



LITERACY IN AUSTRIA

COUNTRY REPORT

CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

March 2016

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1 Introduction

This report on the state of literacy in Austria 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 countries¹. 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 2012². 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 equity⁴).

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

Austria participated in IEA's PIRLS (4th graders reading comprehension) in 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.

Austria performed below the EU average in PIRLS 2011 (529 vs 535 EU-average) and very close to EU average in PISA 2012 (490 vs 489). Its score even fell well below the average in 2009 (470 vs 486 in EU). The performance decreased in PIRLS between 2006 and 2011 (by 9 score points), and decreased much more (by 18 score points) in PISA between 2000 and 2012, namely by the equivalent of about a half-year of schooling.

The proportion of pupils who can be considered as low-performing readers in both studies is close to the EU countries on average (20 % in PIRLS and PISA). 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 has increased in PISA between 2000 and 2011 (from 14.6 % to 19.5 %). The proportion of top-performing readers was 5% in PIRLS (vs 9% EU-average) and 5.5% in PISA (vs 7% EU-average).

The gap according to the pupils' socioeconomic background was higher than the EU average in PIRLS (87 vs 76 on average). In PISA, it was close to the EU average (91 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 much higher than in EU countries on average (67 vs 38). Similarly, in PIRLS the mean score difference between those who always spoke the test language at home, and those who sometimes or never did so was slightly higher than in EU countries (36 vs 26).

In Austria, the gender gap (in favour of girls) was lower than the corresponding EU average differences in PIRLS (8 vs 12) and in PISA (41 vs 44). In PIRLS, the decrease was rather similar among girls and boys. In PISA, the decrease in reading performance observed between 2000 and 2012 was two times stronger among boys (-0.24) than among girls (-0.12).

In conclusion, the performance in reading in Austria has decreased overtime, more significantly among 15 year-olds than at grade 4. Austria now performs below the average in PIRLS and close to average in PISA. The proportion of low-performing readers is close to the EU countries on average, and the proportion of top-performing readers is below EU average. The spread of achievement (gap between low and top performing readers) is smaller in Austria than in EU on average at both levels. The gap according to socioeconomic status, migration or language spoken at home tends to be higher in Austria than in EU on average. Austria is then a little less effective, and also tends to be less equitable than EU countries on average. However, the major concern is the decrease in reading performance, and the increase of the proportion of low-performing readers, especially among teenage boys.

Technical note:

In 2009, a dispute between teachers' unions and the education minister of Austria led to a boycott of PISA, which was only lifted after the first week of testing. The boycott required the OECD to remove identifiable cases from the dataset. Although the Austrian dataset met the PISA 2009 technical standards after these cases were removed, the negative reaction to assessments has affected the conditions under which the PISA survey was conducted and could have adversely affected student motivation to respond to the PISA tasks. Therefore, the comparability of 2009 data with data from earlier PISA assessments cannot be ensured, and data from Austria have been excluded from trend comparisons.

The "**National Education Report**" (Nationaler Bildungsbericht) 2012 stated: "As a whole, Austrian pupils' reading levels are unsatisfactory. In comparison with reading levels measured at the end of primary school (PIRLS 2006), Austrian pupils only ranked in the mid-range of the participating countries. By the end of year four, approximately 11,000 pupils only have basic reading skills and approximately 1,500 fail to achieve even this. (...) This low rank is strongly influenced by the large percentage of particularly weak readers (27%) in the Austrian system. If PIRLS and PISA are taken as one integrated longitudinal study, it becomes clear that the weakest readers fall behind by at least one year of typical learning progress between the end of primary school and the end of lower secondary school" (Herzog-Punzenberger/Bruneforth/Lasnigg 2013, p. 15).

The results could not be ignored: Accompanied by a heated educational debate, efforts in a more efficient reading education have increased. Similar to other German-speaking countries "Nationale Bildungsstandards" (national standards of education) had been formulated and now build the basis for higher commitment and reviewability of learning processes. The government recognised the seriousness of the situation. The standards of education and the implemented monitoring processes will help to get more specific data about strengths and weaknesses in the field of reading education and will help to develop concrete measures.

Concerning the literate environment outside school it has to be stated that Austria is a Federal Republic and preschool education, adult education and public libraries are in shared responsibility of the Federal Government and the nine States. That sometimes leads to huge differences in the promotion programmes and financial support for e.g. public libraries. There is a lack of detailed studies, but the evidence-base of the few (regional) surveys shows strong regional differences even within the Federal States (c.f. OÖ. Kinder-Medien-Studie 2014, OÖ. Jugend-Medien-Studie 2015⁶).

An important step towards a better interchange between all the different players in creating a vivid literacy culture for all and across all age- and social groups was the establishment of a big working-group by the Austrian Ministry of Education for the preparation of an **Austrian Literacy Framework in 2014**⁷. Similar to the structure of the working-groups in ELINET, experts and institutions of all fields of reading promotion and education described the actual situation and developed a catalogue of objectives, challenges and possible ways. Qualitative improvement in teacher training, the development of better diagnostic instruments, targeted remedial teaching or binding regulations for Austrian libraries are only some of the demands that should lead to a structured implementation plan. The work for the Austrian Literacy Framework has been finished in March 2016.

⁶ See: www.edugroup.at/innovation/forschung/.

⁷ See: www.leseplan.at.

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

Creating a Literate Environment

Pre-Primary Years

Creating a literate environment at home: Compared to the European average, Austria has medium or high scores in important factors which constitute a **supportive home environment** for the fostering of children's literacy performance:

- The majority of pupils in Austria have parents with positive attitudes towards reading.
- The availability of children's books in the home is close to the European average.
- Almost all parents engage often or sometimes in early literacy activities with their children regarding the nine activities. To nearly 70% of the children the parents read books to them often in pre-primary years (European average 58.4 %).

Challenges: There is a need for broad national family literacy programmes **to raise awareness of all parents** that literacy is a key to learning and life chances. Programmes like "Bookstart: growing with books"⁸ should be carried out nationwide, not only offered by regional or local initiatives.

Primary Children and Adolescents

Creating a literate environment in school: As stated in PIRLS, more children in Austria than the EU-average have access to school and/or class **libraries**. There is also the so-called "Grundsatzrlass Leseerziehung" (**Basic Decree on Reading Education**) published by the Ministry of Education that promotes literate environments and diverse methods of teaching reading at school (BMUKK 2013). Also there are many local **reading partnerships** and projects in schools, meaning that volunteers are reading to or with children in need or that students get free time every day to read whatever they want ("reading schools"). Needed are more school libraries including guidelines as well as more stable cooperations of schools and public libraries.

Supporting reading motivation, especially among boys and adolescents: Teachers would need more gender-sensitive reading material, more children or youth-connected reading material, digital texts and reading situations should be provided to teachers. School libraries and external reading institutions and programmes should be implemented in long-term strategies in a more structured way.

Offering digital literacy learning opportunities in schools (and other public spaces, e.g. libraries): Austrian students are relatively well digitally equipped in comparison to the EU average; concerning access to computers, connectivity to fast broadband and connection (i.e. their school has for example a website). Broadband speed is considerably higher than in other EU countries. Approximately 79% of students in Austria have a computer available for reading lessons, but only 3% of the adolescents in Austria are ranging at the highest level of digital reading competence.

⁸ See: www.buchstart.at.

Challenges: There is need for a national strategy about the implementation of ICT in reading promotion. Experiences and studies from other countries must be brought in discussion. Various pilot projects have to be evaluated and discussed in public. Also schools have to be equipped with access to eLibraries.

Strengthening the role of public libraries: Austria has around 1,500 libraries in 1,062 municipalities, out of which around 1,200 are run by volunteers. This high grade of volunteers is specific for Austria's library system. As legally binding national **regulations for public libraries are still missing** in Austria, there is a strong and urgent need for them. It was possible to fix public libraries to the working programme of the Austrian government 2014-2018 as a key-agenda and the call for a national library plan and law was also formulated in the Austrian Literacy Framework. Public libraries are an important agent in reading promotion, there are for example library festivals each year ("Austria reads. Meeting point library", www.oesterreichliest.at).

Improving literate environments for children and adolescents: Programmes, initiatives and examples: There are various initiatives in the field of literacy promotion, like the "Austrian Book Club for Young People"⁹, active in primary schools, or "LESERstimmen – Der Preis der jungen LeserInnen" (Readers' Voices¹⁰), bringing authors and children into close exchange. There are also children's book fairs and festivals like Bookolino¹¹ or "Buch Wien", the annual Austrian Book Fair.). Also platform like www.literacy.at (run by the Ministry of Education) and www.wirlesen.org (for libraries) give impulses for promoting literacy. Of course the family literacy programme "Buchstart"¹², Bookstart, serves as a support for libraries and families (see above).

⁹ See: www.buchkub.at.

¹⁰ See: www.leserstimmen.at/.

¹¹ See: www.bookolino.at.

¹² See: www.buchstart.at.

Improving the Quality of Teaching

Pre-Primary Years

Improving the quality of preschool education: Concerning **ECEC**, in some of our indicators Austria is behind the European average.

- Austria is at the lower end of the distribution among European countries for the total public expenditure per child on pre-primary education (with 0.6%). Also there are 9 different standards for ECEC (Länder level).
- Preschool teachers' qualification levels are rather low. The minimum required level to become a qualified teacher is level 4B (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice/Eurostat 2014, p. 101) while in most European countries a tertiary education degree at bachelor level is required. Only in Austria and Germany is the minimum entry a qualification at post-secondary non-tertiary. (BAKIP, Bundesbildungsanstalt für Kindergartenpädagogik).
- The percentage of males among preschool teachers is rather low.

Austria, however, is one of the few countries with a comprehensive literacy curriculum in pre-primary schools. It contains all the aspects outlined in our ELINET framework for a good emergent literacy curriculum.

Challenges: It should and is already discussed whether pre-primary and primary teachers should be educated together at tertiary level. Language ability tests are compulsory in kindergarten and serve as basis for individual support, but kindergarten teachers often lack sufficient diagnostic competence to reliably identify literacy difficulties at an early stage. There is also a need for even more cooperation between pre-school and school as well as the cooperation with external early literacy programmes like bookstart. A lot is already happening on local basis, but it should be launched at a regional or even national level. An idea would be to offer a training for early-childhood literacy experts.

Primary Children and Adolescents

Improving literacy curricula and reading instruction in schools:

- According to PIRLS 2011 in the *scale of reading for pleasure* Austrian students performed a little bit above average.
- Relatively little lesson time is spent on learning to read.
- There are remarkable gaps in reading achievement and reading strategies as well as reading engagement.
- According to their teachers, students in Austria engage less frequently on a daily basis in activities such as locating information in a text, comparing what they have read with experiences they have had, making predictions about what will happen next in a text, and describing the style and structure of a text, than do teachers on average across the EU-24.
- The Eurydice (2011) analysis of official curriculum documents indicates an absence in Austria of reading comprehension skills such as using background knowledge, constructing visual representations, and reflecting on own reading processes (p. 160, Figure 1.4).

Challenges: The time spent for teaching and training reading must be increased; the low percentage of instructional practices to engage reading in "most lessons" must be improved. There is a need to mainstream literacy across the curriculum and to offer content area literacy instruction in all school subjects also throughout secondary education, whether academic or vocational. It would be worthwhile to sharpen the literacy focus to help teachers of all subjects to become real literacy teachers.

There must be more acknowledgement in the secondary schools that reading is not only a business of the language classes but that every teacher has to promote and support reading within their lessons - whole-staff support ("Lesen in allen Fächern"). New media and its usage should be taken up more actively in school. Therefore, training courses for teachers must be clearly intensified in the field of interdisciplinary reading promotion and the value of literacy.

Digital literacy as part of the curriculum for primary and secondary schools: Media education is explicitly mentioned in curricula. A decree exists, named "Unterrichtsprinzip Medienerziehung – Grundsatzlerlass 2014". The Austrian Ministry of Education developed a new strategy for ICT in 2012 that adheres to the objectives of "Europe 2020". At secondary level, media education is a cross-curricular subject and also a separate, optional subject.

Early identification of and support for struggling literacy learners: There is a shortfall of 4.6% between students in need of remedial support and those who really receive it. Just 9% of students are in classrooms where there is always access to specialised professionals to work with children with difficulties, compared with an EU-24 average of 25%. There are Educational Standards (Bildungsstandards), tested at grade four and at grade 8. These standards are tested obligatorily and periodically and provide a focus for planning and delivering lessons, and grading students. Teacher-generated assessment is based on classroom participation as well as on the results of oral, written, practical, and graphical work. There is also the possibility to use the tool "IKM" – Informelle Kompetenzmessung, which means "informal screening of competencies"¹³. There is also an obligatory screening at the third and fifth grade, the "Salzburger Lesescreening". It tests the basic literacy skills. To measure the process in reading skills in Austria like in most EU countries the assessment of the teacher is weighted higher than independent testing, tests are of lower importance than in other countries.

Challenges: To gain a more complete picture of literacy levels in the classroom, regular literacy assessments should be implemented at each grade level. An ongoing assessment is needed in order to diagnose as early as possible learning difficulties and to respond with focused instruction tailored to the individual needs. Teachers have to be equipped better with easy-to-use tools for diagnostics and receive respective trainings.

Improving the quality of pre-service and in-service teacher training: The aim of having high quality teachers requires selective teacher recruitment policies, which already happens in Austria in some cases. Regarding the literacy skills of the students (future teachers) more effort should be made to foster these during the study courses.

¹³ See: www.bifie.at/ikm.

Regarding **teacher education for literacy**,

- PIRLS indicates that fewer teachers in Austria have participated in initial training courses in which topics such as studying the language of the PIRLS test, studying teaching pedagogy and studying reading theory are strong areas of emphasis, compared with their respective EU-24 averages.
- According to the Eurydice (2011) report, generic skills or methodology for teaching reading is not a topic in initial teacher education in Austria.
- Just 7% of students in Austria were taught by teachers who had not availed themselves of professional development in reading in the two years prior to 2011, compared with an EU-24 average of 29%.

Challenges: Initial teacher education needs a compulsory focus on developing literacy expertise among future primary and secondary teachers. There is a need to foster this focus in Austria by mandatory training and CPD. CPD is mandatory for teachers under province-leadership, but not for the ones under the federal leadership. This has to be changed.

Improving the quality of literacy instruction: Programmes, initiatives and examples: There is a coordination centre for reading, created to support primary school teachers and schools and offer nationwide programs. Another thing is IMST (Innovationen Machen Schulen Top! = innovations leads schools to the top) which is a programme that supports school in improving teaching in German language (including reading) and other subjects. The whole-staff approach forms the basis for in-school CPD training (Schulinterne Lehrerfortbildung, acronym: SCHILF) or for cross-school CPD training in Austria. These trainings often encompass all members of the staff and must focus more on literacy.

Also the Austrian National Literacy Framework (Österreichischer Rahmenleseplan) should become an instrument for improving the quality of teaching¹⁴.

¹⁴ See: www.leseplan.at.

Increasing Participation, Inclusion and Equity

The gap according to the pupils' **socioeconomic background** and the influence of parents' educational achievement in Austria was higher than the EU average in PIRLS (87 vs 76 on average). In PISA, it was close to the EU average (91 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. Nevertheless, these results go hand in hand with a quite socially selective choice already at the age of 10 between General Secondary, New Secondary and Academic Secondary school; in particular in urban spheres where you find these various offers. There are also remarkable gaps with regards to **gender** (in favour of girls) and **migration/language** (in favour of native students) in PIRLS/PISA.

Figure 1: Performance gaps in Austria compared to the EU-24 average, indicating the level of the parents' education, the language spoken at home and gender in primary school (PIRLS 2011)

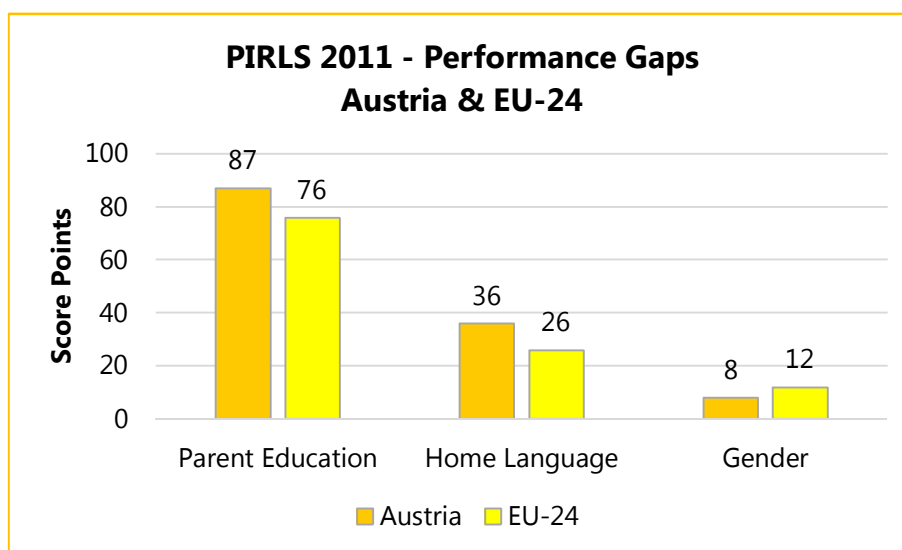
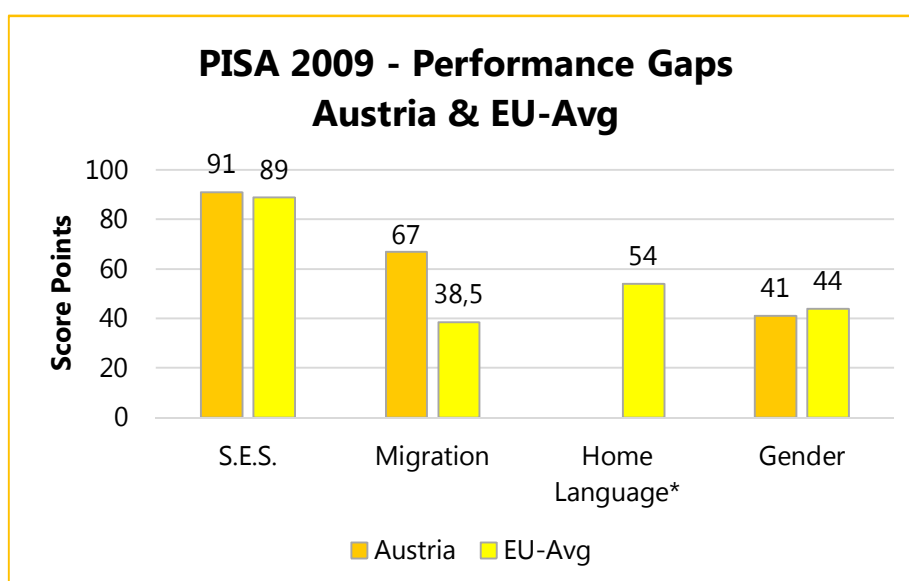


Figure 2: Performance gaps in Austria compared to the EU average, indicating the socio-economic background, the migration status, the language spoken at home and gender in secondary school (PISA 2009)



*no data

Pre-Primary Years

Compensating socio-economic and cultural background factors: Austria is near the European average or has slightly more favourable scores in most of the indicators:

- With 27.6 % in the Gini index, a measure of inequality, Austria is close to the European average.
- The child poverty rate in Austria (7.3%) is among the lowest in Europe.
- Only a very low proportion of mothers have a low level of education.
- The proportion of teenage mothers and single parents is also below the European average.
- More than 20 % of all students in Austria have another first language than German.
- There is quite a significant performance gap in reading competence at grade 4 between children who spoke the language of the test before starting school (mean reading score 533) and those who did not speak the language (mean reading score 490).

Challenges: There is a strong need for more multi-lingual books or digital material in kindergartens and libraries (due to lack of financial resources) as well as literature and work books in the respective foreign languages. Teachers (school and kindergarten) and librarians have to be trained more in giving the necessary support to people with another first language than German. There are already mobile support teams financed in some Länder to help the educational professionals.

Encouraging preschool attendance, especially for disadvantaged children: The participation rate in preschool is high (99.1 % for 5-year-olds, 89.9 % for 4-year-olds, and 56.7 % for 3-year-olds) and free of charge for one year prior to the beginning of primary school. In September 2010 mandatory kindergarten attendance for 16 to 20 hours (half day) over a minimum of at least 4 days per week was introduced for the 5 year olds. This mandatory year was an important step towards inclusion of disadvantaged children. A second mandatory year (also offered free of charge for the parents) is currently being prepared and discussed at political level.

Identification of and support for preschool children with language difficulties: In 2009, Austria introduced a framework for supporting the language development of children aged 3-6. The Nationwide Framework Curriculum for Austrian ECEC Services (c.f. Charlotte Bühler Institut 2009) is defined as a play-based curriculum for ECEC institutions and one major part outlines the principles for "Fostering language and speech development". Apart from that, all Länder are legally bound to collect data on each child's language skills no later than 15 months before school entry ("Sprachstandsfeststellung"- language level testing), followed by respective support measures if necessary.

Primary Children and Adolescents

Austria has several programmes to identify and **support children at risk:**

- In 2009, Austria introduced a framework for supporting the language development of children aged 3-6 (see above).
- Mainly in cities with higher immigration rates, there is specialist support for children whose home language is not the language of school. All provinces have established programmes for children and parents with migrant backgrounds. Measures comprise additional staff in settings with higher numbers of non-German speaking children, staff with migrant language skills or specially trained staff to promote German language skills.

- There are trained specialists for children with special needs available in ECEC, special kindergarten teachers, special after-school care centre teachers, psychologists, remedial language teachers and physiotherapists as well as mother-tongue teachers.

Support for children with special needs: Regarding the school system, it is currently being discussed (2016) to abolish Special Schools and teach all children together in so-called inclusive classes. This would need more internal differentiation, more professional staff, more different methods (e.g. back to reform-pedagogy) and more autonomy for schools.

Support for migrant children and adolescents whose home language is not the language of school: More than 20 % of all students in Austria have another first language than German. There is a principle in school education called "intercultural education" in Austria's secondary school system. There is also "DaZ" – Deutsch als Zweit-/Fremdsprache / German as a second/foreign language, established as special didactic approaches in the curricula for German lessons. Children are supported to take part in the "Muttersprachlicher Unterricht", which means that they have classes also in own mother tongue.

Challenges: The system of early differentiation must be seriously discussed. Full-time day schools but also comprehensive schools until the age of 14 would support equity for those with fewer resources from home, as Austria has a very selective school system. Within the various programmes of family literacy (bookstart), in parent-child-groups and kindergartens there are many local or regional projects and important approaches of multilingualism and intercultural exchange. This trend must be encouraged. Public libraries play an important role in these activities.

Preventing early school leaving Austria has a relatively low rate of ESL: 7% in 2014. In 2012, the Ministry of Education adopted a national strategy against ESL. It aims to inter-connect measures at the structural level (reforms and improvements within the school education system); measures at the level of the specific school (initiatives on school quality and improvements of teaching and learning environments); and measures to support students at risk (youth coaching as a new nationwide measure to support students at risk). Students with a migrant background are at a higher risk for ESL in Austria than native students; efforts have been made within the last years.

Increasing participation, inclusion and equity for children and adolescents: Programmes, initiatives and examples: There are a lot of initiatives in and outside schools and preschool for intercultural and multilingual activities such as "Miteinander lesen" (reading together) in Salzburg or "Grenzenlos lesen" (Reading without borders) by the Austrian Library Association¹⁵. Also HIPPY (Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters) - an internationally accepted and proven programme for Early-Childhood-Intervention - is active in Austria¹⁶ and of course "Bookstart: growing with books" offers material and impulses for parents in various languages¹⁷ and contributes to more social inclusion, engaging the libraries to care for groups at risk. There is also a close net of parent-child-groups, where intercultural aspects are reflected and specific support is given. As Austria has a high-level social welfare system, families at risk get financial support and other benefits in order to fight poverty and disadvantages.

¹⁵ See: https://www.bvoe.at/themen/grenzenlos_lesen.

¹⁶ See: www.hippy.at/.

¹⁷ See: <http://www.lebensspuren.net/buchstart/interkulturell.html>

Challenges: All professionals in education, be it day-care-mothers, preschool, school or similar institutions dealing with literacy, need more support when it comes to multi-lingual work and material. This comprises books, literature but also more competence, knowledge and resources to build on. The Austrian school system has to make sure that no child is left behind in his/her educational biography.

3 General Information on Austria's Education System

Austria is a federal parliamentary republic consisting of nine provinces (Bundesländer), each of which has its own provincial government. Responsibility for legislation and its implementation is divided between the federation (Bund) and the provinces. Austria has 8.58 Mio. inhabitants (2015), out of which 238,685 children are of pre-primary age (3-5 years) and around 326,571 of primary age (6-10 years)(c.f. Statistik Austria 2014). Compulsory education lasts for nine years.

The Austrian education system is hierarchically organised, highly centralised, and selective at a very early stage. The provinces have legislative responsibility for kindergarten and for providing public-sector compulsory education in cooperation with the municipalities.

Early Childhood Education

Early childhood education encompasses formal childcare from the age of three until entering primary education as well as early childhood education up to the age of three. It corresponds to the ISCED level 0. The elementary level (ISCED 0) in Austria refers to the following childcare institutions: crèches, kindergartens, after-school care facilities and children's groups. Playgroups and nannies also offer their services. Pre-school education for children of school age who are not yet ready for school belongs to the elementary level as well.

Austria has 8,988 early childhood education care centres (including kindergartens), 342,261 children were enrolled in those childcare institution in 2014/2015 (c.f. Statistik Austria 2015).

Primary Education

Primary education encompasses Primary School and begins at the age of compulsory education. It corresponds to the ISCED level 1. Compulsory education in Austria starts at the age of 6; the primary level lasts four years. Schools of this level are primary/elementary schools as well as special-needs schools and integrative/inclusive education in regular schools.

Lower and Upper Secondary Level

Lower secondary education encompasses the first 4 years after primary education. It corresponds to the ISCED level 2. Pupils can choose between the following types of schools (different admission requirements): General Secondary School (Hauptschule), New Secondary School (Neue Mittelschule), Academic Secondary School Lower Level (AHS Unterstufe) as well as special needs schools and inclusive education.

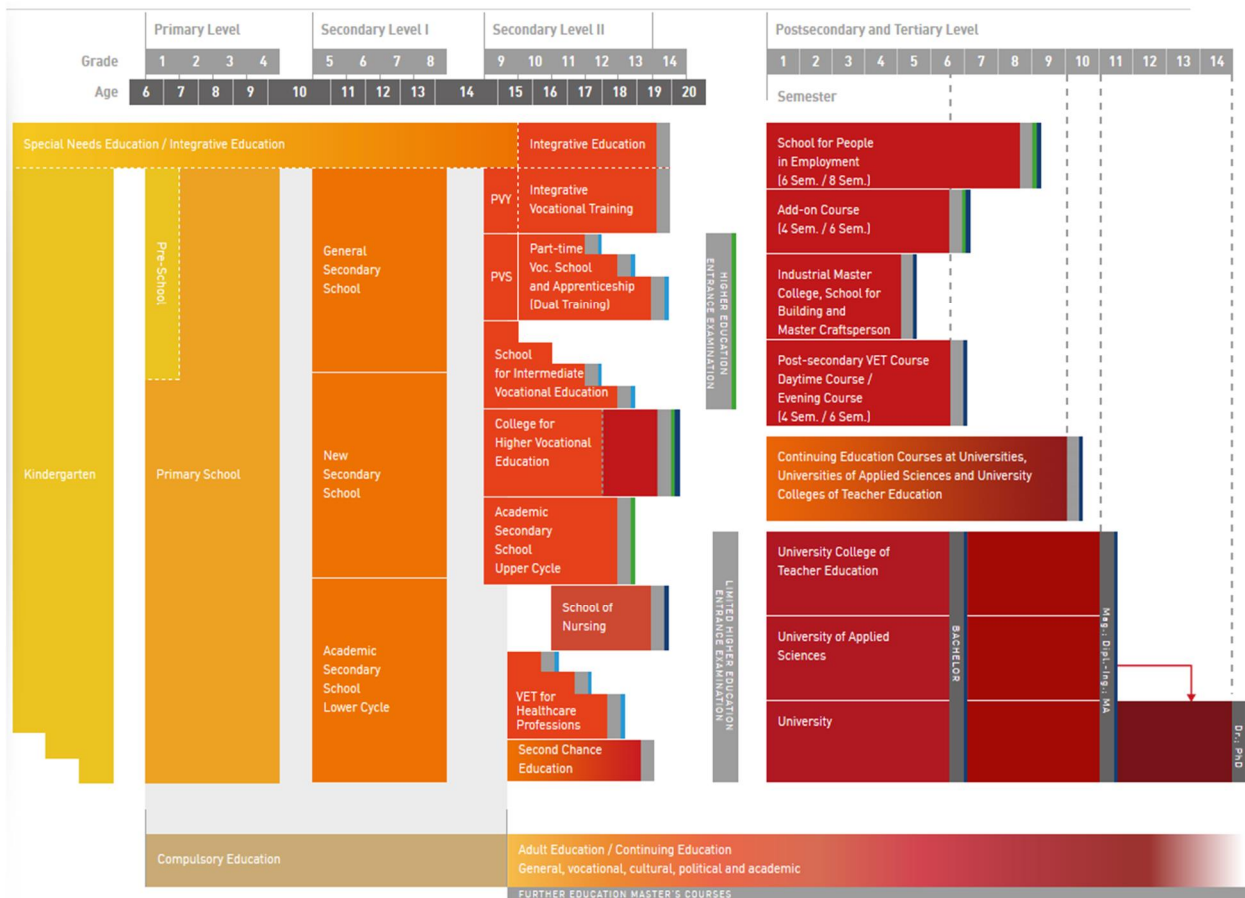
At secondary level II, they then attend the Upper Level of the Academic Secondary School or the Medium or Upper Level Secondary Technical and Vocational School. Once students have completed 9 years of compulsory education they can also take up an apprenticeship within the dual system of practical training combined with part-time vocational school, or follow a programme of training leading to a healthcare profession.

Upon completion of secondary level II the Austrian education system offers additional educational opportunities, ranging from short-cycle tertiary education in the field of Vocational Education and

Training (VET) to degree-level programmes at university colleges of teacher education, universities of applied sciences and universities (c.f. OeAD 2016).

The following figure represents the structure of the Austrian Education System:

Figure 3: Austrian Education System¹⁸



¹⁸ See: www.edusystem.at, accessed March 21, 2016.

4 Literacy Performance Data for Children and Adolescents-Literacy in Austria

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

Austria achieved an overall mean reading score of 529 in PIRLS 2011, which is significantly lower than the EU-24 average (Table 1). EU-24 countries Slovenia (530) and Lithuania (528) performed at a similar level (Appendix A). Austrian students performed significantly lower on the Interpret, Integrate & Evaluate subscale (521) than on Retrieve and Infer subscale (529).

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

	Overall Reading – Mean Score
Austria	529
EU-24	535

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

20% of students in Austria achieved at or below the Low PIRLS benchmark, same as the EU-24 average (also 20%) (Table 2). The share of advanced readers in Austria (5%) was nearly half the EU-24 average of 9%. Just 5% of pupils in Austria performed at the Advanced benchmark, compared with 9% on average across EU countries.

Table 2: Performance by Overall PIRLS Reading Benchmarks 2011 - Percentages of Pupils Austria and EU-24 Average

	Below 400	400-475 Low	475-550 Intermediate	550-625 High	Above 625 Advanced
Austria	3	17	41	34	5
EU-24	5	15	36	35	9

As performance on the PIRLS benchmarks suggests, achievement among students in Grade 4 in Austria is not as wide as in other EU countries, rather 75% of students scored within the intermediate/high range. The standard deviation for Austria (63 points) is another measure of this range (Table 3). Austria has a similar standard deviation to Finland (64).

The difference between scores at the 90th and 10th percentiles is another measure of spread. In Austria, this was 163 points – lower than the EU-24 average difference of 180. Among EU member countries in PIRLS, Finland (162) has a similar spread of achievement although Finnish scores are clustered at the High and Advanced benchmarks.

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

	Standard Deviation	10 th Percentile	90 th Percentile	90 th -10 th
Austria	63	444	607	163
EU Average	70	441	621	180

In 2011, students in Austria performed significantly less well on the PIRLS overall reading scale than their counterparts in 2006 (Table 4), with performance dropping by 9 points between these years. Austria did not participate in PIRLS in 2001, so a comparison cannot be drawn. On average across EU countries, there was only a one point change in performance between 2006 and 2011.

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

	2001	2006	Change (2001- 2006)	2006	2011	Change (2006- 2011)	2001	2011	Change (2001- 2011)
Austria	-	538	-	538	529	-9	-	529	-
EU-24 Average	534	534	0	534	535	1	534	535	1

Significant differences in **bold**.

4.1.2 Gaps in reading performance

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

Parent's educational achievement

Pupils in Austria whose parents had attended University or Higher achieved a mean score (560), some 87 points higher than students whose parents completed Lower Secondary or below (473). The average difference across the EU-24 was 76 points, indicating a relatively stronger relationship between parents' education and pupil performance on reading in Austria (Table 5).

Table 5: Percentages of Parents Whose Highest Level of Education was Lower Secondary, and Percentages who Finished University or Higher – Austria and EU-24 Average

Level of Education	Lower Secondary or Below		University or Higher		Difference (Univ. or Higher – Lower Sec)
	%	Mean	%	Mean	
Austria	4	473	21	560	87
EU-24	18	495	30	571	76

Significant differences in **bold**.

Primary language spoken at home different from language used at school

In Austria, 77% of pupils reported that they always spoke the language of the PIRLS reading test at home – the EU-24 Average is 80%. 23% of students in Austria reported that they sometimes or never spoke the language of the test – marginally more than the EU-24 average of 20%. The difference in achievement between pupils in Austria reporting that they always or never spoke the language of the test was 36 score points – 10 points higher than the corresponding EU-24 average difference (26).

Table 6: Percentages of Students Reporting that they always or sometimes / never speak the language of the PIRLS Test at Home, and associated mean score differences – Austria and EU-24 Average

Language of the Test Spoken at Home	Always		Sometimes /Never		Mean Score Difference (Always – Sometimes/Never)
	%	Mean	%	Mean	
Austria	77	538	23	502	36
EU-24	80	541	20	519	26

Significant differences in **bold**.

Gender

In 2011 girls in Austria achieved a mean score on PIRLS overall reading that was significantly higher than that of boys by 8 points. This was lower than the EU-24 average difference of 12 points (Table 9). The size of the gender difference in Austria in 2006 was slightly higher at 10 points. As in Austria, data across EU countries point to a small reduction in the size of the gender difference (Table 7).

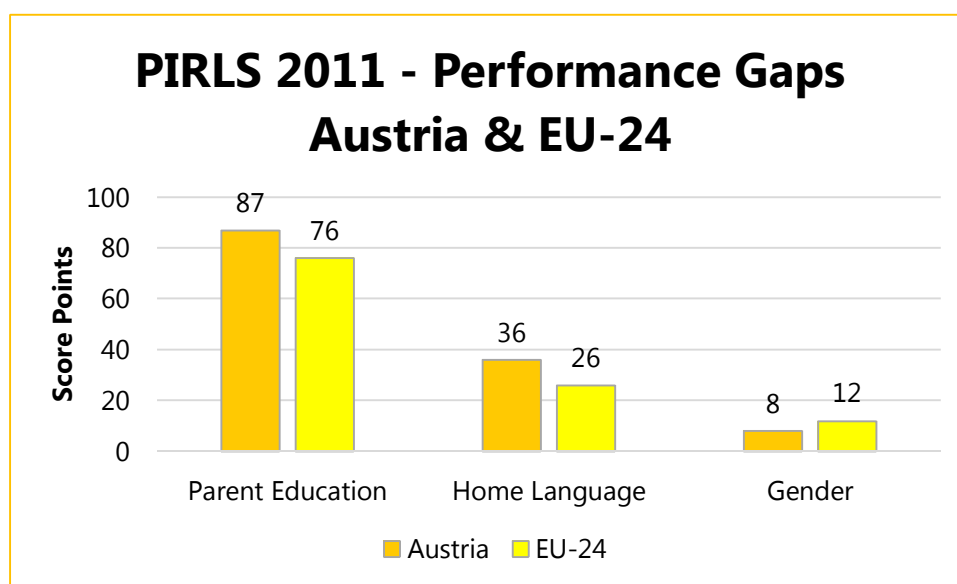
Table 7: Trends in Performance by Gender 2001-2011 (Overall Scale) – Austria and EU-24

	Austria			EU		
	Girls	Boys	Girls-Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls-Boys
2011	533	525	8	541	529	12
2006	543	533	10	541	528	13
2001	-	-	-	542	525	17

Significant differences in **bold**.

The following table sums up the performance gaps in connection with the level of parental education, the first language and gender across the EU-24 (primary level). It reflects the fact that access to education and equality in Austria is very much influenced by the background of each child.

Figure 1: Performance gaps in Austria compared to the EU-24 average, indicating the level of the parents' education, the language spoken at home and gender in primary school (PIRLS 2011)



Attitudes to Reading

Students in Austria scoring in the top quarter of the *Like Reading* scale achieved a mean overall reading score of 510 points. This was some 41 points higher than students scoring in the bottom quarter of the Like Reading scale (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 slightly weaker relationship between liking reading and performance in Austria.

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

Like Reading	Overall Reading Score		
	Top Quartile	Bottom Quartile	Difference (Q4-Q1)
Austria	550	510	41
EU-24	563	511	52

Students in Austria in the top quarter of the *Confidence in Reading* scale achieved a mean score (556) that was some 63 points higher than students in the bottom quarter (493) (Table 9). The average difference across the EU-24 was 80 points, again indicating a relatively weaker relationship between Confidence and performance in reading in Austria.

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

Confidence in Reading	Overall Reading Score		
	Top Quartile	Bottom Quartile	Difference (Q4-Q1)
Austria	556	493	63
EU-24	570	490	80

In fact, there are no big national or representative studies in Austria about reading, writing or spelling except from the PIRLS/PISA data. There are sometimes smaller projects/studies done by regions or schools, but not on a national level. But the so-called “Bildungsstandards” (Educational Standards Assessment) for students of grade four and eight should be reached and are measured in a long-term monitoring process (see below).

4.2 Performance Data for Adolescents - PISA

The performance data are derived from the OECD PISA study. Austria participated in PISA (15 year-olds' reading literacy) since 2000. Therefore 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 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) led by OECD¹⁹ **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, p. 52).

Technical note:

In 2009, a dispute between teachers' unions and Austria's Minister of Education led to a boycott of PISA, which was only lifted after the first week of testing. The boycott required the OECD to remove identifiable cases from the dataset. Although the Austrian dataset met the PISA 2009 technical standards after these cases were removed, the negative reaction to assessments has affected the conditions under which the PISA survey was conducted and could have adversely affected student motivation to respond to the PISA tasks. Therefore, the comparability of 2009 data with data from earlier PISA assessments cannot be ensured, and data from Austria have been excluded from trend comparisons.

¹⁹ See: www.pisa.oecd.org.

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

Austria performed very close to EU average in PISA 2012 (490 vs 489). Its score even fell well below the average in 2009 (470 vs 486 in EU). The performance decreased a lot (by 18 score points) in PISA between 2000 and 2012, namely by the equivalent of about a half-year of schooling.

The proportion of pupils who can be considered as low-performing readers in both studies is close to the EU countries on average (20 % in PISA). 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 has increased in PISA between 2000 and 2011 (from 14.6% to 19.5%). The proportion of top-performing readers is 5.5% in PISA (vs 7% EU-average).

Table 10: Reading performance in PISA 2012

	Mean	S.E.
Austria	490	(2,8)
EU-27	489	(0,6)

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

In PISA 2000, the performance of Austrian students was above the EU average. A large decline is observed between 2000 and 2009 (-37 score points)²⁰. In PISA 2012, Austria's performance increased again and is exactly the same as in EU countries on average. One should wait for PISA 2015 data in order to determine whether it is a real change or just random variation.

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.
Austria	507	(2.4)	470	(3.0)	490	(2.8)	-37	(6.2)	19	(4.8)	-18	(7.0)
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**. *EU 21, **EU26, ***EU27.

Furthermore, the spread of achievement is somewhat smaller than the average of European countries.

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.
Austria	238	(5.4)	220	(6.6)	245	(7.4)
EU-27	251	(1.3)	230	(1.2)	259	(1.6)

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

²⁰The performance of Austria in 2000 might have been biased by technical issues in the sampling which were fixed in the following PISA cycles.

In Austria the proportion of low-performers is the same as in the EU countries on average, whereas high-performers are less numerous than in the EU countries.

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.
Austria	19.5	(1.1)	5.5	(0.6)
EU-27	19.7	(0.2)	7.0	(0.1)

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

Between 2000 and 2012, the proportion of low-performing readers has slightly increased (by 4.9%) in Austria, among girls (+1.7%) but especially among boys (+9.6%). Nevertheless, it should be emphasized that the proportion of low-performers in reading is increased in 2009. This increase is deeper among boys (+17.4%) than among girls (9.2%).

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	14.6	(0.7)	11.1	(0.9)	17.8	(1.2)
2009	27.6	(1.3)	20.3	(1.6)	35.2	(1.7)
2012	19.5	(1.1)	12.8	(1.1)	26.2	(1.7)

Significant differences between assessment cycles in **bold**.

4.2.2 Gaps in reading performance

Socio-economic status

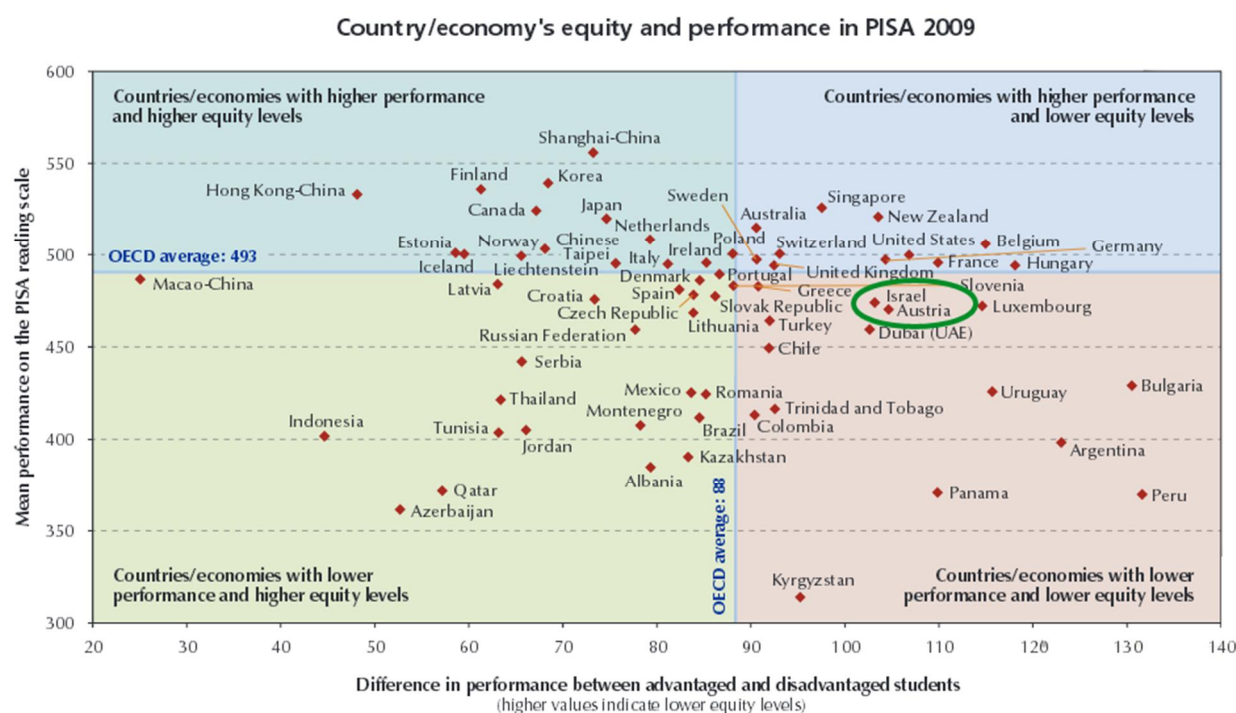
In PISA, the gap according to the pupils' socioeconomic background was a little bit below the EU average (91 vs 89 on average).

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

	Difference between the bottom and the top national quarter of the PISA index of economic, social and cultural status	
	Score diff.	
Austria	91	
EU-26	89	

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

Figure 4: Country/economy's equity and performance in PISA 2009



Austria outlined in green; Source: PISA in focus, No. 25/2013²¹

Migration

In PISA 2009, the gap between native students and students with a migrant background was much higher than in EU countries on average (67 vs 38).

Table 16: 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			
	Percentage of students	S.E.	Performance on the reading scale		Percentage of students	S.E.	Performance on the reading scale			
			Mean	S.E.			Mean	S.E.	Score dif.	S.E.
Austria	84.8	1.2	482	2.9	15.2	1.2	414	6.0	67	6.7
EU-26	91.7	0.02	490	0.4	8.3	0.02	452	6,4	38	6.4

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

In PISA 2009 it was said that the percentage of students with an immigrant background is 15.2%, in PISA 2012 16.5%. The gap between native students and those with an immigrant background is 67 score points (PISA 2009), which is equivalent to a bit more than one year of schooling. The gap

²¹ See: www.oecd.org/pisa/pisaproducts/pisainfocus/pisa%20in%20focus%20n25%20%28eng%29--FINAL.pdf, accessed March 21, 2016.

between native students and those with an immigrant background is somewhat higher in Austria than in EU countries on average.

Language spoken at home

In Austria the gap between students speaking the test language at home and those who do not (10.6 % of the students, i.e. more than in 2000 with 6.7 %) is quite substantial (65 score points) and slightly higher than the EU's average. It is equivalent to more than one and a half year of schooling. In general, there are 1.129.046 students (all types of schools), out of which 245.846 have with another first language than German (22.2%)(cf. Statistik Austria 2016).

Table 17: 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			
	Percentage of students	S.E.	Performance on the reading scale		Percentage of students	S.E.	Performance on the reading scale		Score dif.	S.E.
			Mean	S.E.			Mean	S.E.		
Austria	89.4	(0.8)	483	(3.0)	10.6	(0.8)	418	(6.3)	65	(6.8)
EU-27	86.7	(0.02)	494	(0.4)	13.3	(0.02)	441	(5.4)	54	(5.4)

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

Gender

In Austria, the gender gap (in favor of girls) was lower than the corresponding EU average differences in PISA 2009 (41 vs 44). In PISA, the decrease in reading performance observed between 2000 and 2012 was two times stronger among boys (-0.24) than among girls (-0.12).

Table 18: Mean reading performance by gender, and gender differences – PISA 2009

	Boys		Girls		Difference (B – G)	
	Mean	S.E.	Mean	S.E.	Score dif.	S.E.
Austria	449	(3.8)	490	(4.0)	-41	(5.5)
EU-26	463	(0.5)	506	(0.4)	-44	(0.5)

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

Between 2000 and 2012, a decline is observed among boys (-24 score points) and among girls (-12 score points). The trend is different in the European average between 2000 and 2012: the girls performance increased from 5 score points, and the boys' decreased by 5 score points.

Nevertheless, it should be underlined that the strong decline in reading performance is mainly observed between 2000 and 2009. This average decrease is deeper among boys (-46 points) than among girls (-30 points). Between 2009 and 2012: the girls' performance increased by 18 score points and the boys' by 22 (Table 19).

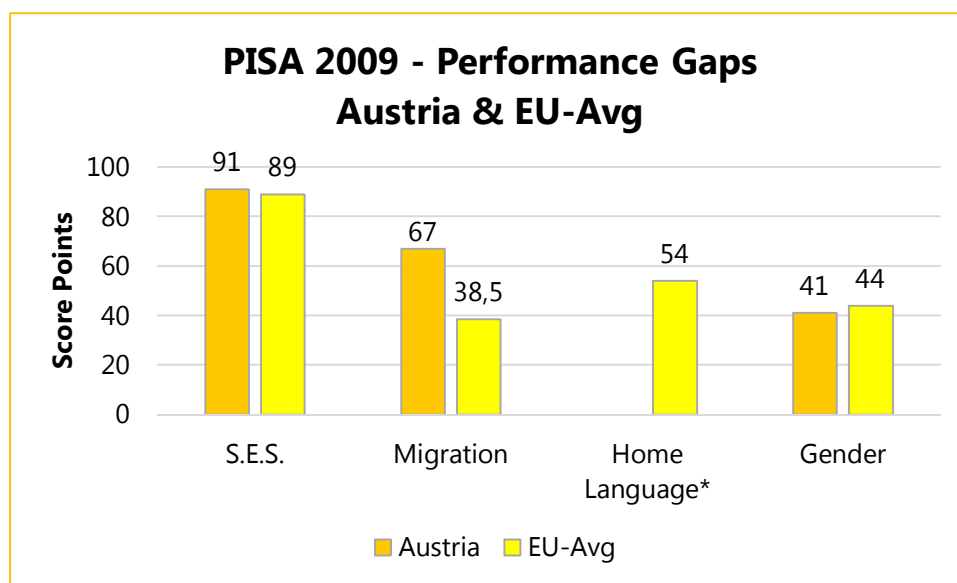
Table 19: Trends in reading performance by gender – PISA 2000-2012

	Austria				EU-27			
	Girls		Boys		Girls		Boys	
	Mean	S.E.	Mean	S.E.	Mean	S.E.	Mean	S.E.
2000	520	(3.6)	495	(3.2)	506*	(0.8)	473*	(0.9)
2009	490	(4.0)	449	(3.8)	507**	(0.7)	464**	(0.8)
2012	508	(3.4)	471	(4.0)	511***	(0.6)	468***	(0.8)

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

The following table sums up the performance gaps according to the socio-economic status, migration, language spoken at home and gender.

Figure 2: Figure 2: Performance gaps in Austria compared to the EU average, indicating the socio-economic background, the migration status, the language spoken at home and gender in secondary school (PISA 2009)



*no data

Engagement and metacognition

In Austria, there is a gap of 111 score points – which is equivalent to almost three 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 Austria is higher than the EU's average.

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.	Mean
Austria	424	(3.5)	534	(4.2)	111
EU-26	444	(0.8)	543	(0.8)	99

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

In Austria there is a gap of 110 score points - equivalent to almost three years 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 21: Mean reading scores between students in the low and top quarters of understanding and remembering strategies

	Low quarter		Top quarter		Difference
	Mean	S.E.	Mean	S.E.	Mean
Austria	417	(3.9)	527	(3.3)	110
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**.

There is a gap of 128 score points in Austria – which is equivalent to three years 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. This huge difference reflects how closely reading proficiency and awareness of efficient reading strategies are linked. On average, in the EU, the gap is lower (90 score points) (Table 22).

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

	Low quarter		Top quarter		Difference
	Mean	S.E.	Mean	S.E.	Mean
Austria	403	(3.8)	532	(3.3)	128
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 conclusion, the performance in reading in Austria has decreased overtime, more significantly among 15 year-olds than at grade 4. Austria now performs below the average in PIRLS and close to average in PISA. The proportion of low-performing readers is close to the EU countries on average, and the proportion of top-performing readers is below EU average. The spread of achievement (gap between low and top performing readers) is smaller in Austria than in EU on average at both levels. The gap according to socioeconomic status, migration or language spoken at home tends to be higher in Austria than in EU on average. Austria is then a little less effective, and also tends to be less equitable than EU countries on average. However, the major concern is the decrease in reading performance, and the increase of the proportion of low-performing readers, especially among teenage boys.

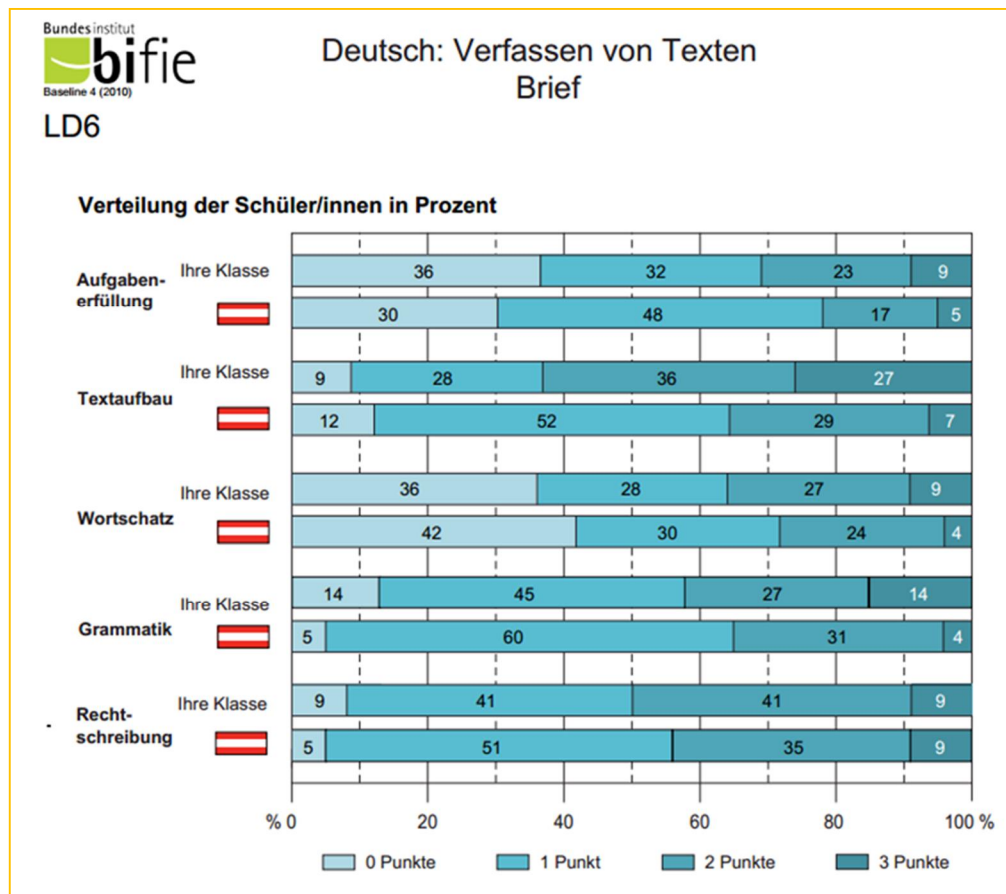
In-country assessment – Educational Standards Assessment (“Bildungsstandards”)

Educational standards are seen as an important means of ensuring and developing the educational quality in schools. Enacted in 2009, the standards describe the competences of students at year four and year eight. There is a regular monitoring of the results by an independent institution, the National Institute for Education, Innovation and Development of the Austrian School System, the BIFIE²². The studies are accompanied by individualised feedback for all participants (student, head master, school authority and ministry).

These processes offer a big chance of improvement, but up to now the question how to handle the results of the survey, receives only little attention.

The following graph (only in German) shows the feedback concerning the results in *writing a letter*. The outcomes of a specific class are depicted in relation to the Austrian average. The items are performance of duties, text composition, vocabulary, grammar and spelling.

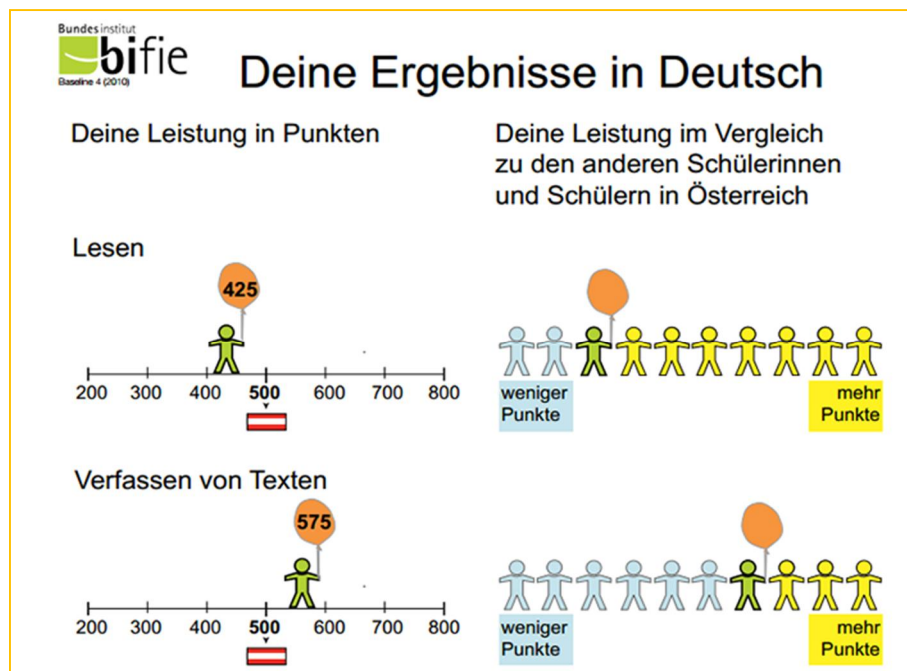
Figure 5:



²² See: www.bifie.at, accessed March 21, 2016.

And here the example of a personal feedback to a student of year 4 (“your results in German language” – individual points and points compared to other students in Austria).

Figure 6:



Austrian National Literacy Framework (“Österreichischer Rahmenleseplan”)

In response to these adverse developments, the Austrian Ministry of Education installed a working group for the preparation of an Austrian Literacy Framework in 2014, including experts and institutions of all fields of reading promotion and education²³. Inspired by and in coordination with ELINET there is a similar structure in the working groups. The interim report²⁴ from August 2015 presents important measures on the way to better reading competences for all and a vivid culture of literacy among all age groups “*from cradle to the grave*”. The complete framework is expected in summer 2016 and should then become the basis for a national literacy strategy as well as for a bundle of concrete measures – starting from campaigns about low literacy skills among adults to more efforts for family literacy or better digital equipment for schools.

²³ See: www leseplan.at, accessed March 21, 2016.

²⁴ See: <https://www leseplan.at/uploads/%C3%96RLP%20Zwischenbericht.pdf>, accessed March 21, 2016.

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 (Taggart et al. 2015; UNICEF 2001). 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). For Austria the following numbers can be stated:

- Like: 40 % (European average 35.3 %)
- Somewhat like: 47.3 % (European average 52.6 %)
- Do not like: 12.7 % (European average 17.9 %)

(For an overview of European countries see table B1 in Appendix B).

Compared to the European average, many pupils in Austria have parents with positive attitudes towards reading. The importance of parental attitudes to reading is shown by the fact that in Austria there are remarkable differences in reading performance at grade 4 between children whose parents like to read (average achievement 548) and those who do not (average achievement 500).

Home Educational Resources

Students in Austria in the bottom quartile of the PIRLS home resources scale (which is based on number of books at home, number of children’s books at home, a quiet room to study, Internet access as well as and parental education and job status) had a mean score that is 76 points lower than that of pupils in the top quartile (ELINET PIRLS 2011 Appendix, Table E2). The corresponding EU-24 average was marginally higher at 79 points. The data indicate a relationship in Austria between home educational resources and reading performance.

17% of pupils in Austria had parents who reported having few home resources for learning (Table 23). The difference in achievement between pupils in Austria whose parents reported having many home resources and few resources was 85 score points – slightly higher than the corresponding EU-24 average difference (79).

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

Level of Home Resources	Few Resources		Many Resources		Difference (Many - Few)
	%	Mean	%	Mean	
Austria	17	483	23	568	85
EU-24	25	495	25	573	79

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. A possible discrepancy might be explained by the difference in sources and questions.

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

- 0-10 books: 9.9 % (European average 11.3%)
- 11-25: 26.1 % (European average 24.9%)
- 26-100: 26.1 % (European average 35.5%)
- >100: 15.1% (European average 16%)
- >200: 12.8 % (European average 12.3%)

In Austria, almost one in ten students (9.9%) reported having 10 or fewer books at home (ELINET PIRLS 2011 Appendix Table E1), slightly less than the EU-24 average of 11.3%. Almost 13% of students in Austria had 200 or more books, compared with an EU-24 average of 12.3%. In Austria, the gap in reading performance between those with 10 or fewer books, and those with 200 or more – 76 points – is marginally lower than the EU-24 average difference of 82 points.

Table 24: Mean Overall Reading Scores of Pupil with 0-10 Books at Home, and those with more than 200 Books – Austria 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	
Austria	10	479	13	555	76
EU-24	11	482	12	563	82

Early Literacy Activity Scale

PIRLS 2011 reports the percentage 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 Austria in the composite score for all these activities are below (for an overview of European countries see table B3 in Appendix B):

Often: 35.2 % (European average 40.7%)

Sometimes: 63.3 % (European average 57.4)

Never or almost never: 1.5 % (European average 1.9%).

This means that in Austria almost all parents engage *often* or *sometimes* in early literacy activities with their children regarding the nine activities.

The Early Literacy Activity Scale correlates with later reading performance in grade 4. The average reading score of pupils who were involved often in these activities was 543, as compared with 523 for those pupils who sometimes were engaged in these activities with their parents before the beginning of primary school (Mullis et al. 2012a, exhibit 4.6, p. 126). These figures demonstrate the importance of the time devoted to literacy-related activities in early childhood and their association with achievement in Grade 4.

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 Austria whose parents read books to them and played games with them before the beginning of primary school is higher than the European average:

read books to them often: 69.1 % (European average 58.4 %)

told stories to them often: 49.5 % (European average 51.5%)

sang songs to them often: 46.4 % (European average 50.6%)

played games involving shapes (toys and puzzles) with them often: 76.8 % (European average 63.5 %).

(For more details and an overview of European countries see table B 4 – B 7 in Appendix B).

Challenges: Since reading to the child is a predictor of future literacy achievement it is a matter of concern, that about 30% of the children have parents who do not read books often to them. There is a need for broad national programmes **to raise awareness of 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 – more or less from birth. In particular, there is a need for more family literacy programmes with **a focus on supporting parents and care-givers** in understanding and fostering the literacy development of their children.

In Austria programmes like "Bookstart : growing with books"(www.buchstart.at) should be carried out nationwide. The very successful activities at local or regional level (Vorarlberg, Burgenland, Vienna) should become a national concern. Every profession dealing with young children and their families – e.g. pediatrics, day-care, early intervention, family centers, libraries, social workers etc. – must promote the importance of (early) literacy from the beginning. Parents themselves must be encouraged to read more to their children – even after they have entered school.

5.1.2 Providing a literate environment in school

The Austrian “Grundsatzterlass Leseerziehung”(Basic Decree on Reading Education) published by the Ministry of Education states – with regards to school – that “a sophisticated range of texts with regard to genre and function (non-literary texts, fictional texts, entertainment, suspense, relaxation, information, etc.)” (BMUKK 2013) is key to shaping a positive reading environment. This Grundsatzterlass has to be transferred into action in a more effective and better way.

Challenges: The implementation of general programmes to encourage reading, e.g. family literacy and reading partnerships, has already started. To improve the situation of pupils from homes with low levels of education/socioeconomic background, these efforts should be strengthened and carried out more systematically. Teachers would need more resources at school, school libraries should be promoted more (in Austria, primary schools legally don't have to have a school library, see below).

To lower the gap between the reading competences between boys and girls, more gender-sensitive reading material and reading situations should be provided to teachers. Some schools already call themselves “Reading Schools”, which means, for example, that the pupils get some free time each day for free reading whatever they like.

Within the school system, reading for pleasure must play an increasing role. School libraries and external reading institutions and programmes should be implemented in such long-term strategies in a more structured way.

Resources teachers use for teaching reading

Since the type of reading materials teachers use in literacy instruction may influence the motivation of students, it is of interest to have a closer look at this matter. PIRLS 2011 provides some data.

On average, internationally, textbooks were used most often as the basis for reading instruction, for 72 percent of the fourth grade students, and workbooks or worksheets were used the next most often, for 40 percent of the students. A variety of children’s books or a reading series was used as the basis of instruction for approximately one-fourth of the fourth grade students, and relying on computer software was relatively rare, used for only eight percent of the students. In Austria teachers reported that they are using textbooks as a basis very often. Children’s books or reading series are often used only as a supplement (Mullis et al. 2012, p. 236)(Table 25).

Table 25: Different kinds of resources used by teachers – Austria and international average

Country	Percent of Students whose teachers use									
	A variety of children’s books		Textbooks		Reading series		Workbooks/ Worksheets		Computer software for reading instruction	
	As basis for instruction	Supplement	As basis for instruction	Supplement	As basis for instruction	Supplement	As basis for instruction	Supplement	As basis for instruction	Supplement
Austria	23 (2.6)	76 (2.6)	59 (3.2)	36 (2.9)	8(1.9)	65 (3.6)	39 (3.3)	61 (3.3)	9 (2.0)	61 (3.6)
International average	27(0.4)	69 (0.5)	72 (0.4)	23 (0.4)	27 (0.4)	59 (0.5)	40 (0.5)	56 (0.5)	8 (0.3)	48 (0.5)

The Austrian curriculum itself states that teachers have pedagogical and didactical responsibility to freely select methods. Teachers also have some freedom in selecting teaching materials. Instructional materials are not part of the curriculum published by the Federal Ministry for Education, Arts, and Culture. Teachers work with a variety of textbooks by various publishers. These textbooks and materials are developed according to various methods of initial reading and must be approved by the Education Ministry to ensure that they fit with the standards and have the necessary methodological level. A list of approved materials (textbooks) exists for each grade level but none is explicitly recommended. Textbook approval lies with a commission at the ministry. Under the Schulbuchaktion (school book initiative), students receive textbooks on the approved list in addition to other materials free of charge (up to a financial limit).

Basic materials used for reading development come from a wide range of reading books offering samples of literature from different genres for children. Teachers appreciate the variety of materials offered by Österreichischer Buchklub der Jugend (Austrian Book Club for Young People). Some books are provided in sets accompanied by materials such as worksheets, folding alphabet letters, and sheets for practising writing. For initial reading, there are spelling books and simple readers. There also are new kinds of multi-media materials (e.g., CD-ROMs) and other ways of using information communication technology (ICT) to support reading development. The Austrian Red Cross also offers educational magazines for schools, including magazines for different age groups containing a wide variety of topics and teaching materials. Teachers also can conduct lessons within the school library (Wallner-Paschon/Suchan 2012).

Availability and use of classroom library

Based on data provided by their teachers, PIRLS shows that 79% of pupils in Austria were in classrooms which had class libraries or had the opportunity to use the school library – above the corresponding EU-24 average of 73% (ELINET PIRLS 2011 Appendix, Table K2). 39% of students in Austria were in classrooms in which the library contained more than 50 books, compared with an EU-24 average of 32%.

Challenges: Although there are the PIRLS data about the (school) library use, it is questionable whether these numbers are correct, as the schools are not obliged to give their statistics to the Austrian Library Service or to the school governing bodies. As mentioned before, in Austria the primary school is not obliged by law to run a school library. There are recommendations, but no binding standards for its organisation or stock or hours for teachers for running the library.

Academic Secondary Schools (Gymnasium) must have a school library by law; the New Secondary School (Neue Mittelschule) *should* have one.

In order to provide all students from all different backgrounds with media and books and in order to compensate for inequalities, there should be a regulation that all types of school must have a school library (or cooperate with a nearby public library) and there is a need for binding standards for school libraries.

Evaluations of the functions and the value of school libraries should be carried out.

Successful approaches in some regions of close cooperation between school and public libraries should be strengthened.

There are no clear legal and financial commitments between the Federal Republic of Austria, the federal states (Länder) and the municipalities concerning school libraries and public libraries (see below).

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, 79% of students in Austria had a computer available for reading lessons, compared to the EU-average of 45% (ELINET PIRLS 2011 Appendix Table I6). Sixty percent uses a computer at least monthly to look up information. The corresponding EU-24 average is 39% (ibid). While 42% of students in Austria used computers for writing at least once a month, almost twice as many students in Denmark (83%) did so.

Digital environment of secondary students

The OECD study "Students On Line" (OECD 2011a) shows that nearly all students (98.2%) use a computer at home (OECD average 92.3%) but with 459 points the digital reading performance is significant under the OECD average of 499 points.

The Survey of Schools (SoS 2013)(European Schoolnet/European Commission 2013) Country Profile states that Austrian students are relatively well equipped in comparison to the EU average; concerning access to computers, connectivity to fast broadband and connection (i.e. their school has for example a website). Broadband speed is considerably higher than in other EU countries.

At grade 11 vocational, Austria ranks above EU average concerning the frequency of use of ICT in lessons, at grade 8 and grade 11 general, it ranks below EU average (ibid).

Only 3% of the adolescents in Austria are ranging at the highest level of digital reading competence. This means that they are able to critically analyse information in digital texts that is not familiar for them and that can be ambiguous. Moreover, they can navigate through the World Wide Web safely and are able to search for different sources stemming from different formats. The OECD-average is 8% (c.f. Herzog-Punzenberger 2012, Chapter 1).

Challenges: Discussions about the value, the opportunities and risks of digital reading and learning are only just beginning in Austria. Up to now there is no national strategy about the implementation of ICT in reading promotion. Experiences and studies from other countries must be brought into the discussion. Not all schools are equipped with technical support in the same way (e.g. beamer, laptops, tablets, smart boards ...). The same goes for libraries.

First pilot projects (like in Hauptschule Jennersdorf, Volksschule Breitenlee) should be evaluated and discussed in wider public and among experts.

5.1.4 Public libraries

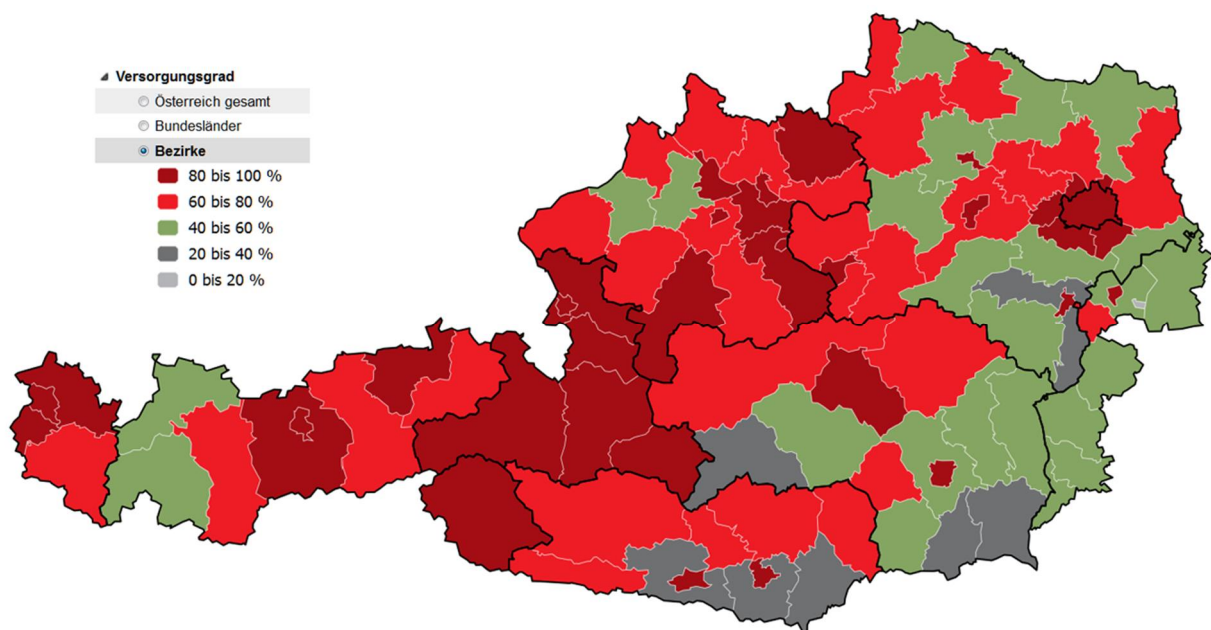
Austria has a comprehensive network of public libraries: About 1,500 libraries in 1,062 municipalities offer their services. It is specific for the Austrian library system, that there is a very high proportion of volunteers (more than 7,000) working in that field, 1,200 libraries are run by such volunteers. That commitment helps to maintain a tense net of libraries but in some cases it prevents the extension of necessary services and offers.

Austria has 9 Federal States and libraries are (like preschool or adult education institutions) in shared competence between the Federal Government and the nine provinces. That leads to sometimes big differences in the promotion programmes and financial support of public libraries and consequently to big differences in their performance.

The following library map of the Austrian Library Association²⁵ shows the dispersion rate of libraries within the Austrian regions and districts in 2014. Areas in dark red mark districts where more than 80% of the communities are equipped with public libraries, areas in grey are indicating a rate of less than 40%.

From dark red (high rate) to red and green (middle rate) and further to grey (very low rate) you can see big differences between states and districts. As there are no regulations in some regions, you find highly professional and successful working libraries while in other districts there is a high number of more or less quite obsolete institutions.

Figure 7: Dispersion Rate of Libraries within the Austrian Regions and Districts in 2014



Source: www.bvoe.at/buechereilandkarte, only in German

The role of public libraries in reading promotion

Libraries play a central role in improving a positive reading environment. In the last decade many of them changed from “institutions of borrowing” to vivid meeting points, to centres of communication and exchange, culture and education as well as literature and literacy promotion. The transmission of reading and narrative skills is high on the agenda, therefore they offer more and more events where the participants play an active role.

The Austrian Library Association (BVOE) as the national umbrella organisation has published a Public Library Concept “The Library of the Future – The Future of Libraries” that demonstrates that they are even more than that: libraries are also centres of information and education and they have an important socially integrative function (c.f. BVOE 2016).

²⁵ See: www.bvoe.at, accessed March 21, 2016.

In Austria there are many different types of organisations running libraries, for example there are many libraries conducted by parishes, but even more by the communities/municipalities and some by trade unions or NGOs. There are also some public libraries run by local associations. There is no formal national law that ensures funding, equipment or certain standards, so there is a wide range in quality. As in Germany, it is the decision of local authorities or initiatives whether there is a public library or not.

However, it was possible to fix public libraries to the working programme of the Austrian government 2014-2018 as a key-agenda with the aim "to work out an Austrian National Library Plan, taking e-media and digitalization into account" (c.f. BVOE 2016).

Many libraries draw on international guidelines, e.g. by the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA). For example:

- Roles and tasks for public libraries: the Public Library Manifesto²⁶
- Guidelines for Library Services for Young Adults²⁷ or for Babies and Toddlers²⁸ or
- IFLA School Library Guidelines²⁹

Challenges: National library regulations in Austria are really needed as a basis for the existence, the offers and the quality of public libraries and their staff.

Along with that goes the need for more efforts to support the huge number of volunteers by an increasing rate of employed librarians. A national library concept would help to further develop the Austrian library system, guarantee nationwide and for all age and social groups the supply of literature, information, education and reading promotion as well as helping to foster cooperation between different players (see above, the Austrian National Literacy Framework is the first step in this direction).

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

Family literacy programs

There are very well developed bookstart programmes³⁰ offering books for the youngest, information and specific material for parents, libraries, kindergartens and schools (in several languages, not only in German). Such family literacy projects are not coordinated or even supported all over the country but depend on local authorities/inspired people like librarians, doctors, teachers, carers or else. Some federal states (Vorarlberg, Burgenland, Vienna) established specific bookstart programmes, others will follow.

In addition, there are Early-Childhood-Intervention programmes³¹, consisting of medical, social and educational help and support for parents in need. Within these projects or single initiatives like HIPPY

²⁶ See: <http://www.ifla.org/publications/iflaunesco-public-library-manifesto-1994>, accessed March 21, 2016.

²⁷ See: <http://www.ifla.org/files/assets/libraries-for-children-and-ya/publications/ya-guidelines2-en.pdf>, accessed March 21, 2016.

²⁸ See: <http://www.ifla.org/files/assets/hq/publications/professional-report/100.pdf>, accessed March 21, 2016.

²⁹ See: <http://www.ifla.org/files/assets/school-libraries-resource-centers/publications/ifla-school-library-guidelines.pdf>, accessed March 21, 2016.

³⁰ See: www.buchstart.at, accessed March 21, 2016.

³¹ See: www.help.gv.at/Portal.Node/hlpd/public/content/122/Seite.1220210.html (only in German), accessed March 21, 2016.

(Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters³²) language and literacy development is also being communicated to parents (also see below, Increasing participation, inclusion and equity).

Programmes for introducing parents and children to libraries and bookshops

Libraries and bookshops are both important factors within the reading culture of a country. In the past they sometimes were seen as competitors. National campaigns ("Austria reads. Meeting point: Library", "Andersen day", "World Book Day" or "Bookstart"-projects, where parents and young families are invited to libraries) now try to intensify the cooperation between libraries and bookshops.

Projects like "Austria reads" or "Bibliotheksführerschein" ("library driving license") develop material and concepts to attract children and families, but there are no structured initiatives or programmes for introducing children and their parents to libraries and bookshops.

Initiatives to foster reading engagement among children and adolescents

For decades the "Austrian Book Club for Young People"³³ plays an important role in the field of reading promotion and reading engagement in Austria, especially in schools. The Book Club is providing material for teachers as well as for students, is running reading campaigns and is at the same time an important motor in national reading promotion and international exchange of experience. In each school there is one teacher with the role of the "Book Club" person responsible to coordinate the Book Club's offers (e.g. magazines for students, material for teachers) at school level.

Very successful are initiatives of the Austrian Library Association like "Leserstimmen" (Readers' Voices)³⁴ or similar initiatives at local level that reach to bring authors and children into close exchange. Especially for children in rural areas, such projects often give the only opportunity to meet authors, at the same time these campaigns provide impulses for Austrian writers, editors and the book market.

Children's book fairs like Bookolino³⁵ in Graz offer very attractive and high quality programmes for young people and schools.

In the last years in six of the nine federal states summer reading activities had been organised by state authorities. Performed and executed by public libraries and sometimes in cooperation with schools, these events provide very successfully impulses in reading motivation and promotion. They perform very well, the number of participants is rising.

A specific literacy website³⁶ run by the Ministry of Education provides an actual overview about the reading scene in Austria and gives impulses for youth and teachers (also see below).

For some years, reading aloud has become very popular in Austria - in schools as well as in public libraries. All over the country there are training courses for volunteers who want to become reading mentors. In schools they act as trainers in private lessons to support reading abilities; in libraries they are active with groups to promote reading for pleasure and narrative skills. At the same time these offers play an important role in the field of integration, social cohesion and the support of struggling

³² See: www.hippy.at.

³³ See: www.buchklub.at.

³⁴ See: www.leserstimmen.at/.

³⁵ See: www.bookolino.at.

³⁶ See: www.literacy.at/.

readers or children who only get few impulses from their families. The nationwide course is called "Ganz Ohr!" (Be all ears!) which also serves as an ELINET best-practice example.

There is also a huge number of services in Austria that can be used to support reading for pleasure, like as the database www.wirlesen.org (We are reading!) or everything offered by the International Institute for Children's and Youth Literature³⁷ or the STUBE – Info Centre for Children's and Youth Literature³⁸.

Challenges: As we know from the PISA and other studies, there is a high correlation between reading for pleasure and reading performance. Therefore, schools, libraries, families and communities should do more in order to support reading motivation, reading habits and a stable self-concept as a reader among adolescents, especially boys and students from disadvantaged families (low SES, migrant background). Many local and regional initiatives exist already, but there is a lack of coordination and evaluation.

Offering attractive reading material for children and adolescents in print and non-print

In the German language, there is a rich assortment of books and magazines for all kind of interests and in very high quality. Most of the media is cheaply available. Also on the internet you find a wide range of reading impulses and sites for all genres.

Less favourable is the situation in other languages. In recent years, there have been big efforts to provide multilingual offers: Libraries extended their offers in the languages of migrants, bi- or multilingual books or magazines are published, specific programmes try to involve non-German speaking people in reading activities.

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

Cooperation between all players in the field of literacy and literacy promotion is the key issue for the development of a substantial reading culture. In some federal states (Länder) there are initiatives to create vivid networks such as "Leseland Salzburg" (Reading Province Salzburg)³⁹. National campaigns like "Österreich liest. Treffpunkt Bibliothek" (Austria reads. Meeting point: Library)⁴⁰ support the cooperation and the exchange of stakeholders (libraries, schools, authors, publishers ...).

Big libraries like in Vienna or Graz have special programmes and offers only for adolescents where they also cooperate with schools concerning the so-called "Vorwissenschaftliche Arbeit" that students have to write for their A-levels/high-school diploma (a pre-academic paper for the new standardised competence-oriented high-school diploma since 2015)⁴¹.

³⁷ See: www.jugendliteratur.net.

³⁸ See: www.stube.at.

³⁹ See: <http://leseland.salzburg.at/>.

⁴⁰ See: www.oesterreichliest.at/.

⁴¹ See: www.ahs-vwa.at, <http://stadtbibliothek.graz.at>.

Fostering digital literacy in and outside schools

In 2010, free access to e-book libraries started in some federal states - now the offers are more or less nationwide. Members of public libraries get the key for free e-lending of various groups of media. Here some of the platforms (accessed March 21, 2016):

- <http://mediathek.salzburg.at/>
- www.onleihe.at/wien
- www.media2go.at
- www.onleihe.at/vorarlberg

Experience has shown that these offers are welcomed by a small group of readers that use these media very intensively. Nevertheless free e-lending projects can build bridges to digital literacy. Solutions for schools and e-books in the school library are planned but implemented only partially (legal regulations).

"Read and win"⁴² is an online competition where young readers can enter by reading and reviewing at least one out of the ten available books. Participants can be between the ages of 14 and 19. All the books that can be read for the competition can be loaned from school and public libraries. Prizes include tablet PCs and eBook readers which in turn motivate young readers through the use of ICT.

The will to improve or stay at a very high level of multimodality (also in libraries and schools) in Austria is clearly visible. It is not clear, however, how far the implementation has progressed. There are few reliable data about the use of eMedia and their effects in Austria. The Federal State of Upper Austria could be a best-practice example for the provision of long-term studies and their interpretation:

- www.edugroup.at/innovation/forschung/kinder-medien-studie.html
- www.edugroup.at/innovation/forschung/jugend-medien-studie.html

Challenges: The ideas and various projects should be brought together to a strategic concept of e-Reading and e-Learning in Austria. Studies and surveys are essential steps to that goal.

As regional surveys like in Upper Austria show very divergent results about reading habits between different districts there should be detailed analyses to find out the specific aspects that support or impede the development of reading culture.

⁴² See: www.readandwin.info.

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 McKinsey report “How the world best performing school systems come out on top” (McKinsey et al. 2007) states: “The quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers” (McKinsey et al. 2007).

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 recognized 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 2011, 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 2012, 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.

In Austria there is the Youth Welfare Act 1989 (Federal Law) and Provincial Kindergarten Education Act (Provincial Laws of the 9 provinces); a framework law for quality in ECEC institutions is scheduled for 2015/2016.

Up to the age of 3, early childhood care is provided in centre-based settings like Kinderkrippen. In addition, there is also a system of regulated home-based care, which is ensured by day care parents/mothers/fathers (*Tageseltern/ Tagesmütter/ Tagesväter*). From age 3 (and sometimes even slightly earlier), children may attend Kindergarten.

The ECEC-system is organised party unitary; the Länders are mostly in charge of all important aspects. Institutions are not allowed to employ staff, the national curriculum can be adapted on the Länder

level. Pedagogues are free to choose appropriate educational content and methods. Services are visited on average once or twice a year by the inspector of ECEC of the respective provider. Non-routine inspections may be made in the case of complaints. Inspectors may access the building and review operational records, act as primary assessors of quality and indicate quality shortcomings (Hartel 2014, p. 8ff.).

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 Austria is 0.6 %. 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). There is a so-called 15a-agreement that secures the common financing of ECEC in shared responsibility of the Federal Republic and the Laender. This enables to unlock resources for language support and also literacy promotion.

Ratio of children to teachers in pre-primary school

According to "Education at a Glance 2014" (OECD 2014a, p. 451) the ratio of students to teaching staff in pre-primary institutions in Austria is 14 (for an overview of European countries see table D2 in Appendix B).

Percentage of males among preschool teachers

According to Statistik Austria (2013), 1.4 % of the pre-primary teachers in Austria are males. The range is from 0.2% in Bulgaria and Hungary to 17.7% in France (Pordata 2014), 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 level 4B (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice/Eurostat 2014, p. 101). The minimum qualification for becoming a teacher at pre-primary education (kindergarten) is in most European countries a tertiary education degree at bachelor level. Only in Austria and Germany is the minimum entry a qualification at post-secondary non-tertiary (BAKIP, Bundesbildungsanstalt für Kindergartenpädagogik).

Continuing Professional Development is a professional duty and a prerequisite for career development. In most European countries, CPD is generally considered a professional duty for staff (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice/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 schoolchildren. Pre-school programmes 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).

Preschools in Austria are in the administration and responsibility of the federal states but there is a nationwide accorded curriculum dating from 2009. Particularly in the last year before starting school, there is a recognized need to support the language development and social learning as well as personal development and personal skills.

The **Nationwide Framework Curriculum for Austrian ECEC Services** (Bundesländerübergreifender Bildungsrahmenplan für elementare Bildungseinrichtungen in Österreich; c.f. Charlotte Bühler Institut 2009) is defined as a play-based curriculum for ECEC institutions and includes six educational domains: emotions and social relationships, ethics and society, language and communication, motor skills/health/well-being, aesthetics and creativity, nature and technology. In the area "language and communication" the English term "literacy" is used and the importance of **engaging and motivating children in literacy-related activities** and the **familiarisation of children with the language of books (e.g. reading and telling stories)** is stressed.

The plan has 4 main elements:

- Procedure for the determination of the language level to establish children with special language needs
- Defining cross-province framework targets of language education and support in children aged from three to six, as well as defining German-language standards when starting school.
- Qualification offers for educators within the framework of training as well as further education and advanced training.
- Strengthening parents in their role as main language transmitter (ibid).

It also fixes the 12 pedagogical principles of pre-school, such as participation, inclusion, empowerment, diversity or individualisation (c.f. Charlotte Bühler Institut 2009, pp. 1ff.).

The **"Bildungsplan-Anteil zur sprachlichen Förderung in elementaren Bildungseinrichtungen" (Language support plan)** (Charlotte Bühler Institut 2009a) outlines principles for "Fostering language and speech development: The promotion of early childhood language and speech development comprises both linguistic as well as pragmatic features" and refers also to bilingualism and multilingualism: "Supporting and accompanying children who are learning an additional language can only succeed if their mother tongue (first language) is duly respected. Therefore the process must go hand in hand with principles of intercultural pedagogy. The importance of dialect and/or idiom are taken into consideration, so that the child can feel at home in a language, respectively identify with it"⁴³.

In Austria the promotion for language awareness is based on: playing with language by using nonsense words and rhyming; exploring and experimenting with sounds, words and texts; breaking down speech into small units, blending syllables or sounds in sounds (Eurydice 2011, p. 55).

⁴³ See: www.sprich-mit-mir.at/app/webroot/files/file/bildungsplananteilsprache.pdf.

Improving early language and literacy screening and training in ECEC (Early Childhood Education and Care)

In 2009, Austria introduced a framework for supporting the language development of children aged 3-6 (see above). This includes the language assessment of all children at least 15 months before school entry to make sure that children get specific support during the last year in kindergarten. All Länder are legally bound to collect data on child's language skills no later than 15 months before school entry ("Sprachstandsfeststellung"- language level testing). Due to a contract between state and all Länder, financial resources are allocated by the state. Furthermore, the state (i.e. Ministry for Education) is obliged to provide instruments for data collection. Instruments are designed by the National Institute for Education, Innovation and Development of the Austrian School System⁷ (BIFIE). They were evaluated in 2009. BESK 2.08 (Beobachtungsbogen zur Erfassung der Sprachkompetenz in Deutsch von Kindern mit Deutsch als Erstsprache; observation tool for children with German as first language) for German speaking children and BESK-DaZ 2.09 (Beobachtungsbogen zur Erfassung der Sprachkompetenz in Deutsch von Kindern mit Deutsch als Zweitsprache; observation tool for children with German as second language) for children speaking other first languages than German. Six out of nine Länder use these instruments, the other 3 developed their own instruments or use other equally appropriate instruments.

Data are collected in April and May of the second last year in kindergarten, followed by respective supporting measures if necessary. There is a second data collection period approximately one year later to prove developmental progress. Accompanying measures are continuing professional development programmes for ECEC staff (Hartel 2014). The systems and strategies are summarised in several reports⁴⁴ (c.f. Stanzel-Tischler 2011).

Challenges: The process of enhancing the status of kindergarten and kindergarten teachers should be continued. Like in other European countries the qualification for Kindergarten teachers should be at tertiary level.

The beginning exchange between kindergarten/family centres/day care etc. and primary school should be strengthened as well as the exchange with external early literacy programmes and strategies, coming from libraries for example (bookstart etc.). In this respect a nationwide training programme for literacy experts for early childhood would be an advantage, also including diagnostics and observations skills. There is a strong need to develop education concepts across the borders of institutions – common pre- and in-service training of pre-primary and primary teachers to guarantee a comprehensive support of (language) development.

Austria needs to work on the child-care rate as the Barcelona-Objective of 33% was missed, in Austria 25% of children from 0 to 3 are enrolled in child-care institutions. So more expenditures for early education are needed although the federal financing has been increased in 2014.

Concerning the quality of ECEC: in Austria there is a teacher-child-ratio of 1:10 to 1:17, recommended is a rate of 1:10; as there are 9 different standards for ECEC in Austria, it is no federal duty and there are too few child care places.

⁴⁴ See: <https://www.bifie.at/node/1550>.

The trade unions/both sides of industry have formulated clear objectives to be reached concerning ECEC (c.f. Bundesarbeiterkammer et al. 2015):

More cooperation between school and pre-school to be really able to support each child best.

Tertiary education for pre-school teachers, more cooperation with academic research and development.

More diversity among the pre-school teachers.

More evaluation to secure quality.

More cooperation with parents, more offerings for parental education.

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.

Like in Germany, literacy curricula in schools in Austria have been influenced by the "Bildungsstandards" (educational standards), a response to bad PISA results. These standards for year four and year eight are competence-oriented and are under a constant monitoring process. There is also the "Grundsatzrlass Leseerziehung" (see above).

The national curriculum and this legislative decree on reading instruction (BMUKK 2013) reflect the current concept of reading literacy as a necessary means of communication and continuing education and as the basis of lifelong learning. The basis of literacy education is to work on textual and contextual exercises connected to reading and writing and to learn basic literary theory. Reading development is understood to encompass acquiring and using reading skills and also, in a wider sense, the ability to use reading as an important means of individual, cultural, and personal development. Engaging with a variety of texts enables students to appreciate national culture and to develop moral, aesthetic, and social values.

Primary school curricula

Educational Contents at Primary School

The first two years of primary school are considered a unit. All children may proceed to the second year after attendance of the first year, irrespective of the assessment of the child's performance in the annual report. In addition to attending compulsory subjects, pupils are free to choose to attend non-assessed optional classes (such as school choir singing, drama classes etc.) which are designed to foster special interests and skills. Moreover, pilot projects on new ways of integrated pre-school and primary education have been started. These new ways to enter school education are designed to complement conventional ways in the years to come.

From the third year (elementary level II) onwards a modern foreign language (Croatian, Czech, English, French, Hungarian, Italian, Slovak or Slovenian) is taught on a compulsory basis, though without assessment of the child's performance. Based on interests and performance, parents are informed and advised on the kind of educational pathway recommended for their children after completion of the fourth year of primary school.

Depending on the demand, i.e. given there are at least three pupils in need of it, remedial classes to the extent of one teaching unit per week are offered for language subjects and mathematics (e.g. for pupils with learning difficulties or for pupils who have missed lessons because of illness).

With the exception of religious education, lessons at primary school are usually held by a form teacher. In addition to that, there are specially trained tutors who may be deployed to attend to children with special needs and to children with mother tongues other than German who have problems to follow lessons held in German.

Reading for pleasure

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

Contents of literacy curricula

Introduction to reading starts with compulsory schooling at age six. Students learn the letters of the alphabet usually by May or June in the first year of primary school, though different primers introduce the letters in varying sequence. According to the curriculum, children have until the end of the second year of primary school to learn the whole alphabet. In most classes, reading and writing are developed simultaneously, though some primers concentrate on reading first and begin the writing process later. This is also true for teaching block letters and script (Wallner-Paschon/Suchań 2012). Special consideration is given to children whose first language is not German.

According to Wallner-Paschon and Suchań (2012), the following curriculum objectives in reading should be reached by the end of Grade 4:

- Reading aloud or silently at a skilled level.
- Developing an awareness of text, both fiction and non-fiction, through the process of reading, analysis and explanation.
- Reading fluently and accurately at a speed and intonation close to real speech
- Demonstrating knowledge of various forms of literacy work, such as folk poetry, tales, stories, instructional and popular works, articles suitable for children, and children's literature.
- Using books and libraries, including developing familiarity with the content and form of books, periodicals, newspapers, and their place and arrangement in the library.

Concerning **reading instruction in primary school** 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

According to Wallner-Paschon and Suchań (2012), teachers in Austrian schools may choose either whole language or phonics methods to teach initial reading. The curriculum provides a broad guide as to what to teach (i.e., broad aims are laid out), while teachers can select appropriate methods and materials, based on students' needs. Wallner-Paschon and Suchań note that "elements of the whole language method ... are used along with phonics to teach children to analyse the sound value of letters and syllables and to synthesise them as words" (p. 67).

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).

All of these comprehension strategies receive a major emphasis in intended language curricula in Austria (according to the PIRLS 2011 Encyclopedia (Mullis et al., 2012b, Vol. 1, Exhibit 8, pp. 34-35). However, as teachers' self-reports reveal, there seems to be a big discrepancy between the intended curriculum and what is going on in literacy instruction (s. 2.2.3 below).

Literacy curricula in secondary schools

There are several curricula for the various school types according to differing subjects. Using language and fostering reading and writing skills are explicitly written into the curriculum for German language for the Academic Secondary School, also with a focus on students whose first language is not German⁴⁵. The same goes for the Secondary School and the New Secondary School.

The general didactic frameworks are: Language and Communication, teaching principle: reading and narration.

Challenges: Training Courses for teachers must be clearly intensified in the field of interdisciplinary reading promotion and the value of literacy. School Authorities and the Universities should develop and implement a scientific concept of early reading instruction for teacher training and obligatory further education.

For the secondary level the training of reading comprehension, reading strategies, language awareness, narrative skills and multimodality must become a steady part of the secondary level curricula. Also in secondary schools the whole-staff-approach must be fostered (see below).

⁴⁵ See: https://www.bmbf.gv.at/schulen/unterricht/lp/lp_ahs_unterstufe.html.

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 Austria or other European countries. In order to describe the practice of reading instruction we would need extensive observational studies. However, there are only rare observational studies. 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.

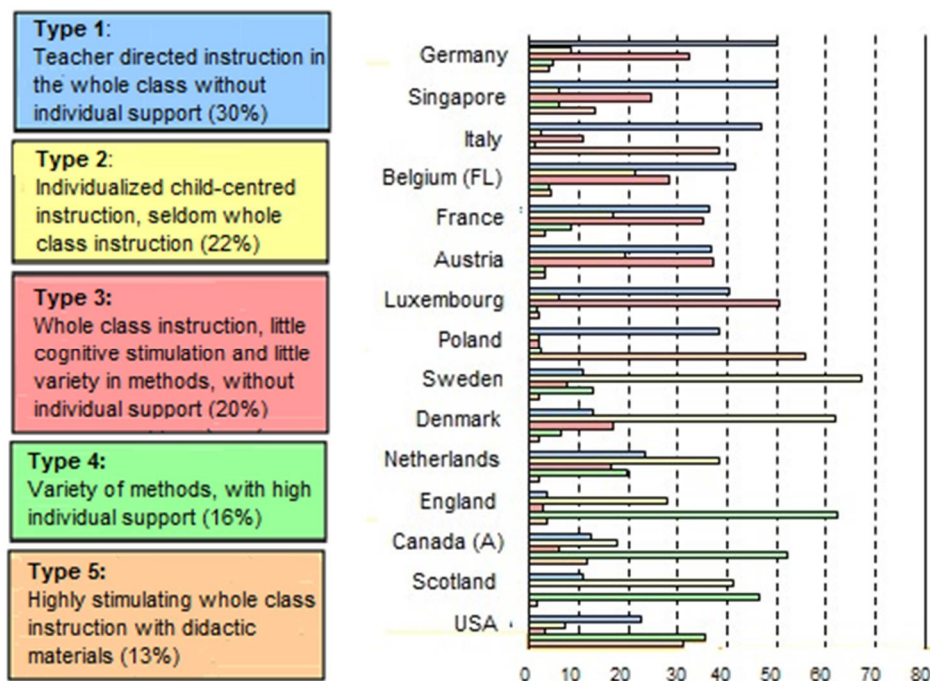
In PIRLS 2006, fourth-grade reading teachers reported about instructional materials, strategies and activities. In a latent class analysis Lankes and Carstensen (2007) identified 5 types of instruction:

- 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 figure 8 demonstrates, in Austria **Type 1 and 3 are dominant** - that are class-oriented methods of teaching with low individual support. Students often have to write answers to texts they had to read before. Creative approaches are quite rare. Often a teacher or a student is reading while the others have to listen or read along. Both methods are not very efficient for the training of how to understand a text.

Figure 8: Distribution of types of Reading Instruction (PIRLS 2006 data)



Source: Adapted from Lankes & Carstensen 2007

A difference occurs between teachers who have done special in-service training with regards to reading instruction/didactics during the last two years and those who did not for a long time: Those with recent training use more different and diverse reading instruction methods (e.g. reading aloud in front of the group, reading and presenting own books) than those without any recent training related to reading instruction (cf. Suchán/Breitfuß-Muhr)⁴⁶.

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. Students in Austria spent fewer instructional hours in schools (803 hours per year) compared with students on average across EU-24 countries (850 hours), but allocation of time to teaching the language of the PIRLS test (263 hours) was above the average across EU countries (241 hours). The number of hours allocated to reading in Austria is consistent with the recommended allocation of time dedicated to language/reading in the Austrian curriculum (30% of instructional time) (ELINET PIRLS 2011 Appendix, Table I4). According to Wallner-Paschon and Suchán (2012), the combined instructional time for German, reading and writing is approximately seven hours per week.

The average number of hours allocated to **teaching reading** each year in Austria as part of language instruction (64 hours) is slightly below the EU-24 average (68), though the EU average is itself low relative to, for example, the United States and New Zealand (both 131 hours). Teachers in Austria report allocating less time to teaching reading across the curriculum and in reading classes (97 hours) than on average across EU countries (147 hours) (Source: PIRLS 2011 (Mullis et al. 2012a, p. 214, Exhibit 8.4). EU averages from PIRLS 2011 database (see ELINET PIRLS 2011 Appendix, Table I3)).

No comparable data are available for secondary schools.

Activities of teachers to develop student's comprehension skills and to engage them

As pointed out above, among adolescents there are remarkable gaps in reading achievement - equivalent to almost three years of schooling - between students with good knowledge of reading strategies and those who have a limited knowledge of strategies, including meta-cognitive ones. There is a similar gap concerning the level of engagement. In view of these results it is of interest to look at the reports of teachers concerning reading strategies and engagement.

PIRLS 2011 provides information on the frequency with which teachers in Austria engage students in specific reading comprehension activities. The following are the percentages of students in Austria and on average across the EU-24 who engage in specified comprehension activities 'every day or almost every day':

- Locate information within the text: 44.7% (EU-24 = 65.5%)
- Identify main ideas of what they have read: 45.2% (EU-24 = 55.5%)
- Explain or support their understanding of what they have read: 57.6% (EU-24 = 61.6%)
- Compare what they have read with experiences they have had: 19.3% (EU-24 = 34.7%)
- Compare what they have read with other things they have read: 26.5% (EU-24 = 22.4%)
- Make predictions about what will happen next in the text: 5.6% (EU-24 = 22.4%)
- Make generalisations and inferences: 17.7% (EU-24 = 36.5%)
- Describe the style or structure of the text: 3.5% (EU-24 = 22.7%)
- Determine the Author's Perspective or Intention: 4.4% (EU-24 = 21.0%)

⁴⁶ See: <https://www.bifie.at/buch/875/9/2>.

Austria is below the EU-24 average in terms of the frequency with which students engage in generalised reading comprehension strategies such as locating information in the text, identifying the main idea and explaining or supporting their understanding. A number of higher-order comprehension activities are practised infrequently across EU-24 countries. However, strategies such as making predictions about what will happen next in the text, describing the style or structure of the text, and determining the author's perspective or intention are practised even less often in Austria.

In PIRLS 2011, teachers were also asked a series of questions designed to ascertain the extent to which **students are engaged in learning**. These included: "I summarise what students should have learned from the lesson"; "I relate the lesson to students' daily lives" and "I use questions to elicit reasons and explanations". 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 with such practices used 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, 52% of students in Austria 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).

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.

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:

Challenges: Teachers in Austria report allocating less time to teaching reading across the curriculum and in reading classes (97 hours) than on average across EU countries (147 hours). Therefore, the time spent on teaching reading as part of language instruction should be increased - at least at the EU-24 average of 68 hours and the low percentage of instructional practices to engage reading in "most lessons" must be improved. Also this needs an increased adoption of individualised reading strategies in the curricula and the provision of good manageable diagnostic tools to recognise individual strengths and weaknesses as basis for specific support.

In connection with digital literacy, schools must foster an active uptake of the media usage of young people in school education (e.g. different genres of young literature like fantasy, dystopia, mystery, steampunk ...) in order to increase the involvement of adolescent reading interests. Last but not least there must be more acknowledgement in the secondary schools/among the teachers that reading is not only a business of the German language classes but that every teachers has to promote and support reading within their lessons - whole-staff support ("Lesen in allen Fächern")

Courses on teaching reading and the cognitive psychology of reading are not a prerequisite and seldom offered. As such, fundamental knowledge about the complex processes of the development of reading skills is not sufficiently ensured amongst teachers.

Digital literacy part of the curriculum for primary and secondary schools

The Emedus Country Overview shows that media education is explicitly mentioned in curricula. A decree named “Unterrichtsprinzip Medienerziehung – Grundsatzterlass 2014” (Media education Principles) regulates the implementation of media education in curricula⁴⁷. The Austrian Ministry of Education developed a new strategy for ICT in 2012 that adheres to the objectives of “Europe 2020”. On the secondary level, media education is a cross-curricular subject and also a separate, optional subject. “In general secondary schools [...] ICT is taught as a separate subject and included in technology as a subject”.

Schools have a certain amount of liberty to adapt the national curricula to the local needs.

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 unrecognized, 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.

According to Wallner-Paschon and Suchań (2012), in 2009, the Austrian government mandated **Educational Standards** (Bildungsstandards) based on the core curriculum for German, reading and writing and mathematics in primary schools and for German (grade 4), mathematics and English in secondary schools (grade 8). These standards are tested obligatorily and periodically and provide a focus for planning and delivering lessons, and grading students. They also provide a focus for national assessments which occur on a three-year cycle (German, reading, writing was assessed in all schools at Fourth grade in 2014).

At the eighth grade, the first nationwide Educational Standards Assessment in mathematics took place in 2012 (English followed in 2013, and German in 2014). At the fourth grade, the Educational Standards in mathematics were assessed for the first time in 2013, followed by “German, reading, writing” in

⁴⁷ See: https://www.bmbf.gv.at/ministerium/rs/2012_04.pdf?51oyce.

2014. Baseline tests were conducted in 2009 (secondary schools) and 2010 (primary schools) with a random sample of schools in order to attain data about the actual state of the acquired competences at the beginning of the process. The results of the Educational Standards Assessments must not influence student grades.

Screenings for reading competence to identify struggling readers

Assessment standards and methods are prescribed by the language/reading curriculum (Mullis et al. 2012, p. 99, Vol. 1, Exhibit 7) in half of the European countries that participated in PIRLS 2011. Austria is a country in which goals and objectives, instructional methods or processes, and assessment standards and methods, but not instructional materials, are identified as being prescribed in the language/reading curriculum.

Teacher-generated assessment is based on classroom participation as well as on the results of oral, written, practical, and graphical work. There is also the possibility to use the tool "IKM" – Informelle Kompetenzmessung, which means "informal screening of competencies". It is an online testing tool that schools/teachers can use voluntarily for their own evaluation, but which is centrally provided by the BIFIE⁴⁸. The results are only for the teacher but don't have to be given to any other institution.

There is an obligatory screening at the third and fifth grade, the "**Salzburger Lesescreening**". It tests the basic literacy skills (see below). No formal external testing occurs during compulsory education that has consequences for individual students; only teachers assess student performance.

In lower secondary schools, students are required to pass classroom exams in German, mathematics, and the first foreign language (most commonly English).

Monitoring primary students' progress in reading

In PIRLS 2011, 54% of students in Grade 4 in Austria were taught by teachers who placed a major emphasis on evaluation of students' ongoing work as an assessment method to monitor students' progress in reading, compared with an EU-24 average of 84%. Just over two-thirds of students in Austria were taught by teachers who placed a major emphasis on use of classroom tests, compared with an EU-24 average of 51%. Just 11% of students in Austria were taught by teachers who used national or regional achievement tests, compared with an EU-24 average of 25% (ELINET PIRLS Appendix Table I8).

According to Wallner-Paschon and Suchań (2012), reading instruction should focus on identifying possible reading difficulties, including dyslexia. They refer to a number of instruments that teachers may use (but are not required to use) to diagnose difficulties: the *Salzburger Lese-Screening 1-4* (see above), and *Lesen können heißt lernen können* (Reading Means Learning), which focuses on analysis of students' oral reading.

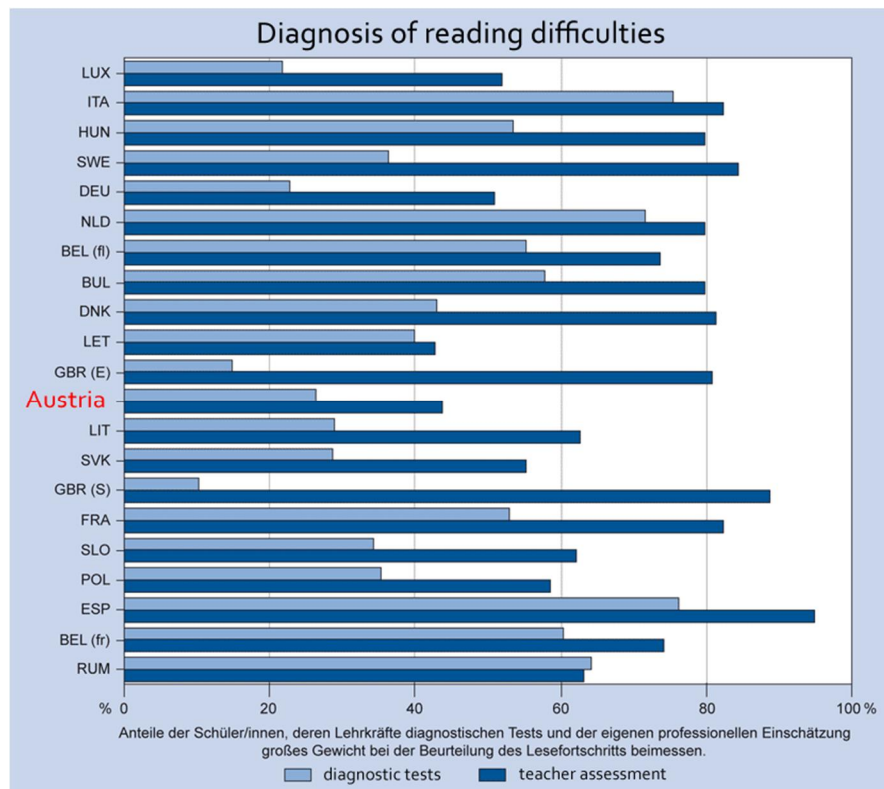
Beyond these classroom measures, teachers may call on educational and psychology counsellors or the school's special teachers and psychologists to examine a student's reading and develop an individualised remedial programme.

To measure the process in reading skills in Austria like in most EU countries the assessment of the teacher is weighted higher than independent testing. 44% of Austrian teachers value this personal evaluation very high, while just a quarter see diagnostic tests as important instruments. Austria is one

⁴⁸ See: www.bifie.at/ikm.

of the five European countries in which tests are of low importance while in Netherlands, Italy or Spain they are more valuable (over 70%).

Figure 9: Diagnosis of Reading Difficulties



Source: www.bifie.at/buch/875/9/3, accessed March 21, 2016

Challenges: There must be more tools and resources for an earlier identification of and support for children and adolescents with literacy difficulties. This would also include more extensive systematic assessment of their literacy skills: To gain a more complete picture of literacy levels in the classroom, regular literacy assessments should be implemented at each grade level.

Also formative assessment should be used as an integral part of teaching literacy in order to have an ongoing assessment to diagnose as early as possible learning difficulties and to respond with focused instruction tailored to the individual needs. This would be an important measure to prevent literacy difficulties. Also, in higher classes, formative assessments should be part of teaching (content area) literacy in order to evaluate students' performance levels, to identify individual needs and to shape teaching accordingly.

Finally, stronger links between diagnostics (assessment) and support should be made. The main goal of literacy assessments should be to identify struggling readers and learners in order to systematically support them, allocating attention and resources accordingly, targeting low performing schools - in need of additional funding and resources - as well as low performing students within schools. Assessments therefore need to be closely linked with support programmes delivered by adequately qualified teachers and specialists.

Supporting struggling literacy learners

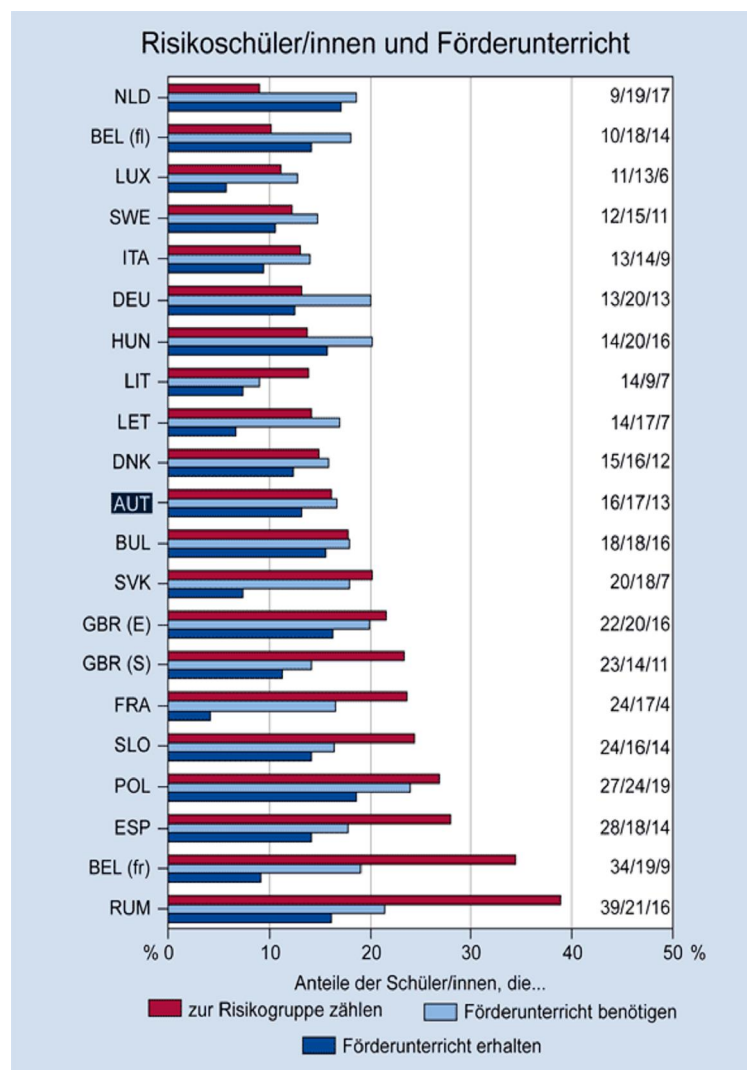
In Austria there are guidelines as to which students with reading difficulties should be supported within their classes. This includes the adaptation of teaching methods and workload to the needs and capacities of these students (internal differentiation). In order to provide individual assistance to students with difficulties in reading and spelling, individualised remedial programmes or plans may be developed by the teacher in cooperation with other teachers and the student's family. Support measures can also include small group and individual teaching (external differentiation).

The quality and significance of diagnosis by teachers is an important condition for differentiated support and individual learning success of students (Horstkemper 2006; Hascher 2003). Therefore the Ministry of Education stated that problems of reading have to be discovered very early and individual strategies of help and support has to be elaborated and applied (Bundesministerium für Unterricht, Kunst und Kultur 2013, p. 3).

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 17.3% of students in fourth grade in Austria are considered to be in need of remedial reading instruction, but only 12.7% really get support (ELINET PIRLS 2011 Appendix, Table K1). Hence, there is a shortfall of 4.6% between those in need and those in receipt. On average across EU 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. The following graph sorts the countries according to their percentage of the **risk group** (red) and shows the relation between the needed support (light blue) and the support really given (dark blue).

Figure 10:



Source: www.bifie.at/public/buch/875/gross/9-3-5.gif, accessed March 21, 2016

In Austria, 19.6% of students in fourth grade performed at or below the PIRLS low benchmark on overall reading (ELINET PIRLS 2011 Appendix, Table A6). Hence, the percentage of students in Austria in receipt of remedial reading instruction (12.7%) is below the percentage who performed poorly on PIRLS.

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 in primary school. Based on teacher responses to a series of questions in PIRLS 2011, 9% of students in Austria 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 26). Three percent of students in Austria are in classes where there is always access to a teacher aide to work with children with reading difficulties, while a further 29% are in classes where there is access sometimes. Corresponding EU averages are 13% and 34%, indicating relatively less use of teacher aides than in Austria. Access to volunteers to work with children with reading difficulties is similar in Austria as on average across EU countries.

Table 26: Percentages of Students in Classrooms with Access to Additional Personal to Work with Children with Reading Difficulties, Austria and EU-24 Average, PIRLS 2011

Access to...	Austria			EU-24 Average		
	Always	Some-times	Never	Always	Sometimes	Never
Specialised professional	8.6	36.7	54.7	24.9	41.8	33.3
Teacher aide	2.6	28.7	68.7	13.2	33.6	53.2
Adult/parent volunteer	1.9	17.0	81.1	2.8	17.5	79.7

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

Studies show that students benefit most from additional support if these support hours are especially dedicated to writing and reading as such and not to only concentration or partial competencies (Klicpera und Gasteiger-Klicpera (2001b)). As shown, literacy specialists are used very rarely or are not even available.

According to responses provided by teachers in PIRLS 2011, 39% of students in Austria 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 27). The corresponding EU average is higher at 55%. A larger proportion of students in Austria (46%) than on average across the EU-24 (37%) are taught by teachers who wait to see if performance improves with maturation. Nine in ten students in Austria are taught by teachers who spend more time working on reading **individually** with a student who falls behind – about the same as the EU-24 average (90%). Finally, almost all students in Austria (98%) and 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. What must be not forgotten is that many children do not get any support from their family background, so they would need extra help with their homework etc.

Table 27: Percentages of Students in Classrooms Where Teachers Engage in Specified Activities to Support Students Who Begin to Fall Behind in Reading, Austria and EU Average, PIRLS 2011

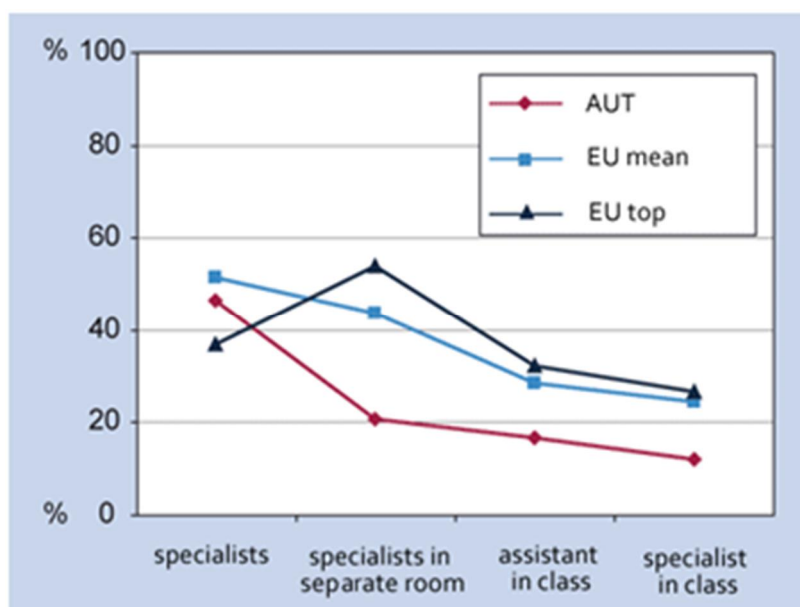
	Austria (Yes)	EU-24 Average (Yes)
I have students work with a specialised professional	39.0	55.2
I wait to see if performance improves with maturation	46.0	36.6
I spend more time working on reading individually with the student	91.0	90.1
I ask the parents to help the students with reading	97.8	96.9

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

As educational mandate the principle of support is anchored in Austrian school regulations. One hour a week is reserved and provided in primary schools for this issue (Kahlhammer & Wöll, 2007). Beside this remedial teaching there is the possibility to offer specific tutoring hours for students with difficulties in reading and writing.

The following graph shows the availability of supporting staff in various aspects (number of specialists, assistance in hours outside the class). In all four items Austria significantly is below the EU average in providing specific support for struggling readers.

Figure 11:



Source: www.bifie.at/buch/875/9/3

A very important and promising approach is the idea of **external reading mentors**. This form of face to face support by volunteers guarantees individual support, helps to raise self-esteem and is also an important factor of social cohesion. Pilot projects show very good results especially for children of non-German mother tongue backgrounds. To make this concept real fruitful there is need for an

appropriate legal basis and a nationwide curriculum. Students' reading socialisation is influenced very positively by this individual support (Bundesministerium für Unterricht, Kunst und Kultur, 2013, p. 16).

Challenges:

Strengthening remedial support: Whether remedial training takes place or remedial courses are offered is dependent on the school's resources, and very often when classes have to be cancelled, remedial courses are the first. There is evidence that not all children in need of remedial support in literacy receive it. Students who do not reach a minimal standard of literacy level should have a legal right to individual support.

It is in fact a challenge that more children are in need of remedial support in fourth grade, but don't get it. There is a shortfall of around 4 % between those in need and those who really receive additional support. This should be changed through more resources and better diagnostic tools as well as through more training for teachers to recognise any struggle.

Also Austria performs less well than many other countries when it comes to specialised professionals to work with students who have reading difficulties. There must be an emphasis on the fact that more additional personnel has to be made available for schools. Struggling readers need targeted individualised support. Individualised instruction works best when it is provided by teachers with specialist training in recognising and overcoming literacy problems, acting as a resource person for all primary teachers. There are too few literacy specialists in schools in Austria who are available to work with children with reading problems. The Austrian National Literacy Framework (see above) ("Österreichischer Rahmenleseplan") also formulates this need for more capacity.

Schools should provide more **support systems** (additional instruction time, additional experts like reading experts, psychologists, speech therapists) for students falling behind in literacy and should also evaluate more if and how the respective parents can help their children (Rosebrock, 2007).

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

Entry requirements for Initial Teacher Education

In Austria teachers are required to demonstrate satisfactory performance on a specific aptitude test or in an interview in which they are asked about their motivations for becoming teachers.

Practically there are three different ways of assessments:

- Certificate of final examination of upper secondary education decided at the level of the education authority (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2013a);
- A (written or oral) examination specific for admission to teacher education decided at the level of the education authority and at institutional level (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2013a);
- An interview specifically for admission to teacher education decided at the level of the education authority and at institutional level (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2013a).

Concerning **literacy and language skills**, most universities do not require an exam in language skills (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2011) except for future teachers of foreign languages. In Austria, future teachers for Primary School and Secondary Level 1 are tested in their language skills.

Selection methods for admission to initial teacher education

There are specific selection methods in Austria. Future students at the University Colleges of Teacher Education have to demonstrate satisfactory performance on specific tests and interviews as well as in self-assessments. At the Austrian University Colleges of Teacher Education all pre-service and in-service training for the primary level and secondary level I takes place. Future students in the Bachelor programme for Primary School and the Bachelor programme for Secondary School Level I have to do an entry exam before they get accepted to the respective studies. This entrance exam consists of:

- An online self-assessment (scientific coaching programme "Career Counselling for Teachers"; it is mandatory but the results only stay with the person) and
- an electronic aptitude test that is testing the cognitive, emotional and language skills (!) of the future teachers;
- For some special courses (e.g. nutrition or information & communication) they also have to do a face-to-face-assessment centre which lasts for about 15 minutes and should show the social and communicative skills.

For becoming a teacher at primary school they have to prove if they are musically gifted and if they are physically gifted. For the secondary level 1 they also have to prove subject-specific abilities and competencies.

Having a positive entrance exam means that you are allowed to start your studies at the University College of Teacher Education ("Pädagogische Hochschule")⁴⁹.

Challenges: The aim of having high quality teachers requires selective teacher recruitment policies, which already happens in Austria. Regarding the literacy skills of the students (future teachers) more effort should be made to foster these during the study courses.

Level of qualification and length of the required training for primary teachers

All teachers for the primary and secondary level are taught at university level in Austria. Austria requires primary teachers to have a bachelor's degree, which until 2015 has taken three years' study. In European comparison this is a relatively short duration. 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).

The national regulations for the so-called "New teacher training" stepped into action in the 2015-16 academic year. New professional training for those studying in the field of primary education has started at colleges of education nationwide. The minimum length of study for a teacher training degree under the new training at a public or private college of education amounts to at least 4 years (bachelor's degree) plus 1-1.5 years (master's degree). The basic structure of the new bachelor's and master's degrees is standardised. Training takes place according to age-group (primary or secondary) and not according to school type⁵⁰.

⁴⁹ See more at <http://phst.at/ausbildung/anmeldung-zu-den-studien/#sthash.ICSoXdmH.dpuf>.

⁵⁰ See: https://www.bmbf.gv.at/enfr/school/bw_en/bildungswege2015_e.pdf?58sww9.

Because this is coming up in future, more information about current reading teachers' formal education is offered by PIRLS 2011 (Mullis et al. 2011, exh. 7.1, p. 188). 4% of fourth grade students have teachers who completed a Postgraduate University Degree, 2% had teachers who completed a Bachelor's Degree or equivalent but not a Postgraduate Degree, and 93% had teachers who completed post-secondary education but not a Bachelor's Degree.

Table 28 shows the proportions of Grade 4 students taught by teachers with varying qualifications in PIRLS 2011.

Table 28: Percentages of Students Taught by Teachers with Varying Education Qualifications

Country	No Further than Upper Secondary Education	Completed Post-Secondary Education but Not a Bachelor's Degree	Completed Bachelor's Degree or Equivalent but Not a Postgraduate Degree	Completed Postgraduate University Degree**
Austria	0.5	92.9	2.3	4.3
EU-24	6.1	13.6	53.4	27.0

Source: PIRLS 2011 Database (see Mullis et al. 2012a, Exhibit 7.1, p. 188, and Appendix C, Table J1).

Length of required training of secondary teachers

The nationwide implementation in the field of the new secondary education starts from the 2016-17 academic year (in the provinces of Styria, Carinthia and Burgenland, the new training already applies from 1 October 2015) and takes place in cooperation with colleges of education and universities. Alongside this, the current training programmes (3-years-bachelor etc.) will continue until they expire⁵¹.

Until now there have been two ways of becoming a teacher at secondary level: At the University Colleges of Teacher Education ("Pädagogische Hochschule" – teachers for primary and lower secondary level are trained in Bachelor and Master courses) and at the Universities for the upper secondary resp. Gymnasium teachers (Bachelor and Master).

- Bachelor's level (3 years) or Master's level (5 years) to lower secondary teachers, according to the institutions;
- Master's level (5 years) to upper secondary teacher.
(c.f. European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2013a).

The "Pädagoginnenbildung NEU" (New Regulations connects the Universities and the Colleges of Teacher Education and allows more openness in educational ways.

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. In PIRLS 2011, primary teachers were asked to indicate the level of emphasis given to a number of topics deemed relevant to teaching literacy in their pre-service teacher education.

⁵¹ See: https://www.bmbf.gv.at/enfr/school/bw_en/bildungswege2015_e.pdf?58sww9.

PIRLS asked about whether teachers had emphasis on language, pedagogy and reading theory in their initial teacher training. For Austria, the following numbers can be stated:

Table 29: Percentages of Students Whose Teachers Reported that their Formal Initial Teacher Education Had Emphasised Study of Language of the Test, Pedagogy and Reading Theory, by Country and EU-24 Average (PIRLS 2011)

	Study Language of the Test			Study Reading Pedagogy			Study Reading Theory		
	Not at ALL	Overview or Introduction to Topic	It was an Area of Emphasis	Not at ALL	Overview or Introduction to Topic	It was an Area of Emphasis	Not at ALL	Overview or Introduction to Topic	It was an Area of Emphasis
Austria	0.8	36.1	63.1	2.1	50.5	47.5	4.9	57.9	37.2
EU 24 Average	1.8	24.5	73.7	4.6	36.2	59.2	15.7	54.7	29.6

Source: PIRLS 2011 Database. Based on PIRLS item ATBR20; see Appendix C, Section J.

Also most teachers in Austria have made experiences with assessment of reading or remedial reading in their formal initial teacher education.

Table 30: Percentages of Students Whose Teachers Reported that their Formal Initial Teacher Education Had Emphasised Study of Second Language, Assessment of Reading and Remedial Reading, by Country and EU-24 Average (PIRLS 2011)

Country	Second Language Learning			Assessment of Reading			Remedial Reading		
	Not at ALL	Overview or Introduction to Topic	It was an Area of Emphasis	Not at ALL	Overview or Introduction to Topic	It was an Area of Emphasis	Not at ALL	Overview or Introduction to Topic	It was an Area of Emphasis
Austria	56.5	33.8	9.7	23.0	66.7	10.4	4.1	58.5	37.4
EU 24 Average	44.5	42.0	13.5	21.4	52.0	26.6	23.6	54.8	21.7

Source: PIRLS 2011 Database. Based on PIRLS item ATBR20;

Challenges: Initial teacher education needs a compulsory focus on developing literacy expertise among future primary and secondary teachers. There is a need to foster this focus in Austria by mandatory training and CPD.

Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

CPD is mandatory for teachers under province-leadership, but not for the ones under the federal leadership. Since as early as 2001, all teachers who are subject to the legislation governing teachers employed by the Länder (provinces) have been obliged to take part in in-service teacher training for 15 hours per school year. For teachers at academic secondary schools and colleges for higher vocational education who are subject to the federal service legislation there is no obligation enshrined in the Service Act for Teachers to take part in in-service and continuing training.

Teachers can, however, be obliged to take part in in-service training events if there have been major school reforms, otherwise in-service and continuing training is voluntary. However, in-service and continuing training requires the approval of the superiors, as a rule the school heads. But teachers are obliged to ensure their teaching is state-of-the-art in terms of subject-specific didactics and pedagogy.

This results in the implicit consequence of a continual obligation to in-service and further development, both regarding subject-related and regarding didactic and pedagogic issues.

The school heads' duties also include HR development. In line with the quality development of the school and teaching (location-specific development plans), school heads can oblige teachers to take part in in-service and continuing training events. In addition, short programmes and HE-based CVET courses are offered which enable graduates to take on additional school-related tasks (such as training for the areas of school management, school library, student counselling, etc.) (Eurypedia Reports on CPD 2015).

Time frame and quality standards of CPD

Organisations that define CPD programmes: The area of in-service and continuing teacher training mainly comprises demand-oriented lectures. Current demand is oriented, on the one hand, towards nationwide central and legally defined innovation programmes and developments in the field of teaching, on the other hand towards required developments and implementation measures which are geared towards them.

The Circular No. 20/2007 (Decree on in-service and continuing teacher training at university colleges of teacher education) regulates the fundamental tasks and organisational framework conditions of in-service and continuing education and training provided at university colleges of teacher education. The central longer-term focuses of in-service and continuing teacher training are in each case published in BMUKK circulars (Eurypedia Reports on CPD 2015).

Institutions of in-service and continuing teacher education and training and their tasks:

In-service and continuing teacher training for teaching qualifications for primary schools and the pre-school year, general secondary schools, new secondary schools, special needs schools and prevocational schools is provided at university colleges of teacher education. This also applies to in-service and continuing training of teachers at academic secondary schools.

In-service and continuing training of teachers at part-time vocational schools and for partial areas at secondary technical and vocational schools and colleges for higher vocational education is mainly provided by public university colleges of teacher education.

The University College of Agrarian and Environmental Pedagogy is responsible for in-service and continuing training of teachers for part-time vocational schools and secondary technical and vocational schools for agriculture and for the specialist area of agriculture and environment at colleges for higher vocational education for agriculture and forestry.

Private university colleges of teacher education and private study programmes offer in-service and continuing training of teachers of religion at compulsory schools (Eurypedia Reports on CPD 2015).

In Austria there are no monetary incentives (such as allowances) for people to take part in continuing vocational education and training (CVET) events. The main motivation for participation is to keep subject-related knowledge up to date or obtain better qualifications for a future application (such as school head). If a teacher intends to work in the area of in-service teacher training, acquisition of specific qualifications is also a prerequisite (Eurypedia Reports on CPD 2015).

The national reading literacy initiative "Lesen fördern" sketched general CPD guidelines.

In Austria, a nationwide initiative on pupils' reading literacy '*Lesen fördern*', initiated by the Ministry of Education in 2005, included certain guidelines for CPD. For example, teacher training institutions were obliged to spend 10 % of their budget on reading literacy CPD programmes. Since 2009, the Coordination Point LITERACY (www.literacy.at) is coordinating all CPD programmes throughout Austria. It is also responsible for updating teachers on all aspects of literacy (including reading, writing and using the new media) (Teaching Reading in Europe, p. 109).

Participation in CPD in Austria

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. The data for Austria and for the EU-24 average is given in table 31.

Table 31: Percentages of Students with Teachers Allocating Varying Amounts of Time to Professional Development Related to Reading in the Last Two Years – Austria and EU-24 Average

	No time		Some Time but Less than 16 Hours		16 Hours or More		Percent of Students Whose Teachers Read Children's Books At Least Once a Month for Professional Development
	Percent of Students	Mean Reading Score	Percent of Students	Mean Reading Score	Percent of Students	Mean Reading Score	
Austria	7.09	525.29	76.11	529.07	16.8	529.96	62.66
EU 24 Average	29.3	536.3	52.9	534.2	17.8	535.8	67.6

Source: PISA 2011 database (see Mullis et al., 2012a, Exhibit 7.4, page 196, and Table J4 in Appendix C).

Literacy CPD programmes - part of the national strategy for enhancing reading and literacy skills

"In Spain, Lithuania, Austria and Norway, the development of CPD programmes on literacy-related topics is currently part of an overall national strategy on improving reading and literacy skills" (Teaching Reading in Europe, p. 109).

The next step is the **Austrian National Literacy Framework** (Österreichischer Rahmenleseplan) (see above), which is going to concentrate on this topic from 2016 on. Literacy promotion has to be the focus of CPD as well as the whole-staff approach when it comes to reading (Bundesministerium für Bildung und Frauen). "Reading is a crucial part of all subjects. The teachers of one school have to work together to achieve this goal of higher literacy skills among the students. They are all asked to promote reading motivation and reading comprehension" (Bundesministerium für Bildung, Wissenschaft und Kultur, p. 1).

Challenges: There is a strong need for improving the quality of continuing professional development targeted at building literacy expertise of teachers. There should be a clear obligation for teachers and teacher trainers to take part in scientifically grounded training and continuing professional development. Schools and teachers must be engaged more to collaborate with external experts, volunteers and libraries to support the children.

Digital literacy as part of initial teacher education

The "Internet Declaration" – "As regards ICT for initial teacher training, the Declaration recommends the introduction of a minimum standard of ICT infrastructure for all teacher training institutions and to improve the didactical use of ICT in teacher training, for example, through e-coaches for teachers, e-schools for professional teacher training, introduction of e-didactics as obligatory course in initial teacher training, novel e-learning software" (Hornung-Prähäuser/Geser 2010; c.f. Rizza 2011).

Challenges: Fostering digital literacy skills of teachers and students needs a stronger emphasis on the teachers' digital literacy. Austrian teachers must strongly be provided with obligatory professional training throughout their professional life.

5.2.6 Improving the quality of literacy teaching for children and adolescents: Programmes, initiatives and examples

Providing more resources for literacy-related projects at school

"An important educational initiative in Austria is IMST. The initiative was previously called Innovations in Mathematics, Science, and Technology, but since German recently has become part of the project it has been renamed "Innovationen Machen Schulen Top" (Innovations to Make Top Schools). Originally, IMST was established as an immediate reaction to the TIMSS 1995 results for upper secondary schools and given the task of analyzing these results. Today's goal is establishing and embedding a culture of innovation in Austrian schools to improve teaching in German language, including literacy, mathematics, natural science, computer science, engineering. IMST provides subject-related, organisational and financial support for network projects as well as for thematic teacher projects" (Wallner-Paschon/Suchań 2012, p. 62⁵²). Under IMST there are many projects running in connection with literacy.

Pre-service and in-service teacher training

Another measure to improve reading achievement is a coordination centre for reading, created to support primary school teachers and schools and offer nationwide programmes. As a consequence of the PISA 2003 results, the Education Ministry founded the competence and advisory centre "Koordinationsstelle: Lesen" (Coordination point: Reading) to address issues related to reading. The centre is staffed by a group of delegates from all nine Austrian provinces, nominated by University Colleges of Teacher Education (Wallner-Paschon/Suchań 2012, p. 62).

Each University College of Teacher Education can choose its own focus for their studies and trainings. Most of them explicitly have chosen "reading"/"literacy" which means that they offer a bundle of courses with regards to literacy to their students/in-service teachers or that they engage more in national or international projects dealing with literacy.

⁵² See: www.imst.ac.at/.

Whole-staff approaches in literacy-related professional development for teachers

The whole-staff approach forms the basis for in-school CPD training (Schulinterne Lehrerfortbildung, acronym: SCHILF) or for cross-school CPD training in Austria. This training often encompasses all members of the staff. These in-school training sessions are often focussed on important topics of pedagogical school development, but they can also be on content-related topics such as literacy if it is part of the school's profile. For example in the federal state of Styria, there are SCHILF offered by the University College to schools dealing with literacy as such or with literacy in multilingual contexts.

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 (World Bank 2016, Naudeau et al. 2011). 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 (Sylva et al. 2004).

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 27.6 % Austria is close to the European average.

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 (UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre 2012). 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). The child poverty rate in Austria (7.3%) is among the lowest in Europe.

Mother's education level

The PIRLS 2011 database offers information about mother's level of education referring to ISCED levels. The figures for Austria are presented below and point to a very low proportion of mothers with

a low level of education, 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: 1.0 % (5.3%)

ISCED 2: Lower secondary education: 7.0 % (16.7 %)

ISCED 3: Upper secondary education: 62.8 % (36.1%)

ISCED 4: Post-secondary non-tertiary education: 7.8 % (7.1 %)

ISCED 5B: Tertiary education (first stage) with occupation orientation: 8.0 % (9.5%)

ISCED 5A: Tertiary education (first stage) with academic orientation 2.4 % (13.9%)

BEYOND: 9.7 % (10.1%)

Teenage mothers

Adolescent pregnancy can have negative social and economic effects on girls, their families and communities. Many girls who become pregnant have to drop out of school. A girl with little or no education has fewer skills and opportunities to find a job. According to UNICEF (2001a) the percentage of teenage mothers is 13,2% for Austria (12 out of 1.000 young girls between 16 and 19 years). In 2014, 1.671 babies were given birth to by teenage mothers (cf. Statistik Austria, 2015a). The range for the European countries participating in ELINET 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 (2013, Figure A 7), in Austria the percentage of children living mainly with a single parent is 7.0 %. 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), in Austria the proportion of children with parents born outside the country is 17.0% or only one parent born outside the country is 11.0% (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 6.6% (for an overview of European countries see table A7 in Appendix B). There is quite a significant performance gap in reading competence at grade 4 between children who spoke the language of the test before starting school (mean reading score 533) and those who did not speak the language (mean reading score 490).

More than 20 % of all students in Austria have a first language other than German.

The National Education Report Austria 2012 (English version, p. 26) states: "In the 2010–11 school year, 207,000 pupils with a first language other than German were enrolled in Austria's schools. Among these, approximately 110 different languages were spoken." "The Integration of the European Second Generation (TIES) shows that Turkish second generation pupils in Germany and Austria have significantly higher percentages of early school leavers as well as significantly lower percentages of highly educated school leavers than Sweden and France. Different structural characteristics of these

education systems, such as early participation in crèches and kindergartens, late separation in ability groups and school types as well as all-day schools for all pupils, make the difference" (National Education Report 2012, engl., p. 26).

Challenges: Also in connection with the refugees coming to Austria, there is an enormous need to provide teachers, schools, institutions of early childhood education and care as well as libraries with more bi-lingual literature and materials. They are often not properly equipped to serve this need. Also more resources are needed in schools to deal with many different social backgrounds and different first languages, including more further training for teachers and librarians. Crèches and kindergarten must also be supported to ensure the first steps of social integration of families with a migrant background.

In Austria there is the strong tradition of early differentiation – when children are 10 years old. Nevertheless, for years there have been ideas to have full-time day schools but also comprehensive schools until the age of 14. This would support equity for those with fewer resources from home for example.

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 Austria is 5.8 %. 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 1.3 % in Austria (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 7.1 % (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).

Cognitive or sensory disabilities

The number of children with cognitive or sensory disabilities in kindergartens is unknown because the data is not collected statistically. From older surveys, however, it can be seen that more ten percent of all children in Austria have special needs because of physical, sensory, learning disabilities or development disorders.

According to Eurydice/Webgate (2015) specialists in the area of mobile development support for children in kindergarten are available: special kindergarten teachers, special after-school care centre teachers, psychologists, remedial language teachers and physiotherapists. The Salzburg childcare law requires that in integrative groups with children with increased educational needs an additional special kindergarten teacher has to be employed at least occasionally⁵³.

⁵³ See: https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Austria:Separate_Special_Education_Needs_Provision_in_Early_Childhood_and_School_Education.

Regarding the school system it is currently being discussed (2016) to abolish Special Schools and teach all children together in so-called inclusive classes. This would need more internal differentiation, more professional staff, more different methods (e.g. back to reform-pedagogics) and more autonomy for schools.

In Austria, there are different models of Integrated Education, such as:

- Integrated classes: disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils are taught in joint classes by a team of teachers (primary, lower secondary and special needs school teachers).
- Special tutor classes: according to their respective disadvantage, children are given additional lessons by a special needs school teacher within the framework of conventional school classes.
- Co-operative classes: as far as organisation is concerned, there is a separation of primary, lower secondary and special needs school classes, but upon a joint decision by the respective teachers some or even all lessons may be held on an integrated basis.
- Upon request of the person vested with the right of education, disadvantaged children may attend an optional 10th year of schooling. In certain cases attendance of a special needs school may even be made possible beyond the 10th year of schooling (cf. Bundesministerium für Bildung und Frauen 2014a).

5.3.3 Promoting Pre-School attendance

The OECD Family Database (2014) offers figures of participation rates at age 3, 4 and 5. According to 2010 statistical data, the participation rate is 99.1% for 5-year-olds, 89.9% for 4-year-olds, and 56.7% for 3-year-olds (OECD 2014) (for an overview of European countries see table C2 in Appendix B). For children between the ages of 5 and 6, i.e. one year prior to the beginning of primary education, attendance at Kindergarten is compulsory. Approximately 13% of children attend mixed-age groups ("Altersgemischte Betreuungseinrichtungen") for children from 1 to 6 years, which are mostly provided in Kindergartens (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice/Eurostat 2014, p. 179).

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. 2012a).

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 for Austria:

- 3 years and more: 69 % (average reading score 532)
- Between 1 and 3 years: 27 % (average reading score 530)
- 1 year or less: 3 % (average reading score 518)
- Did not attend: 1 %

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

In September 2010 mandatory kindergarten attendance for 16 to 20 hours (half day) over a minimum of at least 4 days per week was introduced for 5-year-olds (i.e. children one year before school entry). This attendance is free of charge for one year. Austria, as many other countries, provides at least one year of free pre-primary education if it is a public institution. Some provinces offer additional free childcare for specific age groups⁵⁴.

⁵⁴ See: webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Austria:Early_Childhood_Education_and_Care.

Apart from that, there are private kindergartens where you have to pay and also Tagesmütter/-väter are to be paid.

No child should be excluded from preschool because parents cannot afford to send their children to preschool/kindergarten institutions if they have to pay. Many European countries provide at least one year of free pre-primary education.

In Austria, an agreement between Federal and State levels has been drawn up stating that half-day kindergarten attendance in the year before starting school should be free of charge for parents, in effect since the beginning of the kindergarten year 2009/2010.

Many parents are also taking the advantage of being part of Family-Children-groups or are visiting regularly Family centres which are often organised in the communities on municipality level and are also striving to include e.g. migrant parents into the community.

Challenges: There is a strong need for having more whole-day opportunities in kindergarten or childcare-centres in order to assist parents if necessary (see above).

The potential benefits of high-quality ECEC are particularly significant for children from disadvantaged groups. The idea of offering a second kindergarten-year for free and mandatory is being discussed (see above).

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.

In Austria the attendance at kindergarten or at a parent-organised daycare centre (Kindergruppe) has been mandatory in Austria for five year old children since September 2010. This last year before entering school should give equal chances to all children, independent from their socio-economic background and individual resources. There is a strong focus on language and literacy and language assessments are made on a professional basis, supported by the Federal States and institutions (Language level tests, see above). Emphasis is put on identifying pre-school children in an early stage if they have language problems. If necessary, parents are informed and further support from an expert is recommended. In the Länder there are also specialists whose counsel can be sought by the kindergarten. One method is to make an observation using a handbook⁵⁵.

⁵⁵ See: http://www.verwaltung.steiermark.at/cms/dokumente/11684097_74837162/c5317a86/Beobachtungsbogen_BESK_2.0.pdf, only in German.

Challenges: In Austria, more easy-to-use diagnostic tools should be developed and communicated to teachers of all levels. This should allow them to better identify language problems at an early stage and to organise support measures. To realise this, also external experts and the financial basis for these are strongly needed in the institutions as well as further investments in solid offers in Parent Education and progress in language testing traditions (see above).

Also, if the Special Schools are going to be completely abolished within the next years, this would mean an enormous change process for all teachers and the school system (resources, digital learning, barrier-free access etc.).

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

According to Wallner-Paschon and Suchań (2012, p. 68), since the 2006-07 school year, primary school children requiring language support (including immigrant children) can receive up to 11 hours of small group instruction per week. However, this varies from school to school.

In the academic year 2013/2014, 33,920 students were taught in their first language (18.5% of all pupils in all types of schools with another first language than German). There are 414 mother-tongue-teachers in Austria, teaching the following 25 languages: Albanian, Arabic, Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian, Bulgarian, Chinese, Dari, French, Italian, Kurdish/Kurmanci, Kurdish/Zazaki, Pashto, Persian, Polish, Portuguese, Romanes, Romanian, Russian, Slovakian, Slovenian, Somali, Spanish, Czech, Chechen, Turkish and Hungarian (cf. BMBF 2015).

Since the 1990s, intercultural education" was (by law) introduced in Austria's secondary school system as a principle in school education. The other school forms also have various multi-cultural references in their curricula. Schools are free to put the emphasis on intercultural key areas within the autonomous development of their additional internal curriculum. There is also "DaZ" – Deutsch als Zweit-/Fremdsprache / German as a foreign/second language, established as special didactic approaches in the curricula for German lessons (cf. BMBF 2015).

The ideal situation is that the children are supported in learning German as well as in their first language – even in regular classes in school. They should be empowered to also read texts in their first language in school, read to other students. Multilingualism is seen as a resource and should also raise interest for other languages among the other pupils (Bundesministerium für Unterricht, Kunst und Kultur, 2013, p. 12).

Challenges: The rate of pupils with migrant background or refugees is constantly increasing in Austria. In most of the cases these children would need more support from teachers, but as this is not always possible, there have to be more resources to get professionals from outside the school, such as voluntary reading mentors who come to the school. For such volunteers, more structure is needed nationwide, some first projects have already started (see below).

There is also a strong need for more multi-lingual books or material in schools and libraries (due to lack of financial resources) as well as literature and work books in the respective foreign languages.

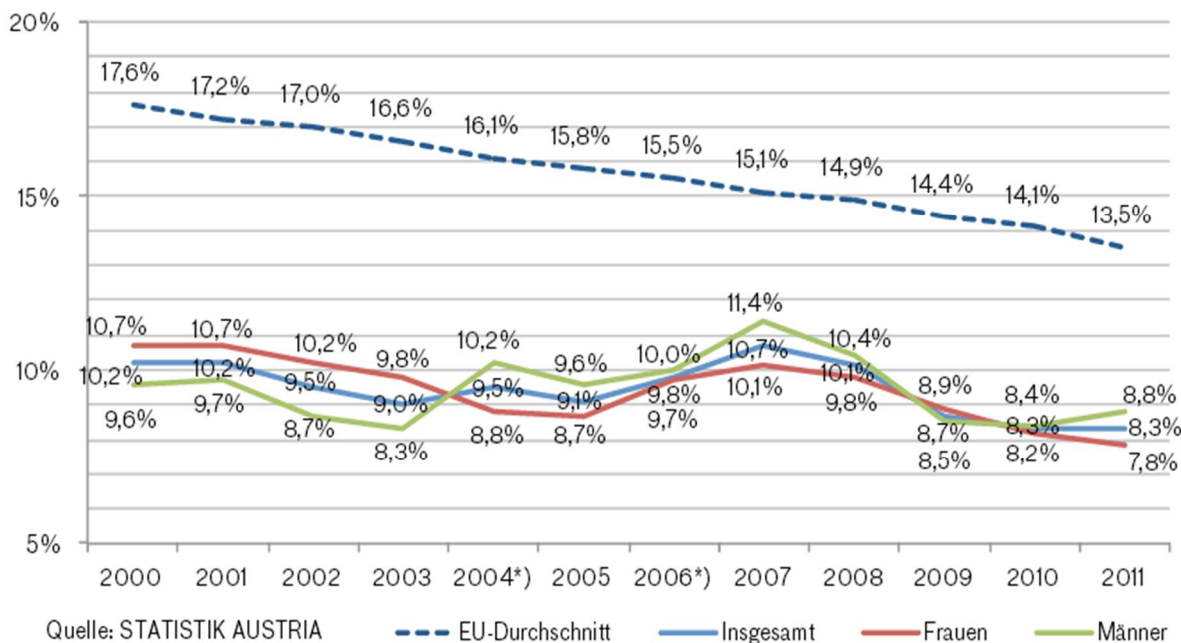
Teachers (school and kindergarten) and librarians have to be trained more in giving the necessary support to people with a first language other than German.

5.3.6 Preventing early school leaving

Literacy provision and participation in secondary schooling: 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.

Figure X:



Source: Nationale Strategie zur Verhinderung frühzeitigen (Aus-)Bildungsabbruch, BMUKK 2012, p. 14)⁵⁶.

The graph shows that there are few successes in reducing the proportion of early school leavers within the last decade. According to Eurostat 2014, in Austria, the rate of early school leavers was 7.3% in 2013, down from 7.6% a year before. The target value of the early school leaving (ESL) rate Austria set for 2020 is 9.5%. The duration of compulsory education in Austria is 9 years. Children start school at the age of 6; compulsory schooling ends at 15 years (Compulsory Education in Europe 2013/14). As concerns students (ISCED 1-6) aged 15-24 years, we find that in Austria 55.5% of 15-24 year olds were in some form of education in 2012, which was below the EU-27 average value of 62.0%.

The percentage of 18-year olds in education was 72.3% in 2011, which situated Austria below the EU-27 average (80.7%). In 2012, this indicator for Austria went up to 73.4%, still well below the 78.4% the country registered in 2006.

⁵⁶ See: https://www.bmbf.gv.at/schulen/unterricht/ba/schulabbruch_eslstrategie_24401.pdf?4dzgm2.

There is a European Toolkit for Schools for tackling ESL⁵⁷ that is used and promoted in Austria. There are also the whole-school approach, special coaches and trainings for young people to help them find their talents and skills and a job opportunity or training/school.

There is also a National Strategy to prevent ESL in Austria (c.f. BMUKK 2012).

Challenges: As said above, early differentiation has to be avoided, first and foremost in urban areas. Early selection correlates with the risk of Early School leaving in Austria and has the danger of further excluding groups at risk.

The group of Early School-Leavers is highly correlated with migration and socio-economic status of the parents. All named measures above are therefore applicable to prevent those young people from leaving educational or training systems.

5.3.7 Addressing the gender gap among adolescents

Gender-related preferences and reading modalities need a differentiation concerning texts or settings in school or in one's homework. Female and male reading can be very different. Schools are asked to provide such texts and settings to reduce the gender gap (Bundesministerium für Unterricht, Kunst und Kultur, 2013).

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

Programmes against poverty

In 1995, a network of more than 40 social organisations, educational institutions and research facilities has been founded. It prepares facts, explains contexts and backgrounds and shows strategies against poverty and social exclusion. That strong network manages to keep the fight against poverty on the agenda: www.armutskonferenz.at. The network is very active in preventing child poverty.

The so-called family pass offers families concessionary rates for leisure activities (e.g. cheaper passes for the library) in addition to the wide range of family benefits. This concessionary card is granted by the provinces under several different names subject to certain criteria being met.

Families with low incomes get supported by the municipalities with a Family Income Supplement. Other charities such as the Caritas Family Support Centre, Volkshilfe Österreich or Hilfswerk Österreich provide support in the home and with childcare while the mother and child are in hospital and during their first few weeks at home. Under certain circumstances, the costs of this support can be covered in full or in part by the provinces and municipalities.

Family allowance is granted to parents for their children irrespective of whether the parent is in employment or their income level. If there are several children in a family, the total amount of family allowance rises (sibling supplement scale).

Apart from that, Austria as a social welfare state secures the subsistence income for everyone as a measure of fighting poverty.

⁵⁷ See: <http://www.schooleducationgateway.eu/en/pub/resources/toolkitsforschools.htm>.

Family literacy programmes for migrant parents

HIPPY (Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters) - an internationally accepted and proven programme for Early-Childhood-Intervention - is also active in Austria.⁵⁸

"Bookstart : growing with books" offers material and impulses for parents in various languages⁵⁹ and contributes to more social inclusion.

In Austria there is also a close net of parent-child-groups, where intercultural aspects are reflected and specific support is given⁶⁰.

Policies / programmes to prevent early school leaving

In 2012, Austria adopted a national strategy against ESL (BMUKK 2012). It aims to inter-connect measures at the structural level (reforms and improvements within the school education system); measures at the level of the specific school (initiatives on school quality and improvements of teaching and learning environments); and measures to support students at risk (youth coaching as a new nationwide measure to support students at risk). As there are already a number of compensatory initiatives in place in Austria, the focus is currently on prevention and intervention. Among others, the strategy comprises of measures on the individualization of learning and teaching, the implementation of educational standards, the new competence-based and partly standardised university entrance exam and a focus on quality assurance (European Commission, 2013, p. 33).

The Ministry of Education created a specific unit to implement, coordinate and monitor policies against ESL (European Commission 2013, p. 33).

Youth coaching has been developed by the Ministry for Social Affairs in cooperation with the Ministry of Education to keep, or reintegrate, young people in the education and training system. The target group includes pupils who are at risk of not attaining any qualification at lower or upper secondary level; young people below the age of 19 who are currently not in education, employment or training (NEET) as well as young people up to the age of 25 who require special educational support. Youth coaching aims to advise, support and assist young people and ensure their sustained integration into the (upper secondary) education and training system. Where this is not yet possible, young people should reach alternative objectives or sub-objectives. Youth coaching providers closely cooperate with schools (for identification of at risks pupils) and with different institutions (such as Public Employment Service Austria, training workshops, projects for young people with mental health impairments) which are suitable for the young people during or after their coaching period⁶¹ (European Commission 2013, p. 40).

Production schools, or similar models, have been established in Austria. Young people may gather practical experience of job-related processes and requirements as well as insights into 'what professional life is about'. The concept combines academic learning programmes and practical work experience. The aim is to raise the motivation of young people to engage in learning and to provide them with the experience necessary to make informed decisions on their future careers. Production schools often offer workshops for learning by doing, vocational guidance, socio-pedagogic support,

⁵⁸ See: <http://www.hippy.at/>.

⁵⁹ See: <http://www.lebensspuren.net/buchstart/interkulturell.html>.

⁶⁰ See: <http://www.elternbildung.or.at/elternbildung/publikationen/broschuerefluechtlingshil>.

⁶¹ See: www.bmukk.gv.at/jugendcoaching.

practical experience and assistance in improving basic education skills (European Commission 2013, p. 41).

Promoting preschool attendance, especially among disadvantaged children

The mandatory year in kindergarten for children of the age of 5 was an important step towards inclusion of disadvantaged children. A second mandatory year (also offered free of charge for the parents) is currently being prepared and discussed at political level. This would help disadvantaged children even more to get the same chances.

Fostering intercultural and multilingual exchange

There are a lot of initiatives in and outside schools for intercultural and multilingual activities such as "Miteinander lesen" (reading together) in Salzburg⁶² or "Grenzenlos lesen" (Reading without borders) by the Austrian Library Association⁶³. Meanwhile in more than a hundred of public libraries and therefore municipalities such initiatives are building strong networks in Austria on local basis.

⁶² See: www.stadt-salzburg.at/internet/leben_in_salzburg/integration/miteinander_362539/miteinander_lesen/miteinander_lesen_20_366983/miteinander_lesen_2010_318235.htm.

⁶³ See: https://www.bvoe.at/themen/grenzenlos_lesen.

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Further Links used in this report (all accessed March 21, 2016):

Austrian Library Service: www.bvoe.at, www.bvoe.at/buechereilandkarte

Austrian National Literacy Framework: www.leseplan.at/

Austrian Book Club for Young People: www.buchklub.at

Austria reads: Meeting point Library / Österreich liest. Treffpunkt Bibliothek: www.oesterreichliest.at/

Bookstart Austria: www.buchstart.at

Children's Literature Festival: www.bookolino.at

City Library of Graz: <http://stadtbibliothek.graz.at>

Digital Reading/E-Books:

<http://mediathek.salzburg.at/>

www.onleihe.at/wien

www.media2go.at

www.onleihe.at/vorarlberg

Early Intervention: www.help.gv.at/Portal.Node/hlpd/public/content/122/Seite.1220210.html

HIPPY-Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters: www.hippy.at

IFLA Guidelines:

Roles and tasks for public libraries: the Public Library Manifesto (<http://www.ifla.org/publications/iflaunesco-public-library-manifesto-1994>)

Guidelines for Library Services for Young Adults (<http://www.ifla.org/files/assets/libraries-for-children-and-ya/publications/ya-guidelines2-en.pdf>) or for Babies and Toddlers (<http://www.ifla.org/files/assets/hq/publications/professional-report/100.pdf>)

IFLA School Library Guidelines (<http://www.ifla.org/files/assets/school-libraries-resource-centers/publications/ifla-school-library-guidelines.pdf>)

International Institute for Children's and Youth Literature: (www.jugendliteratur.net)

Lesen fördern! / Promote reading! Retrieved from

www.bmbf.gv.at/schulen/pwi/pa_archiv/lesen_foerdern.html,

www.bmbf.gv.at/schulen/pwi/pa_archiv/initiative_lesen_12385.pdf?4eysu2

Literacy - Coordination point: www.literacy.at/

Literacy (2014). Leseclubs im Sommer. Willkommen im Club! www.literacy.at/index.php?id=408

Literacy (2014). Lesemonat April. Der Monat im Zeichen des Lesens: www.literacy.at/index.php?id=303.
Translation: JK.

Pre-academic paper/High School Diploma / Vorwissenschaftliche Arbeit: www.ahs-vwa.at

Read and Win Contest: www.readandwin.info

Readers' Voices / Leserstimmen: www.leserstimmen.at/

Reading State Salzburg / Leseland Salzburg: <http://leseland.salzburg.at/>

STUBE – Info Centre for Children’s and Youth Literature: www.stube.at

Upper Austrian Children and Youth Media Survey 2014/2015: www.edugroup.at/innovation/forschung/

Wir lesen! / We are reading!: www.wirlesen.org