and syntactic knowledge. Measures must be taken by governments and institutions to ensure that children with poor language development (second-language speaking children and those from a low socio-cultural background, as well as others who experience difficulty in learning language) acquire adequate levels of oral language in kindergarten, preschool institutions and in school. It should be ensured that at age 4 at the latest all children are diagnosed in their oral language proficiency, and that there are obligatory courses for children falling behind in their acquisition of language competence. The aim should be that all children entering school can speak the language of the school so that they can profit from reading instruction**.**

There is no systematic assessment of children in order to identify language development . For linguistically disadvantaged children from the age of 2 to 5 years old, additional support is given by receiving extra help; through supervised play they learn to use language and increase their vocabulary.

5.3.5 Support for children and adolescents whose home language is not the language of school

In PIRLS 2011, 20.6% of students in Grade 4 in the Netherlands reported that they sometimes speak a language other than the test language at home, while 1.6% reported that they never speak the test language at home (ELINET PIRLS 2011 Appendix, Table F2). Corresponding EU-24 averages are 17.3% and 3.0% respectively.

According to Netten and Verhoeven (2012), schools with a large minority student population devote more attention to vocabulary and verbal communication than schools whose student populations consist of mostly native Dutch-speaking students. They describe several initiatives that have been launched to enhance language proficiency for students lagging behind, such as "bridging classes" for primary school students who are disadvantaged because of poor Dutch language skills. These classes can be part-time or out- of-school classes or entirely separate from mainstream school, with students required to spend a year learning Dutch before returning to regular classes.

[25] See: https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Netherlands:Overview.

Shewbridge et al. (2010) note that there has been a policy shift in the Netherlands, whereby support is now targeted at disadvantaged students rather than immigrant students. They point out that since immigrant students are disproportionately represented among low SES students, this can be considered positive, though they also note the importance of ensuring a balanced distribution of students across schools so that no one group of students is segregated from others.

5.3.6 Preventing early school leaving

Literacy provision and participation in secondary schooling: What is the rate of early school leavers?

One important, but certainly not sufficient, precondition for raising performance levels in literacy for adolescents is literacy provision during secondary schooling, as functional literacy is mainly acquired in school-based learning. Thus, the provision of secondary education for all adolescents and the prevention of early school leaving may serve as indicators for the opportunities of adolescents to improve their literacy performance especially related to basic functional literacy.

Research by Statistics Netherlands reveals that young people are staying longer in full-time education. The education participation rate among 15 to 18-year-olds rose to 98% in the 2011/2012 school year. In the same year, six out of ten people between the ages of 18 and 25 were involved in some form of education.

Early school leaving also declined. The number of men aged between 15 and 25 years leaving school without a basic qualification dropped from 15.6% in 2001 to 8.9% in 2011. The percentage of women drop-outs fell in the same period from 13.2% to 6.1%. This clearly shows that early school leaving has been reduced. This is probably due in large part to new legislation making it compulsory for pupils to remain at school until they have obtained a basic qualification. Pupils with a non-Western immigrant background drop out of school more often than Dutch pupils, and boys more often drop out than girls.

More and more young people are opting for senior general secondary education (HAVO) and pre-university education (VWO). An increasing number of young people with a pre-vocational education certificate (VMBO) are staying in school in order to get a HAVO qualification.

In recent years more and more young adults (aged 18-25) have enrolled in higher education. As a result, the level of education of the population as a whole has improved.

5.3.7 Addressing the gender gap among adolescents

There is no general policy to address a gender gap. The Reading Foundation launches several campaigns each school year to address boys in secondary (vocational) education, in which reader development is a central theme. This approach is one of the possible ways to keep adolescent boys interested in reading for pleasure.

5.3.8 Increasing participation, inclusion and equity for children and adolescents: Programmes, initiatives and examples

Policies to prevent early school leaving

Tackling the problem of pupils leaving school early is one of the priorities of the Dutch government implemented by the 'Drive to Reduce Drop-out Rates' approach[26]. The Dutch target is to have no more than 25,000 new early school leavers each year by 2016 – a target that is likely to be attained. An early school leaver is a young person between 12 and 23 years of age who does not attend school and who has not achieved a basic qualification (i.e. a senior general secondary, pre-university, or level-2 secondary vocational diploma).

The Netherlands has been adopting a 'prevention is better than cure' approach to the problem since 2002. Young people have better prospects on the labour market if they have a basic qualification. Partly due to the decreasing early school leaving rate, youth unemployment in the Netherlands is increasing only slightly and is in fact compared to neighbourhood countries relatively low.

The Dutch Early school leaving-programme has been successful in implementing various measures at national level:

- Compulsory school attendance and basic qualification obligation.
- Personal education number, all pupils have been allocated an education number, which makes it possible to track them.
- Digital Absence Portal, all school absenteeism is registered by a simplified computerised reporting procedure.
- Career Orientation and Guidance to prevent the wrong choice of programme, one of the primary reasons to drop out of education.
- Transfer to follow-up education programme made less of a major stumbling block for pupils.
- The care structure at school and locally has been strengthened.

[26] See: http://www.aanvalopschooluitval.nl/english.

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