



LITERACY IN CYPRUS

COUNTRY REPORT

CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

March 2016

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1 Introduction

This report on the state of literacy in Cyprus is one of a series produced in 2015 and 2016 by ELINET, the European Literacy Policy Network. ELINET was founded in February 2014 and has 78 partner organisations in 28 European 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

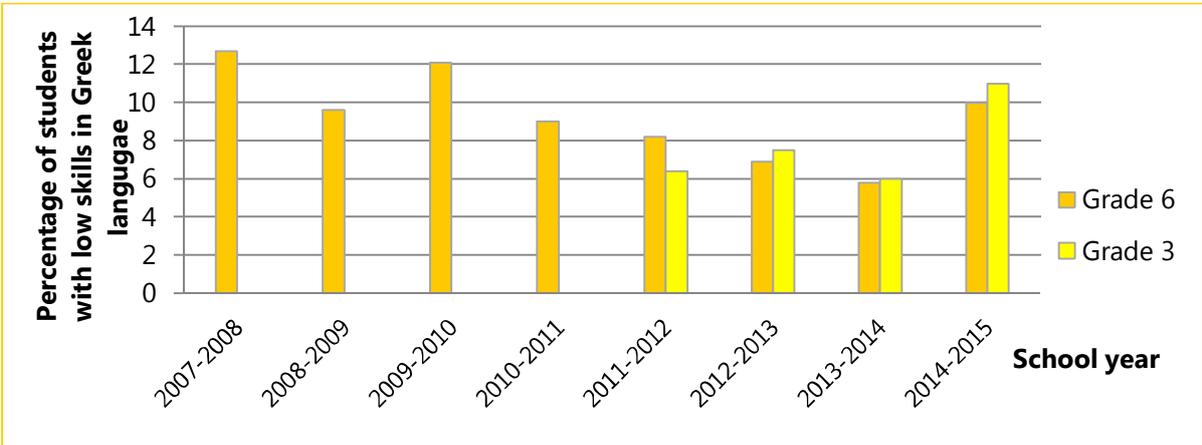
Literacy performance data for primary school children from international surveys are limited to the results of PIRLS 2001 (when Cyprus last participated in PIRLS). As fourteen years have passed since then, these results are considered outdated. Literacy data for 15 year olds from PISA 2012 show that students in Cyprus achieved a mean score of 449 on PISA overall reading. This was significantly lower than the EU-27 average of 489. In terms of the percentage distribution of 15-year-old students on PISA levels, 32.9% students were identified below level 2 and therefore are considered low performing readers, and only a very small percentage of 4% were identified on the higher levels of the PISA reading literacy scale (levels 5 and 6). PISA 2012 results also reveal that the gap in reading performance between students in the top and bottom quarters of the socioeconomic scale (i.e. 85 points) is not significantly different from the EU-27 average. Furthermore, in Cyprus there is a wider gap between the two genders, in favor of girls, in relation to their reading performance (21% of girls and 45% of boys in Cyprus performed at or below level 2 on PISA reading literacy). In relation to the gap in reading performance between native students and those with an immigrant background, this was found to be quite small (i.e. 10 score points). The corresponding gap across EU-27 was 42 points.

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

Percentage of students with low level skills in Greek language

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

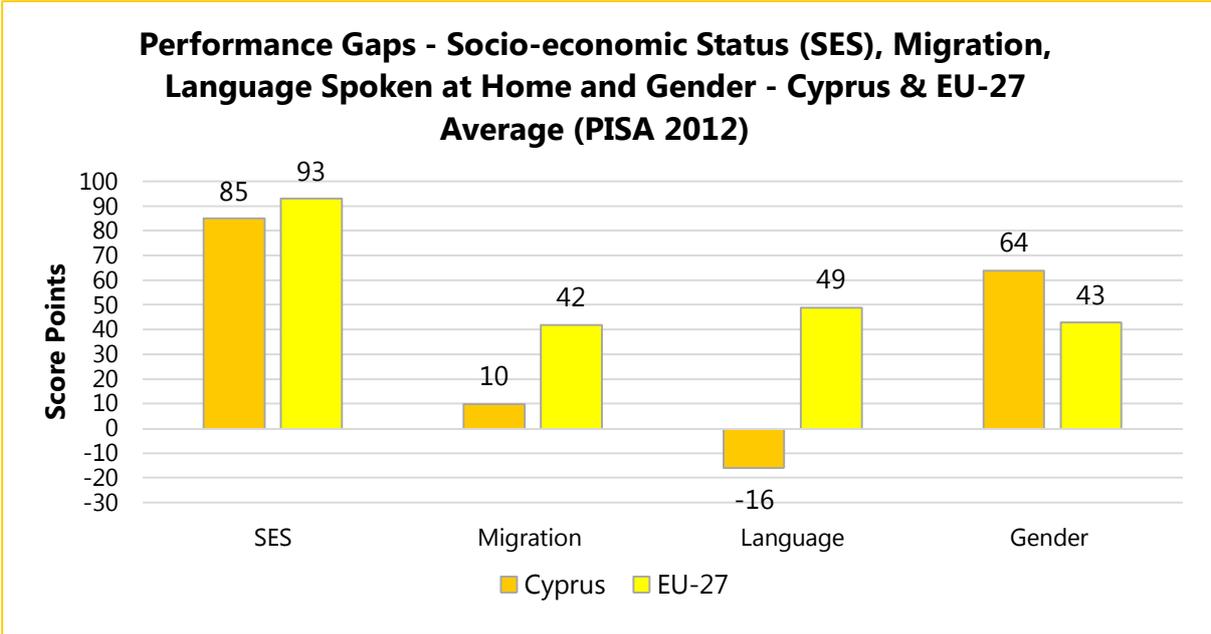
Figure 1: PFL longitudinal results for students identified with low level skills in Greek language



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

Closing the achievement gaps between various groups of literacy learners is a major challenge in all European countries. In Cyprus the following gaps are identified through the PISA 2012 shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Performance Gaps in Cyprus and on Average across EU Countries - Post-Primary Level



SES: Top – Bottom quartile on PISA ESCS scale; Migration: Native – first/second generation immigrants; Language: Speaks language of the PISA test at home – speaks another language; Gender: Girls - Boys

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

Creating a Literate Environment

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

Pre-Primary Years

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

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

Children and Adolescents

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

One of the most important initiatives is the installation of the librarian system ABEKT 5.5 and 5.6 that supports cataloguing and management of libraries. The user interface of ABEKT is available in the Greek and English languages. In 2013, upgraded technical support was extended to the libraries of Primary and Secondary Education and the ABEKT system has been installed in 144 school libraries. Furthermore, the Cyprus Library Network, which has been developed and is evolving under the Ministry of Education and Culture in cooperation with the National Documentation Centre (EKT), provides access to the Catalogues of Public, Municipal, School and other Libraries⁶.

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

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

⁶ Available at: <http://www.cln.com.cy/>.

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

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

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

Improving the Quality of Teaching

To improve the quality of teaching, important aspects need to be considered:

- the quality of preschool
- coherent literacy curricula
- high-quality reading instruction,
- early identification of and support for struggling literacy learners
- highly qualified teachers (cf. Frame of Reference for ELINET Country Reports).

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

Pre-Primary Years

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

and support of social interaction between students, degree and level of language use opportunities etc.) (Pianta, Barnett, Burchinal & Thornburg, 2009).

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

Continuing Professional Development is not obligatory (Eurostat 2014, pp. 104–105) although School Inspectors do provide pre-school teachers with opportunities for professional development. Furthermore, seminars are being provided centrally to pre-school teachers in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Culture. Pre-school teachers have also the opportunity to participate voluntarily at professional development seminars and workshops.

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

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

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

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

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

Since all children in Cyprus from the age of 4 years and 8 months on the 1st of September have the right to free public education can attend to public schools. Only a small number of younger children (younger than 4 years and 8 months) may attend free public and low cost communal kindergartens

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

Children and Adolescents

Improving Literacy Curricula and Reading instruction in schools: Literacy in the New Cyprus curriculum is approached through a broader and research-based perspective. More specifically, an approach of integrated language and Literacy instruction is employed, which aims to balance and synthesize different aspects from various linguistic theories and practices. The integrated language and Literacy instruction consists of the following four aspects, approached correspondingly: (a) the recognition and use of the basic linguistic structures (i.e. alphabet, spelling, grammar, text conventions), b) understanding of the multiple language functions within a variety of texts and contexts, c) comprehension and production of various lingual and non-lingual texts (written, oral, multi-modal) within various socio-economic and cultural contexts, d) critical interpretation and analysis of texts.

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

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

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

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

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

Digital literacy as part of the curriculum for primary and secondary schools: Integration of ICT in primary and secondary education curricula has been on the agenda for a number of years. In order to assist the use of ICT in the educational process the Technology Integration Plan suggests the enrichment of the national curriculum and development of essential educational material like software and others. In the curriculum for primary education, ICT is today not treated as a separate subject, but it is used as a dynamic tool for the teaching and learning Country Report: Cyprus 10 / 21 processes. The main role of ICT here is to secure a more effective implementation of the school curriculum and the development of skills such as problem solving, decision making, communication and information handling. In the curriculum for secondary education, an ICT course is taught for two teaching periods per week in each of the three grades of all lower secondary schools. The main objective of these courses is to cover all seven ECDL modules. Additionally, the courses cover also eSafety, algorithms and programming issues. (p. 9-10 e-SKILLS IN EUROPE, Cyprus Country Report, 2014)⁷.

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

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

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

Students with learning difficulties/or other mother tongues are supported by their teacher during the classroom time (who provides custom made material) or are "pulled out" and attend instruction in smaller groups (or even individual instruction). Since 2008, in schools with a large percentage of

⁷ Available at: file:///C:/Users/pi007/Downloads/Country_Report_Cyprus.pdf.

immigrant population, specialized groups for teaching Greek have been formed. No extra instructional time is provided. Students attend supportive instruction during their normal time schedule. Usually support is provided by the teachers of the schools, thus there is no provision for the employment of specialized personnel. However, in schools with large percentage of immigrants (schools inducted into the program Schools of Educational Priority) teaching assistants with specialized qualifications can be employed on an hourly basis.

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

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

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

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

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

supported from the educational system to develop effective instructional practices to improve literacy skills for all.

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

Increasing Participation, Inclusion and Equity

Pre-Primary Years

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

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

Children and Adolescents

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

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

Support for children with special needs: Children with special needs are educated in public schools equipped with suitable infrastructure, either in mainstream classrooms or in Special Units within mainstream schools. Children attending Special Units are also assigned to a mainstream class, where they can attend integrated lessons and participate in celebratory or festive events. Special educators encompassing a wide variety of specialties (teachers for learning, intellectual, functional and

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3 General Information on the Cyprus Education System

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

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

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

Primary Education: Primary education is compulsory for all children over the age of 5 and has a duration of 6 years. The aim of Primary Education is to create and secure the necessary learning opportunities for children regardless of age, sex, family and social background and mental abilities.

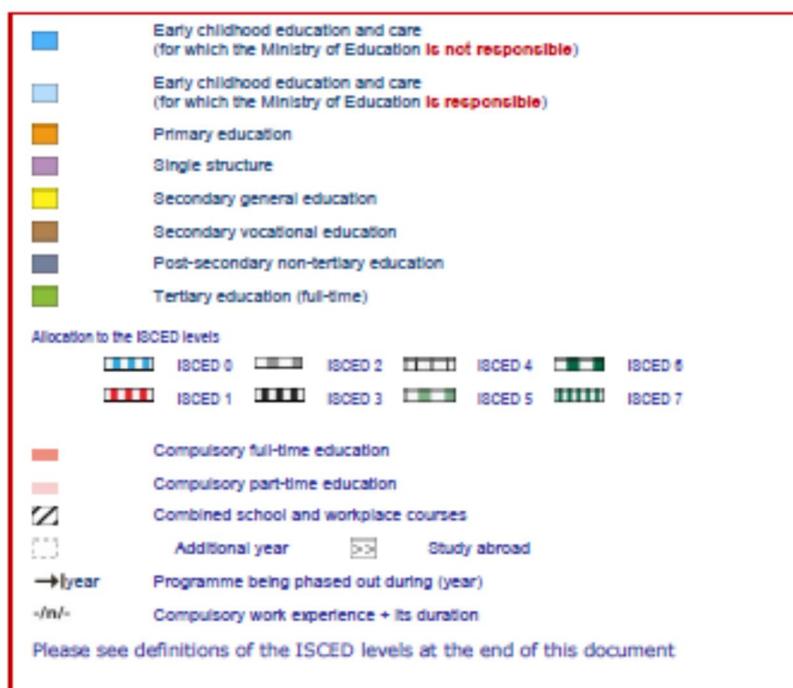
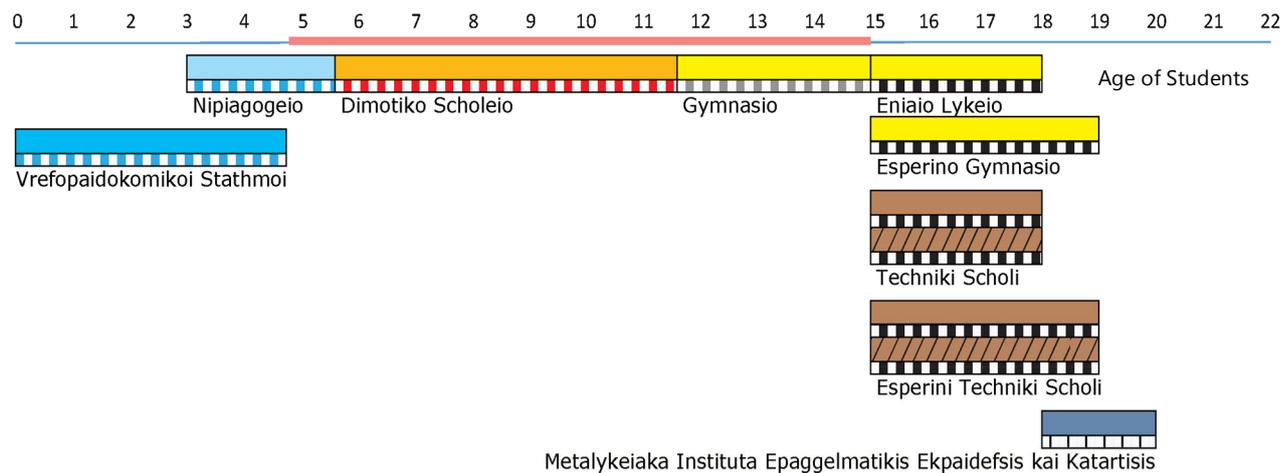
Secondary Education: Secondary General Education offers two three-year cycles of education – Gymnasium (lower secondary education) and Lyceum (upper secondary education) – to pupils between the ages of 12 and 18. The curriculum includes core and interdisciplinary subjects as well as a variety of extracurricular activities.

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

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

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

Figure 3: Structure of the Cyprus School System



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

4 Literacy Performance Data for Children and Adolescents

4.1 Performance Data for Primary Children

The performance data for primary school children are derived only from the National Program for Functional Literacy (PFL) conducted on a yearly basis since 2007 by the Centre for Educational Research and Evaluation (CERE) of the Ministry of Education and Culture (MoEC). Data from IEA's PIRLS are not presented here as Cyprus took part in PIRLS only in 2001 and these data are considered now as outdated.

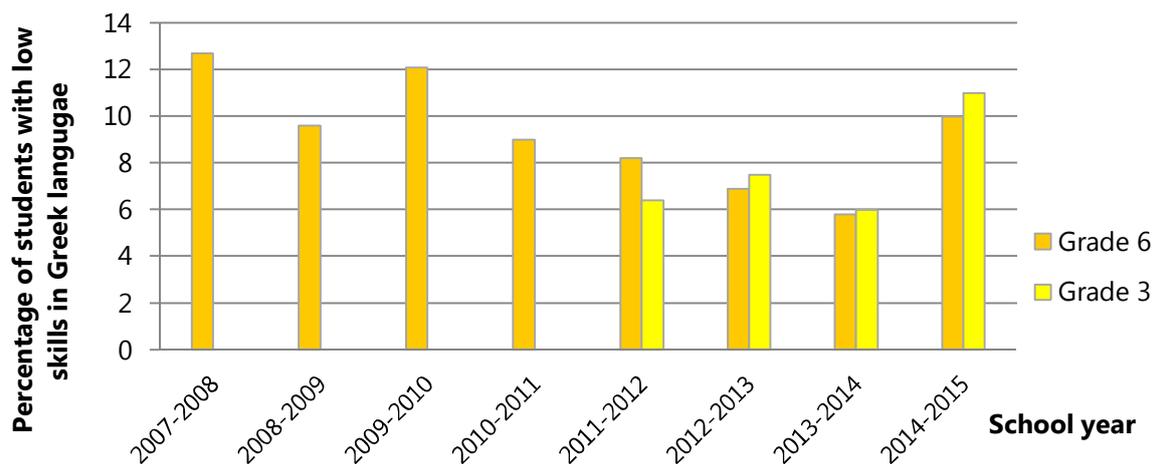
The Program for Functional Literacy (PFL) aims to identify pupils aged 8 (Grade 3) and 11 (Grade 6) at risk for functional illiteracy by the end of compulsory education (i.e. by the age of 15) in order to provide them with support. The Program assesses two of the eight key competences identified by European Commission: communication in mother tongue (Greek language) and mathematics (CERE, 2012a). For this purpose, multiple parallel tests are developed in Greek language and in Mathematics for each grade in order to assess key knowledge and skills that one should acquire by the end of compulsory education for adequate functioning within Cyprus society today. Greek language tests assess three basic skills -reading comprehension, writing and grammar- while mathematics tests assess knowledge and skills in five content areas: numbers, data handling and statistics, geometry, measurement and algebra (CERE, 2012a). The tests include various item types such as multiple-choice, open-ended questions, matching, true/false etc. The tests are administered by the teachers following detailed administration guidelines according to a protocol. The tests are marked by external markers based on marking schemes. In the context of the PFL, teacher and student questionnaires are also developed and administered. Teacher questionnaires aim to collect data mainly on test administration conditions while student questionnaires (administered only to Grade 6 students) aim to collect data on personal and family-related factors which according to the literature are related to the risk for low levels skills (CERE, 2012a).

CERE informs the schools and the Departments of Primary and Secondary Education about the results i.e. the names of the students who need support (CERE, 2015b).

4.1.1 Percentage of students with low level skills in Greek language

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

Figure 1: PFL longitudinal results for students identified with low level skills in Greek language



4.1.2 Gaps in reading

As in every European country, there are achievement gaps between different groups. In the context of PFL, results are explored in relation to student-level variables: background characteristics, attitudes towards learning, and family-related factors. In this section, we present results from this kind of exploration but only for variables explored also in PIRLS study i.e. parental educational background, gender, primary language spoken at home and attitudes towards reading. The results presented in this section refer to the 2014-2015 PFL national data for Grade 6 students. In 2014-2015 a total of 7459 students (95.7%) completed the PFL Greek language tests (CERE, 2015b). A small percentage (4.3%) was excluded from the program due to insufficiencies in the acquisition of Greek language and due to special educational needs (as indicated by the teachers). In 2014-2015, results suggested that 10% of Grade 6 students were at 'risk' i.e. with low-level skills in Greek language (CERE, 2015b).

Parent's educational achievement

In 2014-2015, the percentage of Grade 6 students who reported having parents with high educational background (i.e. they completed tertiary education) was above 50%. According to 2014-2015 PFL results, students whose parents have completed tertiary education are less likely to be identified at risk (CERE, 2015b). Specifically, only 6% of students who reported that their parents had completed tertiary education were identified as at risk (Table 1). The corresponding percentage for the category of students who reported that their parents had not completed compulsory education was 27%. These findings regarding the relationship between parental educational background and 'risk' replicate PFL's findings from previous years (CERE, 2011, 2012b, 2013, 2014b).

Table 1: Students at 'risk' by parents' educational background

		Students identified at risk based on PFL Greek language test	
		No	Yes
Father's highest level of education	Did not complete compulsory education	72,8%	27,2%
	Compulsory education	83,0%	17,0%
	Secondary education	91,5%	8,5%
	Tertiary education	94,0%	6,0%
Mother's highest level of education	Did not complete compulsory education	72,8%	27,2%
	Compulsory education	80,4%	19,6%
	Secondary education	89,5%	10,5%
	Tertiary education	94,0%	6,0%

Source: CERE (2015b). The 2014-2015 report on the dimensions of functional illiteracy for Grade 6 pupils in Cyprus [Research Report]. Cyprus Centre for Educational Research and Evaluation. Nicosia. (p.42)

Language spoken at home different from language used at school

In 2014-2015, 68% of Grade 6 pupils reported that they spoke only the Greek language at home (CERE, 2015b). Pupils who reported that they spoke an additional language at home were found to be more likely to be identified at risk (CERE, 2015b). These findings are in accordance to previous years PFLs' findings (CERE, 2011, 2012b, 2013, 2014b). According to 2014-2015 PFL results, 15% of pupils who reported that they spoke additional languages at home were identified as 'at risk' (Table 2). This percentage is more than twice high as the corresponding percentage of students identified at risk in the category of pupils who reported that Greek was the only language spoken at home.

Table 2: Students at 'risk' by gender, parents' educational background and language spoken at home

		Students identified at risk based on PFL Greek language test	
		No	Yes
Language spoken at home	Only Greek	92,8%	7,2%
	Additional languages spoken at home	84,9%	15,1%

Source: CERE (2015b). The 2014-2015 report on the dimensions of functional illiteracy for Grade 6 pupils in Cyprus [Research Report]. Cyprus Centre for Educational Research and Evaluation. Nicosia (p.42).

Gender

In 2014-2015, the percentage of boys and girls that participated in the PFL was 51% and 49% respectively (CERE, 2015b). The gender gap is evident across all PFL waves of data (CERE, 2011, 2012b, 2013, 2014b). According to Table 3, a much higher percentage of boys were identified as at 'risk' than girls (CERE, 2015b). Specifically, the percentage of boys identified with low level skills in Greek

language is twice as large as the corresponding percentage of girls. This finding suggests an association between gender and 'risk' with boys being more likely to be identified at risk than girls.

Table 3: Students at 'risk' by gender

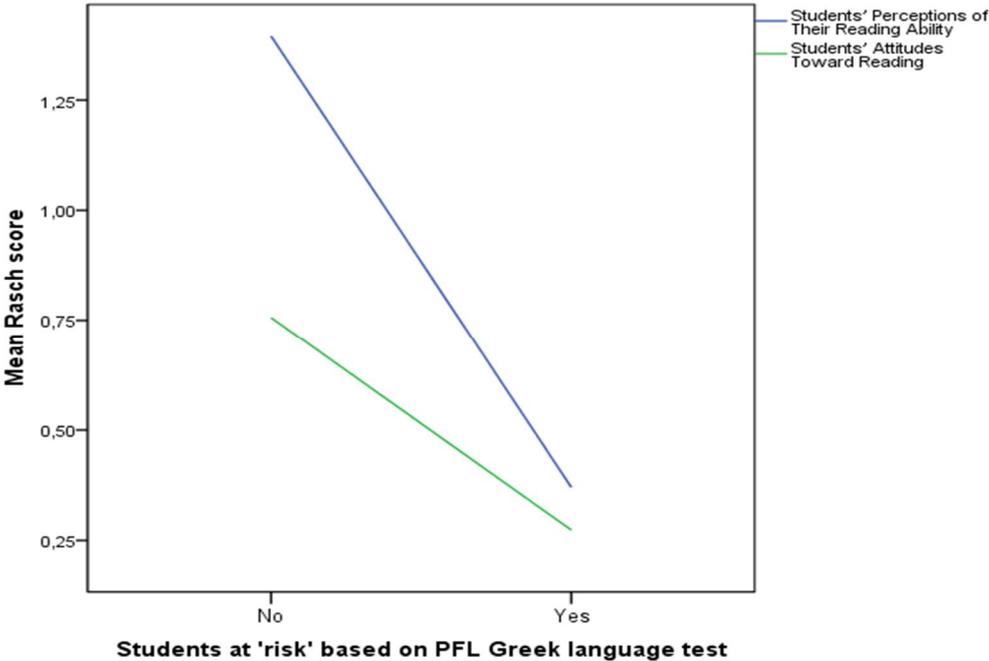
		Students identified at risk based on PFL Greek language test	
		No	Yes
Gender	Boy	86,5%	13,5%
	Girl	93,6%	6,4%

Source: CERE (2015b). The 2014-2015 report on the dimensions of functional illiteracy for Grade 6 pupils in Cyprus [Research Report]. Cyprus Centre for Educational Research and Evaluation. Nicosia. (p.36)

Attitudes to Reading

Data on students' attitudes towards reading were also collected in the context of 2014-2015 PFL. A student questionnaire was administered to Grade 6 students which included, among others, two scales taken from PIRLS study, namely Students' Attitudes towards Reading and Students' Perceptions of their Reading Ability. The scales were translated into Greek and students indicated their agreement with each statement on a four-point scale (Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree). Data were analysed using the Rasch Rarting Scale Model (Andrich, 1978). High scores on both scales were indicative of positive attitudes towards reading and high reading self-concept. According to Figure 4 students identified at risk had a significantly lower mean score on both scales when compared to students who were not identified as at risk (CERE, 2015b). This finding suggests that students at risk had lower reading self-concept and less positive attitudes when compared to students who were not identified at risk.

Figure 4: Students at risk Mean score



Source: CERE (2015b). The 2014-2015 report on the dimensions of functional illiteracy for Grade 6 pupils in Cyprus [Research Report]. Cyprus Centre for Educational Research and Evaluation. Nicosia. (p.40)

4.2 Performance Data for Adolescents

The performance data are derived from the OECD PISA study 2012.

The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) led by OECD⁸ **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 student's background as well as 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 and the rest of them open-ended (short or constructed answers). Results are reported on scales defining different levels of proficiency ranging from 1 (low performing) to 6 (high performing). Level 2 is considered as the level all 15 year-olds should reach, and will enable them to participate effectively to society. Since 2015, PISA has been administered on computers only in most participating countries.

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

Cyprus participated in PISA for the first time in 2012. It should be noted that only limited information or reading performance is available as reading was a minor domain in PISA 2012.

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

In PISA 2012, students in Cyprus achieved a mean score of 449 on PISA overall reading. This was significantly lower than the EU-27 average of 489 (Table 4). Only two EU member countries had significantly lower mean scores than Cyprus – Romania and Bulgaria - and 43 countries had obtained a significantly higher mean score than Cyprus (CERE, 2014).

Table 4: Overall Reading performance in PISA 2012 – Cyprus and EU-27 Average

	Cyprus	EU-27
Overall Reading Mean Score	449 (1.18)	489 (0.6)

Significant differences in **bold**.

⁸ See: <http://www.pisa.OECD.org>.

In terms of the percentage distribution of 15 year old students on PISA levels, Table 5 shows that 32.8% students were identified below level 2 therefore they are considered low performing readers. Only a very small percentage (4%) of students was identified on the higher levels of the PISA reading literacy scale (levels 5 and 6). Moreover, Table 5 shows that in Cyprus there are more low-performing readers (below level 2) and fewer top-performing readers than on average across OECD countries (CERE, 2014).

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

	Low-performers				Top performers	
	< L1b	L1b	L1a	L2	L5	L6
Cyprus	6,1%	9,7%	17 %	25,1 %	3,5 %	0,5 %
OECD	1,3 %	4,4 %	12,3 %	23,4 %	7,3 %	1,1 %

4.2.1 Gaps in reading performance

Socio-economic status

In 2012 in Cyprus, the gap in reading performance between students in the top and bottom quarters of the socioeconomic scale (the PISA index of economic, social, cultural status) is 85 points and this difference is statistically significant. The corresponding EU-27 average difference is 93 points. (Table 6).

Table 6: Difference in reading performance between bottom and top national quarters of the PISA index of economic, social and cultural status – PISA 2012 – Lithuania and EU-27 average

	Difference between bottom and top national quarters of the PISA index of economic, social and cultural status	
	Score diff.	S.E.
Cyprus	85	(3.25)
EU-27	93	(0.93)

Significant within-country differences between fourth and first quartiles in **bold**.

Migration

In Cyprus, the percentage of students with an immigrant background (i.e., first and second generation immigrants) is 8% and this is marginally lower than the corresponding EU-27 average (10%) (Table 7). The gap in reading performance between native students and those with an immigrant background is 10 score points. This gap is lower than on average across EU-27. This suggests that in Cyprus the gap in reading performance between native students and those with an immigrant background is much smaller than the corresponding EU-27 gap. This might be due to the fact that both native students and students with an immigrant background in Cyprus achieve a lower mean score than the corresponding averages across the EU-27.

Table 7: Percentage of Students and Reading Performance by Immigrant Status – PISA 2012 – Lithuania and EU-27 Average

	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		Score dif.	S.E.
			Mean	S.E.			Mean	S.E.		
Cyprus	92	(0.2)	453	(0.7)	8	(0.2)	443	(2.8)	10	(2.9)
EU-27	90	(0.2)	504	(0.5)	10	(1.3)	463	(1.3)	42	(1.3)

Significant differences in **bold**.

A series of legislations and regulations regarding immigrants and education resulted to changes in educational policies, causing the reconstruction of perceptions and attitudes towards socio-cultural diversity. Recent research has shown that refugees in Cyprus regard school as the place for induction to the Cyprus society for both the children and parents due to opportunities for interaction with Cypriots and the Greek language. The implementation of ZEP approach (zones of educational priority implemented in deprived areas) gave emphasis on project work, parental involvement and the development of closer relations between the school and the community.

Specific measures to be taken based on the new data regarding migration are shown below:

- For teaching Greek, the need for continuity between primary and secondary education was underlined. Emphasis was also, given to the clear setting of aims, objectives, methodology, assessment and procedures, that should be monitored based on the European Common Framework of Languages. Teaching should be differentiated depending to the age and level of linguistic competence of the student.
- Reception procedures should be induced. These could be a "reception" teacher, orientation days before the school starts. Also Museum education, project work and environmental studies can contribute to getting acquainted with the community and the country.
- Focused teacher training should be organized. Emphasis should be given on methodology issues for teaching Greek as a second language, developing intercultural competences through different subjects of the curriculum, special training schemes for dealing with particular populations (e.g. refugee and asylum seekers) and on training focusing on empathy.
- Information on the migrant origin and background should be collected in order to design focused and differentiated measures. These data should be "shifted" when students change school.
- New curriculum and special methods for teaching Greek as a second language as well as changes in the regulations should be implemented.

During the school year 2015-2016, as part of the program of Learning Greek as a Second Language, seven (7) Gymnasiums created and operated «transitional classes», aiming at the intensive teaching of the Greek language to foreign language speaking students. After diagnostic evaluation tests of their knowledge of Greek, and according to their number, students in these schools were divided into

Beginners (A1) and Advanced (A2 or B1) groups. Students' were taught Greek for eighteen (18) teaching periods per week. In Lyceums and Technical Schools the program was applied only for four (4) periods per week.

Language Spoken at Home

In Cyprus, 18% of students report that the language they speak at home is different from the language of the PISA test. This percentage is much higher than the corresponding EU-27 average (10%). In Cyprus, students who speak a different language at home from the language of the PISA test, achieve a higher mean score (by 16 score points) than students who speak the language of the test at home. It should be noted though that students from private schools (usually high achievers) in Cyprus completed the PISA test in English and not in Greek (which for the majority them is the language spoken at home). Across the EU-27, students who speak the same language with the language of the PISA test achieve a mean score that is 49 points higher than the corresponding mean score for students who speak another language than the language of the PISA test at home (Table 8).

Table 8: Percentage of Students and Reading Performance by Language Spoken at Home – PISA 2012 – Cyprus and EU-27 Average

	Speak test language at home				Speak another language at home				Difference in reading according to language spoken at home	
	Percentage of students	S.E.	Mean	S.E.	Percentage of students	S.E.	Mean	S.E.	Score dif.	S.E.
Cyprus	82	(0.3)	451	(1.4)	18	(0.3)	466	(3.9)	-16	(4.2)
EU-27	90	(0.10)	498	(0.6)	10	(0.1)	449	(1.8)	49	(1.9)

Significant differences in **bold**.

Gender

In 2012, 21% of girls and 45% of boys in Cyprus performed at or below Level 2 on PISA reading literacy. These percentages are much higher than the corresponding percentages across EU-27 (13% and 26% for girls and boys respectively) (Table 9). Among the EU-27 countries, only Bulgaria had a higher percentage of boys (i.e. 51%) performing at or below Level 2.

Table 9: Proportion of Low-performers (below level 2) in Reading, All students, and by Gender – PISA 2000-2012 – Cyprus and EU-27 average

	Proportion of students at or below level 2 in reading					
	All students		Girls		Boys	
	%	S.E.	%	S.E.	%	S.E.
2012						
Cyprus	33	(0.7)	21	(1.0)	45	(0.9)
EU-27	19	(0.2)	13	(0.2)	26	(0.3)

In PISA 2012, the mean reading score for boys in Cyprus (418) was 64 points lower than the corresponding mean reading score obtained by the girls (481) (Table 10). The corresponding mean difference between the two genders across the EU-27 was 43 score points. Therefore, in Cyprus there is a wider gap between the two genders, in favour of girls, in relation to their reading performance. Among the EU-27, only Bulgaria had a higher mean score point difference in favour of girls (70 points)

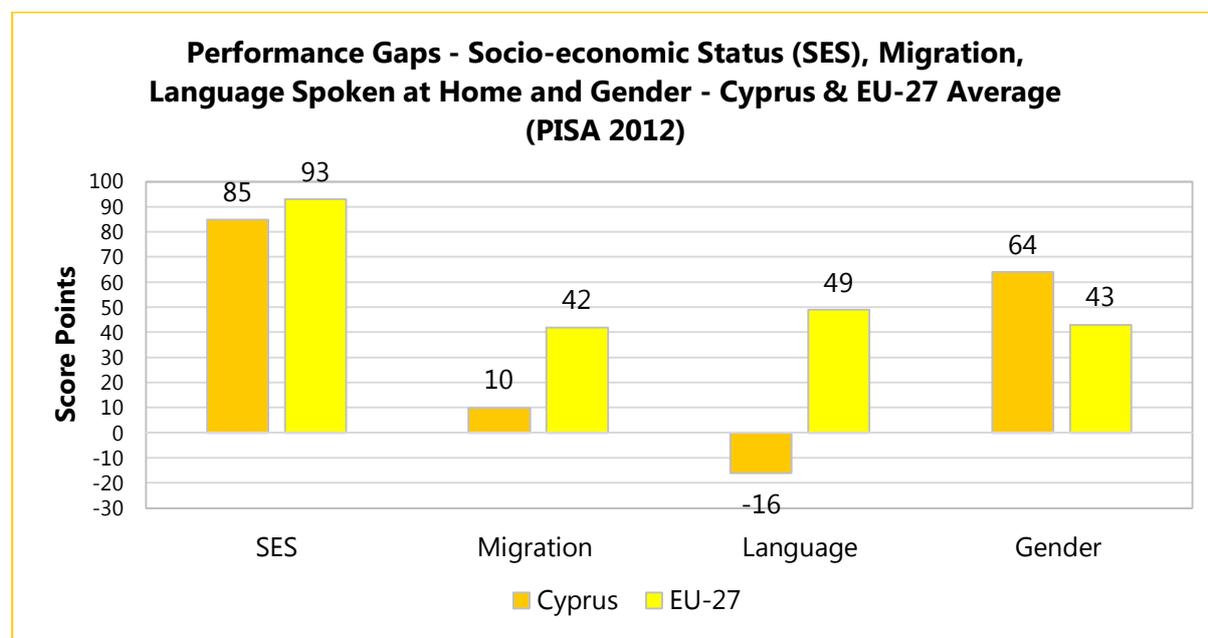
Table 10: Mean Reading Performance by Gender and Gender Differences – PISA 2012 – Cyprus and EU-27 Average

	Girls		Boys		Difference (G-B)	
	Mean	S.E.	Mean	S.E.	Score diff.	S.E.
Cyprus	481	(1.9)	418	(1.9)	64	(2.6)
EU-27	511	(0.6)	468	(0.7)	43	(0.9)

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

The gaps in Cyprus for socioeconomic status, migrant status, language spoken at home and gender are summarised in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Performance Gaps in Cyprus and on Average across EU Countries - Post-Primary Level



SES: Top – Bottom quartile on PISA ESCS scale; Migration: Native – first/second generation immigrants; Language: Speaks language of the PISA test at home – speaks another language; Gender: Girls - Boys

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. In the case that countries did not participate in PIRLS 2011, data for PIRLS 2006 are presented. 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 a book for example to the child.

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

Adolescence is a crucial phase in life where young people develop long-term *identities and self-concepts* which include media preferences and practices (*media identity*). In this perspective, it is of great importance that families, schools and communities offer young people rich opportunities to encounter the *culture of reading* and develop a stable *self-concept as a reader/writer* and member of a literary culture. This includes access to a broad variety of reading materials (in print and electronic forms) and stimulating literate environments in and outside of schools; it also includes opportunities to get actively involved in engaging with texts, and communicating, reflecting on and exchanging ideas about texts with peers and ‘competent others’, such as teachers or parents (Ibid., pp. 45f) .

5.1.1 Providing a literate environment at home

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

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

In the context of PFL, data were collected in relation to home educational resources. Student questionnaire included questions on home resources that support literacy such as the total number of books at home and various study supports such as students having their own room, own desk, a computer at home, an internet connection at home and personal books (CERE, 2015b). Some of these variables are used in PRILS in order to construct The Home Educational Resources (HER) scale. In this section, the relationship between ‘risk’ for low level skills in Greek language and home educational resources is presented based on data collected from Grade 6 students in the context of 2014-2015 PFL.

Home Educational Resources

In the context of PFL, Grade 6 students reported whether they had the following study supports at home: own room, own desk, computer at home, internet connection at home and personal books. The vast majority of students (>80%) reported as having the afore-mentioned study supports at home (CERE, 2015b). Table 11 presents the relationship between ‘risk’ for low level skills in Greek language and study supports at home (CERE, 2015b). It becomes obvious that in the group of students who reported as not having the listed study supports there was a higher percentage of students identified ‘at risk’ than in the group of students who reported having the listed study supports. These findings replicate PFL’s findings from previous years (CERE, 2011, 2012b, 2013, 2014b).

Table 11: Study supports at home and risk for low level skills in Greek language

Variables	Response categories	Students at risk based on PFL Greek language tests	
		No	Yes
Own desk/table for study	Yes	91,4%	8,6%
	No	78,2%	21,8%
Own room	Yes	91,2%	8,8%
	No	85,3%	14,7%
Computer at home	Yes	91,1%	8,9%
	No	86,3%	13,7%
Internet at home	Yes	91,4%	8,6%
	No	79,5%	20,5%
Own books	Yes	91,4%	8,6%
	No	73,3%	26,7%

Source: CERE (2015b). The 2014-2015 report on the dimensions of functional illiteracy for Grade 6 pupils in Cyprus [Research Report]. Cyprus Centre for Educational Research and Evaluation. Nicosia. (p.44)

Number of books at home

According to 2014-2015 PFL data, a quite large percentage of students (36.2%) reported as having 25 or fewer books at home (CERE, 2015b). Table 12 presents the relationship between students "at risk" and number of books at home based on PFL 2014-2015 data (CERE, 2015b). In the group of students who reported as having none or few books at home (<25) a higher percentage was identified at risk than in the group of students who reported as having many books at home (>25).

Table 12: Number of books at home and risk for low level skills in Greek language

Variables	Response categories	Students at risk based on PFL Greek language tests	
		No	Yes
Number of books at home	0-10 books	77,4%	22,6%
	11-25 books	87,1%	12,9%
	26-100 books	94,0%	6,0%
	101-200 books	95,8%	4,2%
	More than 200	94,0%	6,0%

Source: CERE (2015b). The 2014-2015 report on the dimensions of functional illiteracy for Grade 6 pupils in Cyprus [Research Report]. Cyprus Centre for Educational Research and Evaluation. Nicosia. (p.45)

Although in Cyprus many efforts are being made by schools, parents associations and NGO's in order to improve the literate environment at home, there is still a long way to go in order for parents to impact positively on children's attitudes towards reading. Particularly, parents should be encouraged to read to their children before they go to school but also after school starts. It is also important for

parents to understand the significance of early literacy activities at home, such as verbal interaction and playing games that can promote literacy.

5.1.2 Providing a literate environment in school

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 on, reading habits and a stable self-concept as a reader among adolescents, especially boys and students from disadvantaged families (low SES, migrant background).

Throughout the year, many activities take place at schools in order to encourage students to read books such as visits to bookshops, organising book exhibitions at school, meeting and talking with authors, authors presenting and talking about their books. In 2015, for the first time, students are encouraged to take part in a competition in which they will have to read four (4) literature books and then answer to questions related to what they have read.

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

Resources teachers use for teaching reading

Teachers in Cyprus use a variety of texts to teach reading. Apart from the text books authentic documents from papers, magazines, informational books, literacy books, internet material etc. are being used in everyday teaching in an effort to provide opportunities for students to practise reading, understanding and general literacy skills. Text material is provided mainly by the teachers.

Availability and use of classroom library

Every classroom in primary schools is equipped with a library. At the beginning of the school year, a circular letter sent to all schools, among other things, suggests that teachers should encourage their student to borrow books from the classroom library. Students are encouraged to borrow books, either to read in their free time, or to prepare some lesson-related work. Classroom library has mostly story and literature books according to the age and reading readiness levels of students. Furthermore, the classroom library includes dictionaries and encyclopaedias.

School and Classroom libraries are enriched every year with variety of books in order to provide students with opportunities to interact with newly edited and presented texts.

Students are entitled to borrow books for the classroom library to read at school. Classroom library may also be used in classroom activities to work and reflect on texts and to search for information etc. The need for further use of school libraries is foreseen by Ngo's (Cyprus Association of Librarians – Information Scientists CALIS, 2007) and the Ministry of Education and Culture and thus many

workshops have been provided to teachers on the ways to utilize classroom libraries in promoting reading for pleasure.

Strengths: Cyprus national curriculum has embedded reading for pleasure, in Greek language in an effort to provide opportunities to students to interact with literacy texts in an effort to improve student's attitudes towards reading. This change shifts the focus from school texts to literacy texts and other form of texts promoting reading practices in an effort to develop their overall literacy skills. Teachers utilise classroom libraries as a part of their teaching practises and student's' have the opportunity to choose the book they want to read and practise on. Oral and written work is encouraged and presentation of students work as a reflection is also encouraged. Furthermore, students are encouraged to borrow books to read at home at any time they want to.

Challenges: The main challenge concerning the use of libraries is for teachers to engage all students in lending and reading more books from the classroom library. Another challenge is the utilisation of classroom libraries in every day teaching practises. Furthermore, there is a need for more programs that will help and support the development of home environment and parents' involvement as a mean to improved attitudes towards reading in general.

5.1.3 5.1.3 Providing a digital environment

A literate environment can also be created by incorporating digital devices into the school environment. The Ministry of Education and Culture's objective is to introduce ICT at all levels of education. To this end the Ministry of Education and Culture has created the Cyprus School Net which is an educational portal and content management system, addressing schools, teachers, students and parents.

According to the 2012 report of the information society statistics⁹, the usage of Information and Communication Technologies experienced a continuous increasing trend in Secondary education for the years 2001- 2012. Computer usage at the various education levels was as follows: In Primary education, in 2012, there were 15,9 computers per 100 pupils showing a decrease of 0,6% compared to 2011 and an increase of 1123% compared to 2001 (1,3 computers per 100 pupils in 2001). In Secondary education in 2012 there was an increase of 3,6% compared to 2011 and 338% compared to 2001 (6,5 computers per 100 pupils in 2001). In 2012, there were 13,1 computers per 100 students in Tertiary education, 0,8% higher compared to 2011 and 52,3% higher compared to 2001 (8,6 computers per 100 students in 2001).

There was also a significant increase in the number of computers connected to the internet per 100 pupils, in 2012, by 2433% in Primary education, 838% in Secondary and 86,9% in Tertiary education, compared to 2001. Compared to 2011, there was a small increase of 2,0% in Primary education, a significant increase of 7,5% in Secondary while a small increase of 0,8% was recorded in Tertiary education. In 2012, 94,0% of computers connected to the internet in Primary education, were connected with high speed connections (14,3 computers per 100 pupils) compared to 92,6% in 2011. In Secondary education this percentage was 99,6% (24,3 computers per 100 pupils) in 2012 and 98,7% in 2011. In Tertiary education in 2011 and 2012, 98,4% of computers connected to the internet were

⁹ See: [http://www.mof.gov.cy/mof/cystat/statistics.nsf/All/A1E9687767A762D5C225774400360ECF/\\$file/INFO_SOC_STATISTICS-2012-301213.pdf?OpenElement](http://www.mof.gov.cy/mof/cystat/statistics.nsf/All/A1E9687767A762D5C225774400360ECF/$file/INFO_SOC_STATISTICS-2012-301213.pdf?OpenElement).

connected with high speed connections (12,7 computers per 100 pupils) (Table 52. Computers and internet in education, 2001 – 2012 Survey on Education of the Statistical Service 2012)

Digital environment of primary and secondary students

A literate environment can also be created by incorporating digital devices into the school environment. New technologies provide access to a mass of information and are an indispensable adjunct to the teaching of the language course, provided that they can turn to obtain information on knowledge acquisition. The tools of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) can promote the active participation of students in language comprehension and language production activities.

Digital environment of Primary students

Each classroom in primary schools is equipped with at least one computer and a projector. These can be used by the teachers to enrich their instruction or by the students for presentations, research and other lesson related tasks. The past 3 years, some classrooms are also equipped with interactive boards. Primary schools with a big number of students may also have a computer room where students work in groups on specific educational software (i.e. language, maths, science software). The Ministry Of Education and Culture (MOEC) provides educational software to primary schools and ICT counsellors visit the school at least twice a year to help teachers with the use of technology in their teaching.

Based on the evidence from the Cyprus Statistical Service (2012) computer usage in Primary education, in 2012, there were 15,9 computers per 100 pupils showing a decrease of 0,6% compared to 2011 and an increase of 1123% compared to 2001 (1,3 computers per 100 pupils in 2001). A significant increase in the number of computers connected to the internet per 100 pupils, in 2012, by 2433% in Primary education. Compared to 2011, there was a small increase of 2,0% in Primary education. These data show enrichment in digital environment for students in Primary education.

Digital environment of secondary students

In secondary schools, there are Classrooms where specific school subjects are being taught (Languages, History) and Laboratories (Physics, Chemistry, Biology), that are equipped with computers and a projector. Also, in each school there are 2-3 laptops and 2-3 portable projectors that can be borrowed by teachers in order to be used in classroom.

The ICT courses for the Gymnasium and the Lyceum aim in engaging students in a meaningful learning process with the use of the computer as a problem-solving tool. There are 130 ICT labs situated in Lyceums all over Cyprus, which are used for teaching computer science courses. Each lab contains 18 computers, printers, scanners, and multimedia hardware. In all Gymnasiums, depending on the curriculum needs, 181 ICT labs exist with 17 computers and a printer per lab. All computers in all ICT labs are connected to the Internet via ADSL lines. Furthermore, a video projector is installed in all computer science laboratories. The video projector is connected to the instructor's computer.

Based on the evidence from the Cyprus Statistical Service (2012) the usage of Information and Communication Technologies experienced a continuous increasing trend in Secondary education for the years 2001- 2012 . Computer usage in Secondary education in 2012 there was an increase of 3,6% compared to 2011 and 338% compared to 2001 (6,5 computers per 100 pupils in 2001). In 2012, there were 13,1 computers per 100 students in Tertiary education, 0,8% higher compared to 2011 and 52,3% higher compared to 2001 (8,6 computers per 100 students in 2001). There was also a significant

increase in the number of computers connected to the internet per 100 pupils, in 2012, by 838% in Secondary and 86,9% in Tertiary education, compared to 2001. Compared to 2011, there was a significant increase of 7,5% in Secondary while a small increase of 0,8% was recorded in Tertiary education.

5.1.4 The role of public libraries in reading promotion. Public libraries as an important agent in reading promotion.

Public libraries

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

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

Although reading is considered a central and core competence and reading for pleasure is included in the Cyprus Language curriculum, initiatives to promote the cooperation of schools, families, libraries and other agents in literacy promotion are quite restricted. These initiatives come from the MoEC but most of them come from NGO's and other agents.

The Ministry of Education and Culture (MoEC) published a guide for parents concerning everything they need to know about school life and other major aspects of students life in which there is a chapter dedicated in cultivation positive attitudes towards reading (2015-2016 p.55¹⁰). The chapter, apart from, emphasising the importance of reading includes practical ideas for parents in introducing reading to their children.

The International Research Center CARDET based in Cyprus, in cooperation with partners from 6 countries have launched the project "Lifelong Readers" (LiRe¹¹), for the promotion of reading. Lifelong Readers (LiRe) aimed to provide school librarians, teachers, and administrators with guidance and tools for encouraging children of ages 6-12 to develop lifelong reading habits. The low level of young Europeans' literacy skills has been repeatedly documented, while EU bodies constantly stress the need for improvement.

The Lifelong Readers (LiRe) project aims:

- 1) To convince stakeholders about the need to devote more time and effort to reading promotion and to place reading for pleasure at the centre of their policies, approaches and practices.
- 2) To provide stakeholders with guidance, training, and an array of tools for reading promotion in the primary school.
- 3) To initiate change by implementing reading promotion programmes in all participating countries.

¹⁰ See: <http://enimerosi.moec.gov.cy/archeia/1/ypp3341b>.

¹¹ See: http://www.lifelongreaders.org/resources/LiRe_leaflet.pdf.

To achieve these aims, the LiRe project builds a reading promotion framework which features: (i) Summary descriptions of successful reading promotion programs; (ii) Principles, strategies and approaches for promoting the joy of reading, building reading communities, and sustaining reading cultures; (iii) An extensive collection of reading promotion actions, grouped under such categories such as Reading Promotion through Play/ ICT/ Volunteerism/ Awards/ the Arts; (iv) An annotated catalogue of relevant sources and resources; (v) Reading promotion evaluation tools. The LiRe Training Modules, will address the reading promotion training of teachers, school librarians, and administrators. The material will be piloted and implemented by all partners, and results will be widely disseminated.

Challenges: Actions and programs regarding the promotion of literacy with the cooperation between secondary schools, families, libraries and other agents in literacy promotion needs to be developed in a more broad and systemic way in order to be more effective and able to include more families and more students.

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

One of the most important initiatives is the installation of the librarian system ABEKT 5.5 and 5.6. (Automatic Library System, National Center). Thirty-two libraries belonging to government services and departments continue the cataloguing work of their collections through the upgraded scientific librarian system ABEKT 5.6. The ABEKT 5.5 and 5.6 system was established in thirty-four municipal and community libraries, provided with technical and librarian support. This year, as before, financial support has been given to the Municipal Libraries, as well as financial support to the Community Libraries through the method of equal subsidization. The latest ABEKT 5.5 and 5.6 version was developed on client/server design, completely in Windows 98/NT/2000 XP/2003 environment. The user interface of ABEKT is available in the Greek and English language. In 2013, upgraded technical support was extended to the libraries of Primary and Secondary Education. The ABEKT system has been installed in 144 school libraries. The school library employees undergo continuous training and receive technical support by the support team of ABEKT.

The Cyprus Library Network, which has been developed and is evolving under the Ministry of Education and Culture in cooperation with the National Documentation Centre (EKT)¹², provides access to the Catalogues of Public, Municipal, School and other Libraries.

The libraries support team provides support to the website of the Cultural Services¹³ as well as to the Cyprus Library through the necessary actions with respect to creating the required infrastructure for the reloading of digital material, by means of the data transferred to the Europeana Digital Library. This has contributed to the promotion and projection of the cultural heritage of Cyprus with corresponding benefits.

Another program fostered by the Pancyprian Organization for the promotion of Literacy in collaboration with the Cultural Services of the Ministry of Education and Culture is the programme "Supporting the Libraries"¹⁴. The main objective of the program is to assist the public library to develop reading strategies to community groups, to provide for the development of information literacy, to

¹² Available at the electronic address <http://www.cln.com.cy/>.

¹³ See: http://www.moec.gov.cy/politistikes_ypiresies/.

¹⁴ See: <http://grammatismos.wordpress.com>.

facilitate access to the internet, to help adults to become familiar with new technologies to support educational process, to provide social cohesion opportunities through various cultural activities organized, to cater for the inclusion of socially excluded persons (economic migrants, foreigners, repatriates, etc.) as culture is the means of approach in intercultural basis. One of the actions which will take place to achieve our targets is to establish book clubs in the Libraries, book clubs that will consist of members of the library, local residents who love reading, celebrities of the municipality or community and organized groups.

Family literacy programs

The Cyprus Parents' Association¹⁵ has developed a programme with seminars and lectures on different issues that are of parents' interest. The aim of these seminars is to support parenting skills and to promote positive parenting. Complimentary to those lectures, there is an annual journal that contains articles on various issues concerning parenting and contains useful information regarding the upbringing of their children.

Furthermore, the Cyprus Pedagogical Institute offers to schools the opportunity to provide parents workshops and lectures regarding educational, psychological and other thematic of their interest. There is no cost for the hosting of such seminars and parents' participation is on a voluntary basis. Most of the time, the seminars take place late in the afternoon. However, opportunity is provided to schools to organise the seminars according to their needs.

Challenge: Apart of the program presented above, there are no family literacy programmes at a national level, although there are private initiatives from the municipalities and NGO's. Cyprus Educational System is facing a major challenge on ways to provide effective family literacy programs in a systematic and consistent way. Such programmes will provide opportunities for families to understand the importance of literacy and their crucial role in promoting literacy for their children, enabling them to act as basic agents for cultivation and development of literacy skills.

Programmes for introducing parents and children to libraries and bookshops

There are only private and Ngo's initiatives for promoting and introducing parents and children to libraries and bookshops. One programme run by the Pancyprian Organization¹⁶ for the promotion of Literacy titled "Supporting the Libraries" had as an objective to assist the public library to develop reading strategies to community groups, to provide for the development of information literacy, to facilitate access to the internet, to help adults to become familiar with new technologies to support educational process, to provide social cohesion opportunities through various cultural activities organized, to cater for the inclusion of socially excluded persons (economic migrants, foreigners, repatriates, etc.) as culture is the means of approach in intercultural basis. One of the actions which will take place to achieve our targets is to establish book clubs in the Libraries, book clubs that will consist of members of the library, local residents who love reading, celebrities of the municipality or community and organized groups.

¹⁵ See: http://www.scholigoneon.org.cy/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=58&Itemid=108.

¹⁶ See: <http://grammatismos.wordpress.com>.

Main actions of the programme:

- The creation of a Reading Club by social groups (councilors, Women, Youth and Pensioners Organizations, as well as Sunday Schools, youth centers, sports academies, Parents Associations, etc.)
- The organizing of events such as "Reading with celebrities" at the library (Mayor, Councilors, MPs, members of the police-fire departments, footballers, actors, etc.)
- The organizing of readings with immigrant parents; readings will be in the native language and then discussed.
- The organizing of events-presentations of the country, or other countries and cultures, through books and their authors in alternative ways (photo exhibitions in public spaces, collaborations with embassies, etc.)
- The cooperation with schools of the municipality for meetings with teachers from EU countries within the framework of the ERASMUS+ program.

Initiatives to foster reading engagement among children and adolescents

Organised campaigns to promote reading habits for primary school students are organised mostly by NGO's, local municipalities, private book publishers and bookshops and in some cases in collaboration with governmental agencies i.e. the Ministry of Education and Culture. However, these campaigns are sporadic and therefore their impact cannot be considered as significant.

Such an initiative is the program run by the Pancyprian Organization is the Athletic Training Book Clubs¹⁷ that promotes the creation of Reading Clubs by the Cyprus Sports Organization in cooperation with municipalities and communities throughout Cyprus. In this programme children participating in the Cyprus Sports Organization's program "Sports for all" will also participate in a book club where they will read books with contents that serves the ideals of athletic training on issues of fair play, the sporting ethics, the cultural dimension of sports and the athletes in connection with the affairs of the local communities of which they are members.

Through this process, sport fits into the local community by supporting cultural institutions such as the Library, while fully involving indirectly in the program and their local communities. If the municipalities want to engage more directly with financial support, the cost will not exceed the amount of 500 euros.

The children that will take part in the program will be under 8 and over 15 in number and at their regular meetings in local libraries they will be escorted by their coaches. The meetings will be enriched with readings by politicians, actors, mayors and councillors, athletes etc. of local communities as well as with foreign athletes to reduce racism and sport violence.

Although this is a very interesting programme, it is still in a pilot phase so no evaluation of its impact is available.

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

In Cyprus Schools– mainly primary schools –many projects have already been developed to foster reading motivation and reading for pleasure by establishing school and classroom libraries. Both school and classroom libraries offer a variety of books mainly literature, story books and informational books. Teachers can use the classroom in any way they wish providing opportunities to students for reading.

¹⁷ See: <http://grammatismos.wordpress.com>

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, resources for the reading instruction
- early identification of and support for struggling literacy learners
- highly qualified teachers (cf. Frame of Reference for ELINET Country Reports).

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

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 2012 *Starting Strong III*, p. 9). In all European countries pre-primary education is an important part of political reflection and action.

The EU High Level Group of Experts on Literacy stated:

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

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

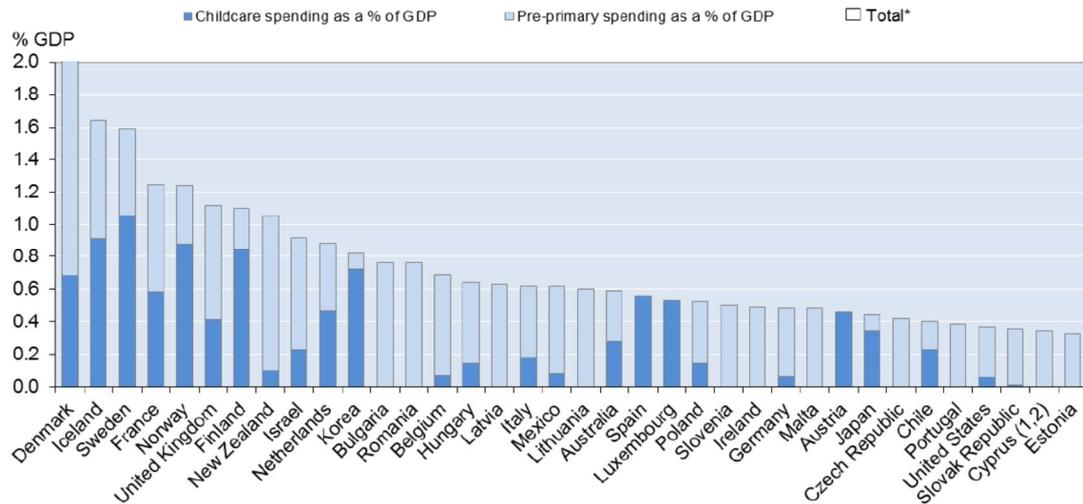
It is important to notice that the quality of pre-school educational programmes are based on two main variable categories: (a) Variable concerning the structural characteristics of the programme (i.e. class size, teacher/student ration, teachers educational level, syllabi and time spent on the implementation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

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 Cyprus is 0.4%. The range is from 0.04% in Turkey and 0.1% in Ireland to 1.01% in Denmark (for an overview of European countries see table D1 in Appendix B).

As shown in Figure 6, although Cyprus spends a 0.4% of the total public expenditure per child in pre-primary education as a percentage of GDP for pre-primary education, no or very limited expenditure is being spent for Childcare.

Figure 6: Public Expenditure and early education per cent of GDP, 2011

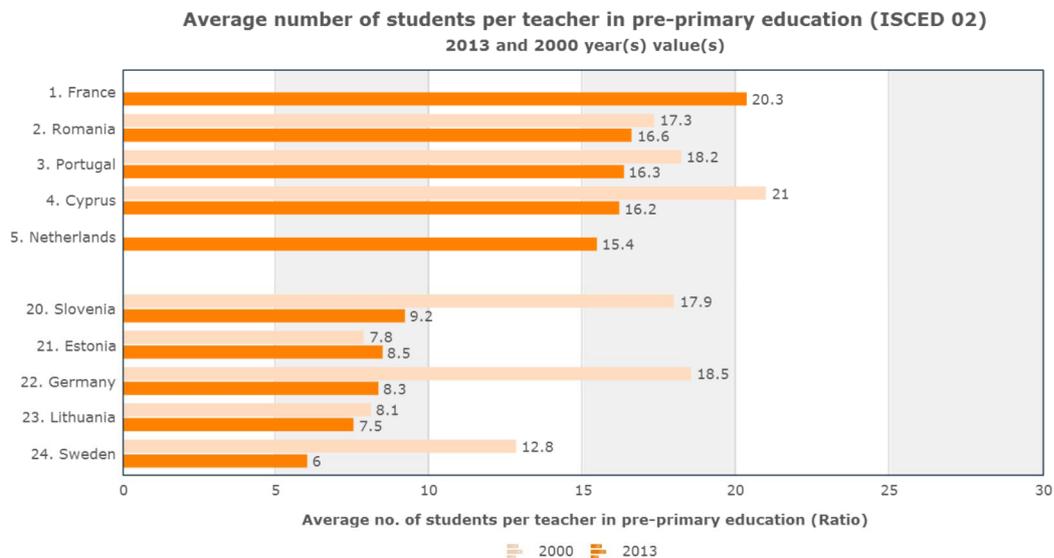


Social Expenditure database 2014; OECD Education database 2014; Eurostat for EU-countries outside the OECD.

Ratio of children to teachers in pre-primary school

The number of pupils that in a class of a public, communal or private Pre-Primary school should be no more than 25 and this should always be in line with the size of the classroom. The maximum number of students is 25 (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2015) (for an overview of European countries see table D2 in Appendix B).

Figure 7: Average number of students per teacher in pre-primary in Cyprus



Percentage of males among preschool teachers

There are only two men working at a public pre-primary settings. According to Pordata (2014), 0.7% of the pre-primary teachers in Cyprus are males. The range is from 0.2% in Bulgaria and Hungary to 17.7% in France (for an overview of European countries see table D3 in Appendix B).

Preschool teachers' qualifications

The minimum required level to become a qualified teacher is Bachelor level (ISCED 5). Length of study 4 years (European Commission/ EACEA/Eurydice/Eurostat 2014, p. 101).

Continuing Professional Development is not obligatory (Eurostat 2014, pp. 104–105) although School Inspectors do provide pre-school teachers with opportunities for professional development. Furthermore, seminars are being provided centrally to pre-school teachers in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Culture. Pre-school teachers have also the opportunity to participate voluntarily at professional development seminars provided free of charge by the Cyprus Pedagogical Institute. More specifically, CPI offers school based seminars and afternoon seminars for the early years teachers. There are three different options for the teachers regarding school based seminars namely informative seminars, workshops as well as action research projects.

Strengths and challenges: In Cyprus, all children from the age of 4 years and 8 months on the 1st of September have the right to free public education (pre-primary, primary and secondary education). Only a small number of children below that age can attend communal and public kindergartens while all younger children attend private kindergartens (high cost), a smaller number of children may attend low cost communal kindergartens (according to socioeconomic criteria) and some children stay at home. Increasing participation of a younger age in public schools is still a challenge for the Cyprus Educational System.

While the quality of Early Childhood education is high, with well-trained staff in all settings, there are insufficient places. There is still a need for the Cyprus Educational system to find the ways to provide pre-primary education opportunities to all children from the age 4 years and 8 months old and even to younger students from the age of 3 years and 8 months old.

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's' learning is sometimes different to the learning of school children. 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).

The curriculum for kindergartens in Cyprus is approved by the Council of Ministers following suggestions given by the Ministry of Education and Culture. It is the same for all types of kindergarten and must be followed in its entirety by all public and community kindergartens.

The curriculum of the kindergarten is child-centred and problem-solving centred and teachers are encouraged to implement the project approach. Play is a central element of the curriculum.

Main parts of the programme are the following:

- Free low structured activities (80 minutes): A free choice of a variety of social, cooperative and creative activities such as art, role playing, experimenting, observation, basic reading, writing and mathematics activities.
- Group Activity A': (40 minutes) language, science, mathematics, health education, environment education, social education, and religion.
- Group Activity B': (40-80 minutes): storytelling, theatre, music and movement, puppet shows, games, and poetry
- The day finished with the so called 'quiet activities' where the children work mostly in groups. During this time the teachers' usually formative or final assessment.

Fostering the **development of emergent literacy skills** is an important function of pre-school institutions, providing a basis for formal literacy instruction in primary school. We consider the following to be key components: oral language development, including vocabulary learning and grammar, familiarisation with the language of books (e.g. through hearing stories read and told), being engaged and motivated in literacy-related activities, experiencing a literacy-rich environment, developing concepts of print, and language awareness. (For more information see the frame text of country reports). In our analysis of steering documents we ask whether these components are included in the preschool curriculum. With the New Cyprus Curriculum (2010), emergent literacy was included for the first time officially in the national curriculum.

The New Cyprus Curriculum that was first introduced in 2010 has been recently revised (2015). The main aim of the pre-school curriculum is the development of literacy through the provision of experiences within which children are able to develop their communication skills (verbal and not verbal), their ability of discourse (spoken and writing) and finally develop positive attitudes towards literacy and reading. The development of literacy skills is mainly based on the opportunities of communicating with others.

Engaging and motivating children in literacy-related activities

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

Providing a literacy-rich environment

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

Concepts of print

Children should understand the direction of print, the stability of the written language, that print carries the message, be able to recognize letters in various texts, understand the "technical language

of print” and the various symbols from the environmental print (Ministry of Education and Culture 2010, p. 38-39). Furthermore, children should be able to read simple sentences or simple texts independently (Eurydice 2011, p. 56).

Language awareness

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

5.2.2 Literacy curricula in schools

Curriculum provides 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.

In Cyprus, the past few years there has been a continuous effort, for the modernization of language/literacy instruction, the teaching of Modern Greek. Literacy today is approached through a broader and research-based perspective. More specifically, an approach of integrated language and Literacy instruction is employed, which aims to balance and synthesize different aspects from various linguistic theories and practices.

Within the framework of the modernisation of the Cyprus educational system, the Greek Language subject plays a multi-layered and significant role. The proficiency in acquisition of the Greek language and the development of literacy in varied contexts and communicative situations consists one of the main objectives of M.O.E.C. Specifically, the Greek Language subject endeavours focus on building awareness of linguistic structures (e.g., *word recognition, use of grapheme-phoneme correspondences*) and the functions they perform in a variety of contexts, aiming towards their effective use.

Language structure is taught through a contextualized communication process and the use of modern pedagogical approaches, where children become researchers, creators and autonomous learners within and outside the school environment.

Therefore, the primary goal of the language subject is that pupils should be able to view and use language not only as a communication tool but also as social practice as a tool for constructing meanings. For this reason, reading, writing, listening, speaking and the structure of language is not taught in fragments or in a decontextualized fashion. In other words, the emphasis is placed on the functions of grammatical phenomena.

Summarized can be said that the curriculum in Cyprus includes five out of six indicators for word identification and four out of five indicators for knowledge of phonics during primary years (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2011, Figure 1.2, p. 56). Most of named indicators are taught especially during primary years.

The new curricula encompass the broad aims of education in Cyprus; fundamental pedagogical principles; subject related principles; and, aims and objectives and the content for every curriculum subject for all grades. The curricula also encompass elements of teaching and learning methodology; indicators of success and indicators of attainment; methods of evaluation; and, indicative teaching activities.

The broad aim of the new curriculum (Comprehensive curriculum for preschool, elementary and high School, 2010) is to contribute to the development of people that:

- Possess a satisfactory and connective body of knowledge from all areas of science;
- Develop behaviours and attitudes that characterize a democratic citizen; and,
- Possess, to the maximum possible degree, abilities, skills and competences that are required in the 'knowledge society' of the 21st century, which include: critical thinking; theoretical thinking and the ability to transfer theory into practice; analysis and planning abilities; problem solving; creativity; cooperative abilities; optimal and sensible use of ICT; empathy; and, communication skills.

The integrated language and Literacy instruction consists of the following four aspects, approached correspondingly:

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

Based on the educational context of Cyprus, the needs of teachers and the needs of students, the main objective of language teaching is to accomplish effective language education and, a more broadly and effective literacy education.

The new curriculum is being gradually implemented since September 2011. The revised curriculum (2015) has been developed with emphasis on indicators of attainment and indicator of success for each subject of study.

Primary school curricula

The use of language and reading constitute a major goal which is spread throughout the curriculum. In addition, language skills are addressed in the subject "ELLINIKA" which includes the topics of Modern Greek Language and Literature. ELLINIKA is taught in every grade of the primary school. In particular, the subject is taught, from September 2015, for twelve (40- minute) instructional periods during the first two grades of the elementary school, and is gradually reduced in the following grades (10 periods in Grades 3 and 4, and 9 periods in grades 5 and 6).

The Language Lesson in Cyprus curriculum aims to develop reading and writing skills as part of a broader literacy agenda. Literacy skills are viewed as dynamic and flexible and the aim of literacy learning is to enable students to control consciously a host of varied literacy skills.

Additional assistance in learning of the Greek language is offered by the school for children whose native language is not Greek and whose level of knowledge of the Greek language does not allow them to attend courses comfortably.

In spite of the fact that, as pointed above, there is a broader language curriculum, there is no specific curriculum for reading (literacy). Reading is usually taught as part of the national language curriculum that also includes all literacy skills (reading, writing, listening, speaking). Language skills are addressed in the subject "ELLINIKA" (including Language and Literature) hence reading is taught as part of language instruction and is apportioned most teaching-time in the two first grades of primary school.

Language is considered an integrated subject, including listening, speaking, reading, writing, orthography, grammar, studying skills, and skills for acquisition of information. In the primary curriculum, each language skill is defined by particular general aims and objectives.

Furthermore, activities of the school language “manual” (grammar, spelling, vocabulary, comprehension activities, writing activities) can be supplemented, overlooked or transformed, in accordance to the desired objectives and developing/anticipated skills of the students in regards with comprehension, use and production of a variety of texts (multimodal or not). Grammar and syntax books, as well as, dictionaries are used in class and at home as reference books.

For the teaching and learning of language, the school language manual is used, not necessarily in serial order (consecutive approach of issues, didactic units, grammatical exercises or pages). The application of the school language manual is adaptable, flexible and multileveled, with multiple ranks in regards with a lesson plan, a teaching unit, a project outline, or a thematic literacy unit. The school manual for language teaching is not the only teaching medium. Text/texts could potentially be co-taught with other informative or literature texts, texts in printed or digital form, oral texts, as well as, non-lingual texts that are age appropriate for the students, with regards to content, linguistic targets, aesthetic style and degree of readability. The potential applications of the manual will increase with the continuous addition, deletion or substitution of texts, whilst always focusing on the teaching of the Modern Greek Language.

Linking sounds to letters, naming the letters of the alphabet, using knowledge of letters, sounds and words when reading, drawing the forms of letters, and combining letters, understanding that the same sounds can and may have a different spelling are taught mainly during primary education in Cyprus. Children also read a range of familiar and common words independently; progression in recognising words (short and long); enriching vocabulary; writing own name from memory, and writing other words from memory are focused mainly during primary education. Guidelines in primary schools, besides the word recognition and fluency, foster the use of grapheme-phoneme correspondences, not only in the first year but also within second and third year.

Instruction 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 may improve 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).

According to the analysis of steering documents by Eurydice 2011 (p.60, Figure 1.4) the following reading strategies are mentioned in literacy curricula in Cyprus: Drawing inferences, Summarizing text, Making connections between parts of a text, Monitoring own comprehension. Not mentioned are: Using background knowledge, Constructing visual representations, Pupils reflect on own reading process. This last strategy is rarely mentioned in literacy curricula in European countries (Eurydice

2011), a remarkable result because reflecting on one's own reading process is a very important aspect in reading comprehension.

Language instruction in Cyprus is designed upon the characteristics of one or more texts but also on the basis of broader instructional units (and learning experiences) that relate to text(s) and refer to a problem/central question, a project etc. Language teaching is built upon a broad variety of learning objectives allowing thus a flexible approach. This enables extensions beyond textbook units in an effort to approach meaningfully an issue or a topic via different genres, including literature-type of texts. Designing topic/thematic units within or beyond textbook supports language instruction and promotes children's literacy in general.

The Ministry of Education and Culture promotes the application of contemporary pedagogical methodologies to literacy by the teacher, through a student-oriented approach, in order to achieve the main objective of linguistic development, that is the mastering, understanding and excellent use of the Modern Greek language. In this sense teacher must coordinate the learning process and outlines/organizes teaching in accordance to the principles of contemporary pedagogical science (constructivism, differentiation of class work, team work and collaboration/ investigative/ cross-curricular integration, exploratory learning, learning through active participation and involvement, utilization of information and communication technologies, integration of language education and real life).

Although, as shown above, guidelines, various activities and instructional practises are suggested by the official curricula, teachers have the autonomy to choose the teaching methodology best suited to their particular circumstances. These include interaction among students and the teacher, cooperative learning in small teams, differentiation of teaching materials, remedial activities, and continuous formative evaluation of the individual and group work. In addition, opportunities for inquiry and experimentation are proposed i.e. field trips, observations, interviews, presentations, dialogue, and role playing, use of information sources, projects, mapping.

The role of the teacher in literacy teaching:

- The teacher supervises, consults, supports, motivates the students.
- Cultivates and develops cognitive, metacognitive and social pedagogical strategies.
- Assists students to persistently improve and learn in an autonomous manner.
- Fashions and safeguards the appropriate settings and conditions for effective utilization of both written and spoken language.
- Teaches language and for language in a targeted, creative and communicatively outlined manner (not through standardized or mechanical manner), avoiding ineffectual reciting and memorization.
- Selects additional teaching material, for attaining the language objectives.

Contents of literacy curricula

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

Explicit instruction of grapheme-phoneme correspondences

The Ministry of Education and Culture highlights the advancement of grammar in a broader perspective, of metalinguistic awareness (including grapheme-phoneme correspondences, phonological awareness, morphological awareness and knowledge of grammar) and the development of basic skills (i.e., reading comprehension and writing skills) through contemporary learning strategies. Also, M.O.E.C. encourages the combination of contemporary language teaching/learning approaches (communicative approach, the text based-approach and a variety of literacy pedagogies) and the creation of an applicable combinatorial framework for teaching the language (depending on the age, interests, background, experiences, needs and capabilities of the individual students and of the classroom as a group).

Literacy curricula in secondary schools

The Ministry of Education and Culture, as part of its policy to modernize our educational system, starting from the school year 2014-15, promoted a series of innovations and reforms, some of which will take effect from the new school year (2015-2016). One of these is the restructuring of Curricula and the introduction of Indicators of Success and Indicators of Attainment. The restructuring of the Curricula based on Indicators of Success and Indicators of Attainment does not introduce changes that create new demands on teachers and students. The purpose of the restructuring is the modernization of the Curricula themselves and, above all, in order to facilitate the work of teachers for effective teaching in mixed readiness classes. The organization of the Curricula on the basis of both axes, Expected Learning Outcomes and the syllabus for achieving them, gives teachers a tool for pursuing and teaching what is necessary in each stage of the student's development. It also sets teaching in a new direction, which goes from the "teaching of the syllabus and the pages of the book" to the "teaching of the student", meeting his/her learning and broader developmental needs. At the same time, the organization based on Indicators facilitates the exercise of pedagogical autonomy of teachers, allowing them to diagnose both the students' weaknesses and their special skills, and to organize a successful learning context for all of them.

The school year 2015-16 is a year of the pilot application of the indicators, aimed at familiarizing teachers and improving indicators through the continuous formative evaluation of their implementation. The pilot application of indicators allows teachers to use Indicators flexibly as advance organizers of the Curriculum and their teaching, in order to give the necessary feedback through daily teaching practice. Within this framework, teachers and the school unit have time to organize activities for study and familiarization with the new structure of the Curriculum, its gradual use in teaching and their feedback towards the organized groups of inspectors, officers of the Pedagogical Institute and consultants, who will visit and support them.

Starting from the school year (2015-2016), a New Class Schedule is applied in secondary education (Gymnasiums and Lyceums), aiming to improve education provided to students. The New Class Schedule, in its new form and content, is in line with international trends, as they are demonstrated by the OECD, *Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development*. In the Gymnasium, teaching periods have increased from 37 to 38 and slight modifications were made in the distribution of class periods per lesson, the most important of which is the strengthening of Language courses (Ancient and Modern Greek). The problems presented in the proficiency of the students in the Greek language have been identified and pointed out repeatedly, both through the results of a series of external evaluations and researches, and by the Ministry of Education and Culture itself. These results indicate

the need for improvement in Modern Greek instruction, in an effort to improve students' language proficiency. The Committee also pointed out the need for further study and investigation of the problem with teachers and students, and the training of teachers in the Greek language Instruction.

In the Lyceum, a new course selection system with clear directions has been applied. Course selection starts in the 1st Grade of the Lyceum and students have a choice of four (4) groups of courses of Orientation. In the 2nd and 3rd Grade of the Lyceum six (6) directions are created (this will take effect starting from the academic year 2016-2017) and the institution of the schools of special interest – Music and Athletic Gymnasium and Lyceum – is strengthened in all cities.

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

Additionally, the new national curriculum introduces literacy in the framework of multiliteracy as a cross-curricular competence which all subjects integrate to their content. Teachers that teach other subjects, further from language must also be trained in how to integrate literacy skills development activities in their courses.

Moreover, since Cyprus classrooms are becoming more and more culturally diverse, teachers' training programs also need to develop teacher literacy instruction skills in teaching Greek as a foreign language to students that are not native speakers.

In an effort to enhance the curriculum practice in the classroom and meet the various challenges, the Ministry of Education and Culture introduced the outcome/teaching targets from the school year 2015 – 2016. The outcome targets refer to the students and their achievement and the teaching targets to the teacher and the content of the curricula. This will enable the monitoring of the student achievement.

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 Cyprus or other European countries. In order to describe the practice of reading instruction we would need extensive 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 childcentred 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). However, Cyprus was not included in these analyses.

Teachers of the first three grades in the primary schools of Cyprus are required to teach decoding and encoding skills by providing instruction in phonemic awareness and phonics. Instruction is expected to support students' acquisition of automatic decoding and encoding. Also, teachers need to help students develop fluency in reading, activate background knowledge, motivate and engage students in personal responses to text. In addition, teachers support students in becoming more fluent readers by engaging them in repeated readings for real purposes and by modelling fluent reading through practicing reading comprehension strategies (e.g., reading aloud). Primary school teachers of all grades in Cyprus, support students in learning and applying reading comprehension strategies. Moreover, teachers are expected to help students activate prior knowledge before, during and after reading so that themes, concepts or topics in the text are well connected with prior knowledge enabling thus, effective retrieval and recall of new information. Nevertheless, teachers aim to provide and promote authentic purposes for engaging in reading. In this direction, teachers offer opportunities for interaction with interesting literary, non- literary and multimodal texts in order to motivate students in engaging effectively in their literacy learning and development. Thus, teachers enable students set authentic reading purposes by providing them with broader options and choices in reading.

Digital literacy part of the curriculum for primary and secondary schools

Digital literacy in Cyprus is gaining a lot of ground according to the evidence presented in the Education and Training Monitor 2015 (European Commission). Research evidence shows that 53.8% of teachers from Cyprus reported having participated in ICT training during 2011-2014 and 46.4% of teachers use ICT for projects or class work with students compared with an EU average of 34.0% (OECD 2014). Teachers' efforts for professional development in ICT are in line with the basic aims of the curriculum for meaningful integration of ICT in the learning process.

Integration of ICT in primary and secondary education curricula has been on the agenda for a number of years. In order to assist the use of ICT in the educational process the Technology Integration Plan suggests the enrichment of the national curriculum and development of essential educational material like software and others. In the curriculum for primary education, ICT is today not treated as a separate subject, but it is used as a dynamic tool for the teaching and learning Country Report: Cyprus 10 / 21 processes. The main role of ICT here is to secure a more effective implementation of the school curriculum and the development of skills such as problem solving, decision making, communication and information handling. In the curriculum for secondary education, an ICT course is taught for two teaching periods per week in each of the three grades of all lower secondary schools. The main

objective of these courses is to cover all seven ECDL modules. Additionally, the courses cover also eSafety, algorithms and programming issues. (p. 9-10 e-SKILLS IN EUROPE, Cyprus Country Report, 2014¹⁸).

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.

Literacy Standards as a basis of assessments

Till 2010, Cyprus didn't have detailed standards for each grade (school years.) For these reason, a group of experts has been formed in order to produce specific indicators and standards for every curricular topic, at each grade, including of course the topic of "ELLINIKA". This work has begun as early as 2010, with the definition of broad curricular standards, defined as "Indicators of Success" and was intensified in 2015. Hence specific teaching/attainment targets (called Sufficiency Indicators).

During the school year 2014-2015, the development of language proficiency and adequacy indicators is currently in progress. From September 2015, teachers can use, in their instruction, the language proficiency and adequacy indicators for Reading/Writing. The indicators of Listening/Speaking are being currently developed and expected to be concluded in January 2016. These language indicators will form the basis of assessments allowing early identification of reading difficulties.

The Language/Reading Curriculum does not prescribe assessment standards and methods. However, general guidelines for assessment are described in the current Primary School Curriculum and other official documents of the Ministry. Within this context, teachers are required to adopt a systematic approach to the assessment of their pupils, employing different types of assessment and a variety of assessment techniques. The pupils are assessed on the degree of their participation in class, the results

¹⁸See: file:///C:/Users/pi007/Downloads/Country_Report_Cyprus.pdf.

of oral and written tests set out by the classroom teacher, as well as the results of work done in the classroom and at home including project work. Records of assessment are solely kept by the teacher thus no written reports on the results of pupil assessment are provided. Nor a grading system exists. The results of assessment are mainly reported by communication with parents. A specific period is assigned each week in the teachers' timetables, which allows for regular meetings of the parents with the classroom teacher.

The educational system at the primary level provides for three different types of assessment, the initial or diagnostic assessment, the formative or continuous assessment and the final or summative assessment:

- Initial assessment is applied at the beginning of a school year or term and forms the basis for planning for the teacher;
- Formative assessment is the prevailing type of pupil assessment, aiming at the continuous monitoring and improvement of the teaching-learning process. It takes place throughout the school year as an integral part of teaching and it provides direct feedback to both teachers and pupils; In primary schools, formative assessment is usually conducted through teacher-made tests. Formative assessment relies on methods such the achievement folder (portfolio), self-assessment and peer-assessment and less on traditional methods such as essays and tests, which reflect the performance of the student in a single moment of the learning course.
- Final assessment is applied at the end of a long period of school work or the whole school year in order to determine the success of its results. Summative evaluation is based on predefined undifferentiated tests which are included in the Language textbooks. Self-evaluation practices, portfolio, and record-keeping are alternative types of assessment.

No national examination exists for the primary schools. All types of assessment are undertaken by the classroom teacher. The Ministry recommends that a variety of assessment techniques must be used, such as written tests, classroom observation, communication, and pupils' self-evaluation. It is important to note that students may move from one grade to the next on the basis of age. Only in exceptional cases a pupil may have to repeat a school year because of unsatisfactory progress (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2013).

Screenings for reading competence to identify struggling readers

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

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

Supporting struggling literacy learners

Number of struggling readers receiving remedial instruction

As shown in detail in section 4 (4.1.1. Percentage of students with low level skills in Greek language) students at risk for low level skills in Greek language are identified by the Program of Functional Literacy ((PFL). In the context of the PFL reading, writing and grammar as well are assessed for year 3 and year 6 (CERE, 2015). The results for the year of 2014 -2015 shows that 11% of Year 3 students and 10% year 6 are at risk for low level skills in Greek language.

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.

In order to address the needs of students at risk, as identify by the national research on functional literacy performed by the Cyprus Center of Educational Evaluation (CERE) the Cyprus Ministry of Education and Culture (MOEC) has created a Functional Literacy Committee. The committee's basic aim is the prevention of functional illiteracy trough the support provided to schools and teachers. For students at risk and for students that are struggling, the development of basic literacy skills: reading, comprehension, writing and speaking and the support of students' self-image consists a main priority for every school and every teacher (Ministry of Education and Culture Circular dde3723a).

The Primary Education Department of the MEOC has provided schools and teachers with list of good practices to help students at risk and struggling readers (Ministry of Education and Culture Circular dde3839a and dde3839b).

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

In an effort to promote "learning for all" one of the main principles of the National Curriculum 2010 (MOEC, 2009) is Differentiated Instruction. Differentiated instruction is seen as a way to address Student's Readiness Level, providing all students opportunity to learn. Based on this main curriculum principle teachers have the ability to differentiate their instruction (curriculum, process, content, evaluation) in order to meet the needs of individual learners: readiness level, interests, learning profile and other individual needs. The C.P.I. also offers series of central and school based training seminars focusing on the design and practice of differentiated instruction, in order to provide the framework within all students will have the opportunity to work and learn.

Supporting 12-15 years old students facing literacy problems.

The Headteachers of the Secondary Schools are informed about the PFL results for Grade 6 students as students identified at risk will be involved the next year (i.e. at Grade 7) in literacy programs in lower secondary schools (i.e. Gymnasium). Based on these data, literacy classes are organized in the first year of Gymnasium. The parents of the children are informed about the classes and are asked to approve the participation of their children in these groups in Greek, Maths or both. The groups consist of minimum 4 and maximum 12 students and do not include non native speakers (since different classes are arranged for them). The students leave the mainstream Greek and Maths class and join the literacy class for the above subjects. Information about the level of acquaintance of the Greek language is sought from the primary schools. The program which involves students of the first three classes of High School is supported and supervised by the coordinators of the Special Education office of the Ministry of Education and Culture.

The general aim of the Literacy Program is to provide the basic human right to literacy and prevent school and social exclusion and its negative consequences. Specific educational goals of the Literacy Program are the development of the basic writing, reading and numerical skills and reading comprehension. Moreover, the program aims to enhance the ability of personal expression, judgement, creativity, discussion and communication and emotional development of the students based on the abilities and interests of each student.

As far as assessment is concerned, the students participating in the Literacy Program take the same exam with the students of the mainstream classes. However, as far as Greek exam is concerned the paper is simplified for them and as far as the Math's exam is concerned, they are allowed to use calculator. Assessment is based on each student's interest and progress. Teachers are encouraged to use alternative ways of assessment such as projects. In case that more than one teacher teaches the same group, they will have to coordinate closely with each other.

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

Entry requirements for Initial Teacher Education

Students that are interested in entering the pedagogical departments of public universities in Cyprus and Greece can do so through the Pancyprian Examinations. The Pancyprian examination awards the School Leaving Certificate (Apolytirion) to graduate students of Secondary Education and simultaneously allows them to earn a position into the Public Higher Education Institutions of Cyprus and Greece. Pancyprian Examinations are conducted in the second half of May till the first half of June.

Public universities in Cyprus and Greece provided the initial teachers education for many decades. However, the past few years, initial teacher education is also offered by private universities in Cyprus. In these cases, entry qualifications are defined by each university. Usually, the general admission requirement for entry to an undergraduate programme of study is a High School Certificate or equivalent qualification. Some programmes may have additional requirements in which case they are specified separately under the relevant programme details.

Level of qualification of teachers in all levels

According to TALIS (2013) results teachers in Cyprus are highly qualified, with 96.2 % of Teachers on ISCED level 5A (Master's Degree) 0.7% on ISCED level 5B (Bachelor) and 3.1 % teachers on ISCED level

6 (Doctorate degree) (OECD, 2014., TALIS 2013. p. 261). Furthermore, teachers in Cyprus stated that they are well or very well prepared to teach their content area (98.9%) and they are well or very well prepared pedagogically to teach (96.7 %).

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

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). Cyprus requires primary teachers to have a bachelor's degree. The study includes induction phase which duration is 39 days for prospective teachers at all levels.

Length of required training of secondary teachers

Cyprus requires that secondary teachers have a bachelor's degree. In addition, secondary teachers must attend a pre-service training programme for 7 months offered by the University of Cyprus in order to be appointed to a public school.

The 2013 OECD TALIS survey provides a mixed picture for teachers in Cyprus (OECD 2014). It shows that 89.1% of lower secondary level teachers in Cyprus had undertaken some form of professional development, which is slightly above the EU-average of 84.7%.

Furthermore, TALIS (2013) results reveal that 94.7 % of Teachers that teach literature (literature refers to the overall language course) have received high level form of education (level 4 or above) and thus have a university degree but only 33 % of these teachers have received specific training in literature instruction and only 2.9 % received a high level professional development courses in literature (Table 13).

Table 13: TALIS (2013) Results regarding the education and training in teaching literature for lower secondary education teachers

	Currently teaching reading, writing and literature ²		Of whom received the following types of formal education or training in this subject category					
			ISCED level 4 or above or a subject specialisation as part of the teacher training ³		In-service or professional development stage		No formal education or training at ISCED level 4 or higher or at the professional development stage for this subject category ⁴	
			%	S.E.	%	S.E.	%	S.E.
Cyprus*	32.8	(1.3)	94.7	(1.1)	33.0	(2.3)	2.9	(0.8)

The role of literacy expertise in Initial Teacher Training

Acknowledging the importance of teachers' literacy expertise in promoting literacy, both teachers' initial education and teachers' professional development aim to provide opportunities for the development of teachers' basic competences 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.

Initial teachers training in literacy expertise is taken into a serious consideration from the University of Cyprus, which is one of the main Higher Institutions providing Pre- Primacy and Primary teachers' education. The syllabus of the university apart from the pedagogical and general methodology teaching courses, provides to prospective teachers a selection of courses regarding language instruction (i.e. Early Literacy, Language Arts Methods, Forms of Language Expression, Structure of Greek for Pedagogical Purposes, Modern Greek Language: Written Speech and Academic Writing, Greek Language Instruction II, Multiliteracies and Multimodalities, Teaching Greek as a Second Language, Teaching Children's Literature).

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

According to an analysis of guidelines for Initial Teacher Education institutions, generic skills or methodology for teaching reading is a topic in ITE (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2011, Fig. 2.5, p. 99). Nine countries have guidelines on teacher education directly related to tackling reading difficulties, mostly for prospective primary teachers. In Belgium (German-speaking Community), Spain and Cyprus, courses for prospective primary teachers cover the methodology for teaching the language of instruction (or teaching reading) and this includes how to address reading difficulties. (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2011, p. 100).

Further from these evidence and based on the need for all primary teachers to teach reading, all graduates from the pedagogical departments of the University of Cyprus or any other private university are trained in language and can be considered as a teacher of reading. According to the program of undergraduate studies of the University of Cyprus¹⁹ (undergraduate prospectus 2014-16²⁰), all graduates must complete at least 10 ECTS in lessons that support the reading instruction [i.e the compulsory courses of Language Arts Methods (5 ECTS), Greek Literature or Greek Language (5 ECTS)]. There are also additional courses that students can select (i.e Modern Greek: Written Speech and Academic Writing). Students can also choose the specialization of Greek Language, thus completing an additional number of 15 ECTS.

¹⁹ The program of study of the university of Cyprus is similar to the programs of the private university in Cyprus, since it serves as the basic framework for the development of accredited programs.

²⁰ See: <https://www.ucy.ac.cy/publications/documents/Ekdoseispdf/Prospectuses/undergr.En14-16.pdf>.

Regarding to assessing pupils' reading skills, according to an analysis of guidelines for ITE institutions, this is not a topic in Initial Teacher Training (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2011, Fig. 2.5, p. 99). Nevertheless, evaluation and assessment are topics offered by the initial teacher training programs of the universities in Cyprus. Perspective teachers are obliged to take at least one course in Educational Evaluation (5 ECTS). Within the course of this course students learn, among other things, how to evaluate pupils' reading skills.

The analysis of guidelines for ITE institutions teaching to read on-line texts is a topic in Initial Teacher Training (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2011, Fig. 2.5, p. 99) only five countries (Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and the United Kingdom (Scotland) have these guidelines explicitly refer to teaching to read on-line texts. This applies in Cyprus (prospective primary teachers) to language of instruction courses. In Cyprus, the Bachelor's degree in primary school teaching also includes a course specialising in multi-literacies and multi-modalities. (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2011, p. 101)

The minimum time allotted to in-school placements during ITE in Cyprus is 60 hours. There is considerable variation in Europe: For prospective primary teachers, this time ranges from 40 hours in Latvia to 900 hours in Austria (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2011, Fig. 2.6, p. 102). Cyprus belongs to the eight countries which explicitly state that skills relating to the teaching of reading must be practised during in-school placements, together with Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Romania, Turkey and the United Kingdom (England and Wales). In Cyprus, prospective primary education teachers are required to allocate approximately a quarter of their in-school placements to teaching the Greek language, which includes the teaching of reading. (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2011, p. 102).

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

Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

In Cyprus, as regards primary school teachers, there is no compulsory continuing professional development (in-service training) for teachers which focuses on literacy development. However, training sessions are provided to equip teachers with the skills to teach literacy across educational levels, targeting those ISCED 2 teachers responsible for implementing the programme on 'functional illiteracy'. (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2011, p. 110). Moreover, several seminars are offered to teachers of all levels by the Cyprus Pedagogical Institute on a voluntary basis, at extra school time. It is important to notice for some years now that the CPI offers seminars and support to teachers on a school basis according to the needs of each school. According to the 2013 OECD TALIS survey 89.1% of lower secondary level teachers in Cyprus had undertaken some form of professional

development, which is slightly above the EU-average of 84.7%. At the same time 53.8% of teachers from Cyprus reported having participated in ICT training during the same period.

As from the year 2014-2015 professional learning of teacher is supported by a school based professional learning programme (YEM), offered by the CPI. Teachers' professional learning through action research is the main aim of the programme. The program has evolved this school year (2015-2016) to a pilot programme for Professional Learning (EM) which has also integrated the practice of an electronic portfolio, not only for teachers to provide information about their professional learning activities but to engage them in a reflective critical thinking regarding these activities (CPI, 2015).

Time spent on professional development related to literacy

The Cyprus Pedagogical Institute organizes learning and training courses for teachers in an effort to promote the use of reading strategies and practices. From 2013 emphasis is placed on the provision of school based teachers training. Furthermore, afternoon teachers training seminars are provided voluntarily in an effort to promote the provision of intensive and differentiated strategies/practices for teaching reading.

Furthermore, in order to support teachers that teach Greek as a foreign language to immigrant students the Cyprus Pedagogical Institute (C.P.I.) has developed a series of training courses aiming at reinforcing the teachers entrusted with the support of foreign speaking students. The C.P.I. offers Training Programme and centralized training courses to the specific population of the Greek language teachers. Teachers that teach immigrant students are also supported in their schools by CPI officers.

Seminar and courses particularly related to reading are offered in the context of:

- Seminar induced for the introduction of the new national curriculum that provided guidelines for instruction of the subject "Ellinika" (Greek language). During the last two years, such courses have been offered in many occasions in all districts of Cyprus in the form of central one day seminars.
- Since 2012 teachers of both primary and secondary schools have the opportunity for two day training seminars (Diimero Ekpaideutikou). For primary education these seminars take place at the beginning of the school year while in secondary education they take place mid-January. In primary education the focus is mainly on language teaching and methodological aspects of teaching. The same goes to secondary language teachers while teachers of other subjects are trained specifically on their field school subject.
- As noted before, seminars for teaching language are offered on voluntary basis by the Cyprus Pedagogical Institute. These courses have duration 15 periods.

All the training seminars mentioned above (i.e Two-day teachers' development program, Teacher Professional Development programs on an optional basis) are evaluated via questionnaires sent to the participants and the trainers. Results are used to determine the quality of the seminar (in terms of content, methods and utility of the knowledge and skills acquired by the participants) and determine the actions needed for its improvement.

Challenge: Time spent on Professional development programs related to literacy cannot be calculated exactly for Cyprus since, as noted above, no specific time is allocated through legislation and educational policy for CPD on the whole. Participation in professional development programmes is mainly voluntarily and partially compulsory. Compulsory participation takes place in school time and up to the last two years was provided in external school venues. The past two years in an effort to

bring professional development on a school basis and nearer to teachers, PD seminars are provided in schools. This program is in an experimental phase and it is actually associated with a pilot study to monitor teachers' professional development through a personal portfolio for their professional development. Teachers' PD at school level is formulated according to the school's and teacher's needs. It is interesting to note that most of the elementary schools are focusing on the development of teachers' literacy instruction skills and general effective teaching evaluation and teaching practises. The establishment of a solid and consistent CPD program is one of the challenges that the Cyprus Educational System faces and as shown above there is a growing effort towards it.

5.2.6 Digital literacy as part of initial teacher education

The university of Cyprus in its syllabus for IT of teachers has compulsory courses in ICT in order to promote and develop their digital literacy: Educational Technology (5 ECTS), Introduction to Computer Science (5 ECTS). Furthermore, elective courses regarding the development of primary and pre-primary teachers' digital literacy are offered.

Challenge: Fostering digital literacy skills of teachers and students needs a stronger emphasis since not all teachers are able to use media in order to support the quality of teaching in order to promote students' digital literacy.

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

In line with the New Primary School Timetables (2015), both language and literature are taught under the subject of «Ellinika» (Greek). Language and literature instruction share a collaborative relationship; literature instruction lies within the broader scope of literacy instruction maintaining, at the same time, its unique value. Language and literature share, thus, common, albeit distinct goals.

Literature texts are used in language instruction aiming, among other, the following:

- The aesthetic enjoyment
- The literature literacy
- The promotion of love for reading
- The creative writing
- Information and values that such texts highlight.
- The language of the texts that constructs and promotes meanings for various issues.
- Their critical investigation and analysis
- The comparison of literature texts with other literature, non-literature texts, or other pieces of art.

The following teaching principles, are proposed by the curriculum and are used by teachers who are being trained and supported to do so by language counselors that visit schools

- Literature texts are used both from school textbooks (textbook and anthology book texts on the same topic allowing potentials for an interdisciplinary approach), but also beyond school textbooks (purposefully chosen).
- Literature texts are approached as sociocultural products enacting different perspectives via linguistics aspects and genres characteristics.
- Literature texts are used as a medium to tap into the various information, concepts and views that relate to the contexts wherein the texts are being developed. These texts, thus, allow a critical consideration and understanding of the world.

- It is possible to approach both literature and non-literature texts within the same lesson. For instance, drawing parallels or identifying departures between a literature and a non-literature text may contribute to children's broader literacy development. At the same time, such an approach may also support children's literacy in literature. The same topic may thus be approached both from literature or language criteria that can share common ground or a different one.

Literacy teaching is aiming among other things to promote the love of reading and reading for pleasure. The Curriculum Development Unit of the Pedagogical Institute is responsible for the preparation of books and audio-visual material that teachers and pupils use during their lessons. Books prepared by the Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs of Greece are also widely used. All of this material is provided to schools and pupils for free. All core teaching texts are the same in the public primary system. However, a school may buy and use supplementary materials with the financial support of the Local School Board or the Parents' Association, provided that they have prior been approved by the Ministry of Education and Culture.

All the above curriculum literacy instructional practises are in use and further from teachers support by school literacy counsellors, their implementation is monitored by headmasters and school inspectors.

Improving the quality of preschool

The last years' efforts have been made in order to improve the quality of preschool education in Cyprus, both at a policy and at practice level.

At a policy level, the development and introduction of the New Curriculum as part of the national educational reform, aimed to improve the quality of pre-school. The New Curriculum for Early Childhood Education 2010 (revised in 2015) documented for the first time the development of emerging literacy skills in early childhood.

Apart from the introduction of the new curriculum, emphasis was given the last two years towards the development of teachers' professional learning through action research methodology. Small-scale research is conducted in collaboration with pre-school teachers in order to promote the notion of 'teachers as researchers' among pre-school years teachers. The programme is implemented by Cyprus Pedagogical Institute.

Early identification of and support for children and adolescents with literacy difficulties

The Program for Functional Literacy (PFL) aims to identify pupils at risk of school failure at two stages during compulsory education i.e. at the end of Year 3 (age 8), at the end of Year 6 (age 11) in order to get support. For this purpose, PFL develops multiple tests to assess two key competences, as identified by European Commission: communication in mother tongue (Greek language) and mathematics. Greek language tests assess three key skills - reading comprehension, writing and grammar- Schools are informed about the results i.e. whether students are identified as 'at risk' and then the Departments of Primary and Secondary Education are informed about the names of the students who need support. Schools are responsible for informing parents of the students 'at risk' and implementing intervention/support programmes for this population.

Pre-service and in-service teacher training

Predominantly, the in-service teacher training in Cyprus Educational System is offered by the Pedagogical Institute of Cyprus. The mission of the Cyprus Pedagogical Institute is the design and implementation of continuous professional development of teachers at all levels, the setting of a framework of the teacher competences and the promotion of horizontal issues of educational priority. It also aims at improving the content and effectiveness of the education provided in accordance with the wider international, European and local context.

Starting from September 2015, a Professional Learning Programme for Teachers is implemented, on a pilot basis, in schools of both Primary and Secondary Education. The Programme is based on the principles of Professional Learning. Taking for granted the premise that teachers are one of the most important factors in the broader effort to enhance the quality of education, the development of a uniform policy on the subject of their professional learning was considered particularly important. This issue has emerged as a need in both older and more recent reports, which comment on our Educational System (e.g. World Bank Reports).

The concept of professional learning includes «all types of learning that teachers may have after their initial training» and «all processes, actions and activities that increase the professional knowledge, skills and attitudes of teachers, so that they may improve the learning of the students».

According to the Programme, professional learning of teachers should be ongoing, should include both training and application in real classrooms, and finally, it should provide sufficient time for learning, reflexion, monitor and support of instruction in order to improve quality of teaching.

Challenge: The vision of the Cyprus' Pedagogical Institute is the continuous professional development of teachers at all levels, as well as the substantial contribution to the planning and implementation of educational policy, taking into consideration the literature and research and the priorities set by the Ministry of Education and Culture in order to improve the quality if the educational system.

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
(might be more).

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 2005, 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 31.0% Cyprus is beyond the European average showing relatively high inequality.

Child poverty

An indicator of child poverty is the percentage of children living in a household in which disposable income, when adjusted for family size and composition, is less than 50% of the national median income (UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre 2012). With 6.1% Cyprus has a low percentage compared to the other European countries participating in ELINET. The range is from 4.7% in Iceland to 25.5% in Romania (for an overview of European countries see table A2 in Appendix B).

Mother's education level

Available data from the Census of Population in 2011 of the Statistical Service of the Republic of Cyprus are only about the educational level of women in general and are shown in the table below.

Table 14: Women's educational level in Cyprus

Education Level	Total in number	Percentage	Percentage based on ISCED levels	Average figures for the European countries
Never attended school* - No schooling	4.098	1,1	5,8%	0.6%
Has not completed Primary	17.322	4,7		No data
Primary* ISCED 1	56.938	15,6	15,6 %	5.3%
Lower Secondary (Gymnasium (3 years))* ISCED 2	43.125	11,8	11,8%	16.5 %
Upper Secondary (Lyceum/ Technical/Vocational)* ISCED 3	120.178	32,9	32,9%	36.1%
Post-secondary non-tertiary* (4) (ISCED 4)	17.140	4,7	4,7%	7.1%
Tertiary level (non university)* (ISCED 5B)	26.861	7,3	7,3%	9,5%
Tertiary level - University (first degree)* (ISCED 5A)	54.896	15	15%	13,9%
Tertiary level - Post-graduate degree* (ISCED 6)	17.792	4,9	5,3%	10,1%
Tertiary level - Doctorate* (ISCED 6)	1.322	0,4		
Not stated	6.168	1,6	1,6%	
TOTAL	365.840	100	100%	

Figures with * have been updated in 2013

Comparing Cyprus with average figures for the European countries participating in PIRLS (for an overview of European countries see table A3 in Appendix B) .it seems that although women in Cyprus are receiving education there is a 5.8% of women that does not complete primary education witch is high compared to 0.6% of the EU average. The percentage of women educational level for secondary (upper and low), Post-secondary non-tertiary* (ISCED 4), Tertiary level (non university - ISCED 5B), Tertiary level - Post-graduate degree* (ISCED 6) and Tertiary level - Doctorate (ISCED 6) are also lower than the EU average. There is although a slight differentiation in the level of primary and first degree level of education where the percentage of women completed primary education and the percentage of women that have a first degree is higher that the EU average.

Single parent

According to Eurostat (2012, Figure A 7), in Cyprus the percentage of children living mainly with a single parent is 6.2%. 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

Based on PFL 2014-2015 data, at least one parent for 15% of Grade 6 students was born outside the country.

Primary language spoken at home different from language used at school

In the context of the PFL 2014-2015, 68% of Grade 6 students stated that they only speak Greek at home while 32% reported that they speak a different language and/or use an additional language at home.

Related Policies

Programmes against poverty: Since December 2012 pupils in need are offered breakfast -and in some cases and lunch -in schools. The number of pupils who received breakfast from the MOEC and other organizations responsible for feeding during the school year 2012-2013 was approximately 10500, i.e. 10% of the whole pupils population.

In addition, during the school year 2012-2013, donations were made by companies and persons to the Pupils' Welfare Fund of the MOEC for the feeding of students in need. The feeding of pupils in need during the school year 2013-2014, began from the first working day of the school year in September 2013, while the provision of fresh, pasteurized chocolate milk started from 2nd February 2014.

Via electronic platform that was created for this purpose, first the head-teachers of the Schools stated the needs of their pupils in sandwiches and fresh, pasteurized chocolate milk. Then, depending on the organization who was responsible for feeding, the Ministry of Education and Culture was engaging in all the necessary steps so that the 13317 pupils who required help at all levels of education (Pre-primary, Primary, General Secondary and Secondary Technical and Vocational Education), i.e. 12% of the whole pupils population would be provided with a sandwich and 11 085 students would be provided with a fresh pasteurized chocolate milk one daily basis. The MOEC has managed, in partnership with many organizations of feeding, to cover the feeding needs of all pupils who require help at all levels of education.

Programmes for parents who struggle with literacy: Parents can play a crucial role in fostering young children's emerging literacy and language skills (Weigel, D., Martin, S., & Bennett, K. K., 2005;

Bonci, A. (2010). Not all parents are able to support their children development. In Cyprus illiterate adults- parents have opportunities to develop their literacy skills through different programmes offered by MOEC.

Natives have the opportunity to completing secondary education by attending to evening secondary schools available in all big cities of Cyprus. Lately an evening Technical school for vocational education and training is being created to cover the needs of adults in interest in vocational education.

Immigrant parents have the opportunity to participate in the "Programme for Greek Language Teaching Applicable to Migrants and Other Foreign Language Speaking Residents of Cyprus", offered by the Ministry of Education and Culture. The programme is one of the actions taken in the framework of the Operational Programme "Employment, Human Capital and Social Cohesion 2007 – 2013" and is co-financed by the European Social Fund and the Republic of Cyprus. Residents of Cyprus over 15 years of age, who are migrants and/or foreign language speakers, are entitled to apply for participation to the programme. In a more general socio-economic context, language skills development is deemed necessary so that migrants and foreign language speakers who live in Cyprus acquire the ability to communicate with ease in their daily lives.

The Programme is implemented by the Adult Education Centres of the Ministry of Education and Culture, from 2010 till today²¹. The courses are offered in 90 minutes sessions twice a week in groups of 10 to 15 persons.

5.3.2 Support for children with special educational needs

According to Eurypedia (2013a), in Cyprus children with special needs get support in in mainstream Kindergartens. It is not mentioned explicitly if the special educational schools included special kindergarten classes. Special educational support staff who are either fully assigned to mainstream schools, run special units or are peripatetic teachers (Eurypedia 2013b)²².

There is no systematic assessment of children in order to identify language development problems (Eurypedia 2013b). Children who referred from parents or kindergarten directors as having possible SN are assessed by a district multidisciplinary team (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education 2009). Country Information: Cyprus²³..

As of September 2001, the MOEC has put into effect the Education and Training of Children with Special Needs Laws of 1999 to 2014 and the Regulations for Education and Training of Children with Special Needs of 2001 and 2013, which support the application of the above Laws.

Children with special needs are educated in public schools equipped with suitable infrastructure, according to the Laws for Special Education. The majority of children with special educational needs are educated within the mainstream classroom (3134). Special Education is also provided in Special Units within mainstream schools. Children attending Special Units (442) are also assigned to a mainstream class, where they can attend integrated lessons and participate in celebratory or festive events.

²¹ See: <http://www.ekt.org.cy/index.php?pageid=76&lang=en>.

²² See: https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Cyprus:Special_Education_Needs_Provision_within_Mainstream_Education.

²³ See: <http://www.european-agency.org/country-information/cyprus/national-overview/identification-of-special-educational-needs>

Children with severe difficulties are educated in Special Schools, equipped with the appropriate staff (teachers for learning, intellectual, functional and adjustment difficulties, psychologists, speech therapists, nurses, physiotherapists and other specialists, as well as auxiliary staff) in order to receive high quality therapy, education and support.

The educational and other needs of children in Pre-primary Schools, in Primary Schools, in Special Units and in Special Schools are met through individualized programmes of Special Education. Five hundred and sixty-eight (568) special educators encompassing a wide variety of specialties (teachers for learning, intellectual, functional and adjustment difficulties, teachers for the deaf and the blind, teachers for special physical education, music therapy, occupational therapy, speech and language therapy, educational psychology, audiology and physiotherapy) work to support and meet the educational needs of children with special needs. Moreover, twenty-nine (29) educators from the secondary and technical education sectors are seconded to provide education and prevocational training to pupils attending special schools.

The MOEC aims to reinforce the awareness and sensitivity of School Inspectors, School Head Teachers, Class Teachers and Teachers of Special Education to the provisions of the Law and their obligations towards children with special needs attending their schools. This objective is achieved through in-service training seminars and personal contacts with people involved in Special Education (Inspectors of Special Education, Educational Psychologists, Special Educational Needs Coordinators and teachers of Special Education).

5.3.3 Promoting preschool attendance, especially among disadvantaged children

The benefits of attending preschool institutions have been proven in many studies. The duration of attendance is associated with greater academic improvement (Mullis et al. 2012b). According to European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice/Eurostat (2014, Figure C1 p.62), the enrolment rate at age 4 is 85%. Cyprus does/not yet reach the European benchmark for at least 95% of children between age 4 and the start of compulsory education participating in ECEC (for an overview of European countries see table C1 in Appendix B).

OECD Family Database (2014) offers more differentiated figures of participation rates at age 3, 4 and 5. According to 2010 statistical data, the participation rate is 100% for 5-year-olds, 75,2% for 4-year-olds, and 45,1% for 3-year-olds (OECD 2014) (for an overview of European countries see table C2 in Appendix B). The percentage of children aged 0-5 with foreign citizenship attending pre-school programmes in Cyprus is higher than in most EU countries (15.8%) (Eurostat, 2014).

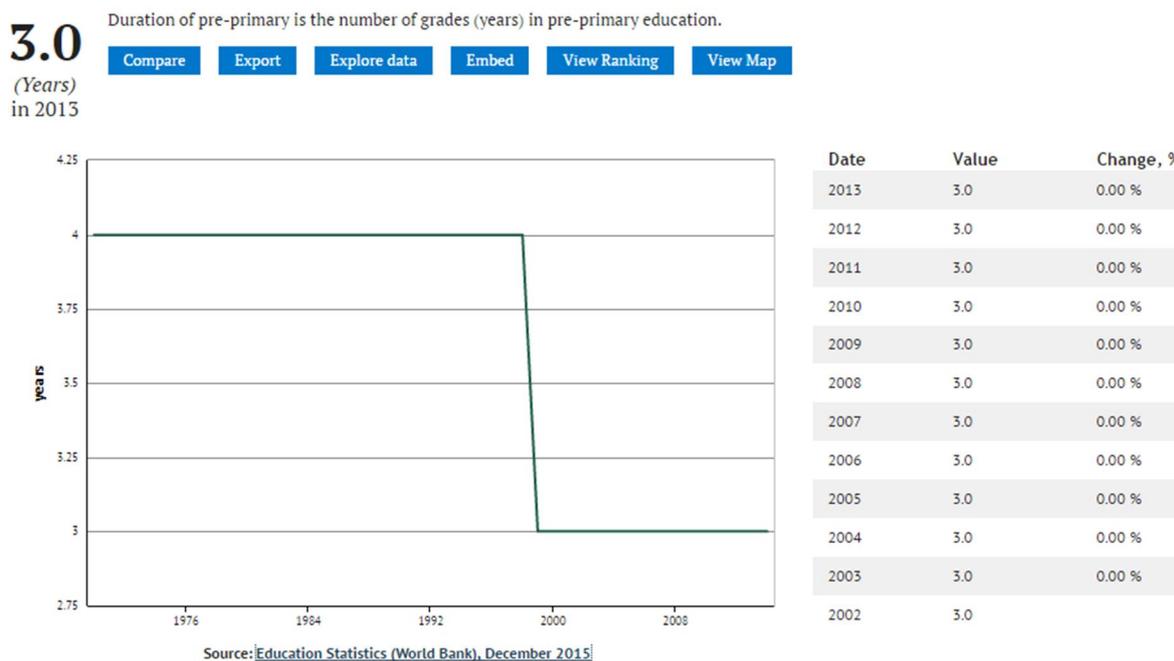
Although there has been an effort to extend compulsory education towards including children of younger age this is not made possible mainly due to its cost. This may be correlated with the lack of suitable and affordable childcare services and with a higher level of informal care than in the EU.

There are socioeconomical and other criteria for the enrollment of children of the age 3 - 4 8/12 years old in public or communal kindergartens. Since school enrollment for 3-4 years old children is not compulsory priority is provided to pre-primary students. After the enrollment of pre-primary students and according to schools capacity some available places can be provided to younger children. In these cases, enrollment of students is provided based on socioeconomical criteria (e.x. family income, number of children in the family and other criteria

The average duration of pre-primary attendance in Cyprus is three years. As mentioned in a previous section of this report, children are accepted in public pre-primary schools over the age of 3 presuming

there are available spaces. Therefore, the average duration of pre-primary attendance in Cyprus are the ages between 3-6 where the Ministry of Education and Culture is responsible for that age range.

Figure 8: Pre-primary Education – Duration of pre-primary education



No child should be excluded from preschool because parents cannot afford to send their children to preschool/kindergarten institutions if they have to pay. While in half of the European countries the entire period of ECEC is free, in Cyprus pre-primary education is free and compulsory for the last year of kindergarten (for 5 years old children). Cyprus belongs to the European countries that provide at least one year of free pre-primary education (Eurypedia 2014)²⁴.

Parents of children 3 - 4 8/12 years old, enrolled in public kindergartens, pay fees per month dependent on their income level (Eurypedia 2014)²⁵. Public or Communal kindergartens cannot cover the demand for all children of this age. Substantial number of children enrolls in private kindergartens.

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

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

²⁴ See: https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Cyprus:Early_Childhood_Education_and_Care.

²⁵ See: https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Cyprus:Early_Childhood_and_School_Education_Funding

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. For culturally and/or linguistically disadvantaged children, additional support is given by additional staff in mainstream settings, programmes focusing on language and establishing priority geographical areas (EACEA; Eurydice 2009, p. 104).

Speech therapists are often placed in schools offering support to special unit pupils as well as mainstream pupils with language problems, but is not mentioned explicitly if that provision exist for pre-primary education too (Eurypedia 2013b).

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

Primary schools in Cyprus are allocated with extra time for supportive instruction in the framework of the "Program of Supportive Instruction" (Programma Enisxitikis Didaskalias) which was introduced in 2002. Time allocation varies according to the size of the school and the number of reported students with learning difficulties and/or students with mother tongues other than Greek.

Since 2008, in schools with a large percentage of immigrant population, specialized groups for teaching Greek have been formed. Until now, no extra instructional time was provided. Students attend supportive instruction during their normal time schedule. Usually support is provided by the teachers of their school, thus there is no provision for the employment of extra, specialized personnel. However, in schools with a large percentage of immigrants (schools inducted into the program Schools of Educational Priority) teaching assistants with specialized qualifications can be employed on the basis of part-time, paid per hour work.

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

Furthermore, the Council of Ministers has approved the MOEC's "Policy Report on Multicultural Education" (2008) which included a lot a new measures and action to promote multicultural education. The MOEC has implemented the following measures towards the rapid and smooth induction of non-native speaking pupils to the school system and the Cypriot society:

- Parallel classes for fast acquisition of the Greek language through intensive instruction.
- In-service training seminars for teachers teaching Greek as a second language organised by the Pedagogical Institute.
- Preparation of an induction guide for new non-native speaking students and their families. The guide has been translated in eight languages, with basic information for the pupils and their parents regarding the Cyprus Educational System. The guide is published in: English, Turkish, Russian, Georgian, Bulgarian, Romanian, Ukrainian and Arabic.
- Addition of intercultural elements to the National Curriculum and the school textbooks. The last are currently produced within the framework of the changes to the structure and the content of the Cypriot educational system.

- Production and development of appropriate educational and pedagogical material, as well as the use of material that has been produced in Greece and is currently used in all public schools by both teachers and students.

In addition to the above actions, in September 2013, the Department of Primary Education has sent to all schools a detailed circular regarding the applied policy, proposing particular suggestions for the integration of immigrant children. The circular also recorded the general framework of principles for the smooth integration of non-native speaking children in the school environment. It also made suggestions about strategies for the effective teaching of Greek as a second language and provided an indicative list of good practices. At the same time, a separate website was prepared for Multicultural Education, where the available material that teachers could use was uploaded.

Support to immigrant students was provided until now (see section 5.3.1) by the ZEP programme and as from 2016 this support will be extended and provided to more schools and thus cover more immigrant students through the EU co-funded program "School Activities for Social Integration" (Section 5.3.1.) Support for migrant children and adolescents

A series of legislations and regulations regarding immigrants and education, resulted to changes in educational policies, causing the reconstruction of perceptions and attitudes towards socio-cultural diversity. Recent research has shown that refugees in Cyprus regard school as the place for induction to the Cyprus society for both the children and parents due to opportunities for interaction with Cypriots and the Greek language. The implementation of ZEP approach (zones of educational priority implemented in deprived areas) gave emphasis on project work, parental involvement and the development of closer relations between the school and the community.

Specific measures to be taken based on the new data regarding migration are shown below:

- For teaching Greek, the need for continuity between primary and secondary education was underlined. Emphasis was also, given to the clear setting of aims, objectives, methodology, assessment and procedures, that should be monitored based on the European Common Framework of Languages. Teaching should be differentiated depending to the age and level of linguistic competence of the student.
- Reception procedures should be induced. These could be a "reception" teacher, orientation days before the school starts. Also Museum education, project work and environmental studies can contribute to getting acquainted with the community and the country.
- Focused teacher training should be organized. Emphasis should be given on methodology issues for teaching Greek as a second language, developing intercultural competences through different subjects of the curriculum, special training schemes for dealing with particular populations (e.g. refugee and asylum seekers) and on training focusing on empathy.
- Information on the migrant origin and background should be collected in order to design focused and differentiated measures. These data should be "shifted" when students change school.
- New curriculum and special methods for teaching Greek as a second language as well as changes in the regulations should be implemented.

During the school year 2015-2016, as part of the program of Learning Greek as a Second Language, seven (7) Gymnasiums created and operated «transitional classes», aiming at the intensive teaching of the Greek language to foreign language speaking students. After diagnostic evaluation tests of their

knowledge of Greek, and according to their number, students in these schools were divided into Beginners (A1) and Advanced (A2 or B1) sections. Students' were taught Greek for eighteen (18) teaching periods per week. In Lyceums and Technical Schools the program was applied only for four (4) periods per week.

Family literacy programmes for migrant parents

In order to provide information about the Cypriot educational system to migrant parents, the Cyprus' Ministry of Education and Culture has produce an electronic guide "GUIDE TO EDUCATION IN CYPRUS" (MOEC, 2015) in nine different languages.(<http://www.moec.gov.cy/odigos-ekpaidefsis/>). Furthermore, parents can attend evening Greek Language classes alone or along with their children

Challenges: There is a need for more family literacy programmes for disadvantaged families in order to be able to support their children.

5.3.6 Preventing early school leaving

Early School Leaving (ESL), as it is known, is a large issue at the core of the European 2020 strategy and of the individual targets that have been set (eurostat, 2015²⁶). Cyprus participates in this effort with a working group, which has reached the following conclusions regarding ESL in Cyprus: Many programmes are in the right direction, but are not part of the overall design, of the integrated strategy of the Cypriot state. There is inadequacy in the early detection of High Risk, before the problem is consolidated in a young person (abandonment / delinquency), and there is even inadequacy in the simultaneous and effective activation of all services from different Ministries / Departments. Therefore, there is an urgent need for a more timely assessment and improved co-operation between services. Based on these findings and the upcoming conclusions of the EU Council on the issue of School Leaving, the YPP should evaluate the existing system and its structures, in order to meet the need for creating an integrated and evidence-based strategy to address ESL and improve the quality of the school. The MoEC has successfully implemented several projects that serve the issue, but it is required that they should be integrated into a integrated strategy that will also engage the services of other ministries, and that would involve the elements of evaluation and continuous improvement and responsiveness to changing data.

In all other EU Member States men were more likely to leave education earlier. Gender differences were particularly strong in Cyprus where early leaving was twice as high or more for men than for women. Similarly, young foreign-born residents have a higher tendency to abandon formal education prematurely. In the EU, the share of early leavers among migrants in 2013 was more than twice as high as for natives (22.6% compared with 11%). Language difficulties, leading to underachievement and lack of motivation, are possible reasons. Lower socioeconomic status of foreign-born residents increasing the risk of social exclusion is another.

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.

²⁶ See: <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/3217494/6655013/KS-EZ-14-001-EN-N.pdf/a5452f6e-8190-4f30-8996-41b1306f7367>

Alongside the EU index of Early School Leaving, opportunities are investigated to develop or strengthen the system of national data collection on students, especially for those at risk of dropping out of school and for those who drop out (in full compliance with national data protection legislation). Such a system could allow for the regular monitoring of their educational course, aimed at the early detection and the identification of students at risk of dropping out and could provide the basis for developing effective guidance and support for schools, in order to prevent early school leaving, as well as for developing measures for monitoring dropouts from education and training.

Rate of early school leavers

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

However, this improvement masks a number of disparities:

- In Cyprus young men are almost four times more likely to leave school prematurely (11.2%) than young women (2.9%), and the gender gap is widening.
- Foreign-born students have a much higher risk of dropping out from education (19.5%) compared with students born in Cyprus (4.6%).
- Cyprus still has a relatively high proportion of youth who are not in employment, education or training (NEETs); the rate among 15-24 year olds in 2014 was 17.0%, compared with the EU-28 average of 12.4%.

The decrease in early school leaving might also be due to the fact that a significant number of economic immigrants, who are traditionally more prone to school drop-out, have relocated abroad on account of the economic crisis and the lack of job opportunities in Cyprus. Young people may also return to education or training due to high unemployment on the one hand and the introduction of compensation schemes on the other (Eurostat, General government expenditure by function (COFOG) database CYPRUS 4).

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

5.3.7 Addressing the gender gap among adolescents

The Ministry of Education and Culture has formed an Interdepartmental Committee with representatives from all the Ministry's departments and services that oversees and coordinates all gender equality issues, related to actions taken by the MoEC. The Committee has resulted in the development of an Action Plan (2014-2017) with the aim of bringing the gender mainstreaming strategy into educational policies and schools practices. This action plan includes actions on gender equality awareness based on three objectives: 1) the inclusion of gender equality in matters related to the structures of our educational system, 2) the inclusion of the principle of gender equality in matters relating to teacher in-service training and 3) the empowerment of the family in promoting gender equality.

Programmes addressing the gender gap among adolescents

Special programmes are implemented by the Department of Secondary Technical and Vocational Education and Career Counselling and Educational Services, in collaboration with the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance in order to give adolescent girls and boys a better idea of the options available in various sectors, particularly in occupations dominated by one sex, to encourage increased female participation in technical fields and the use of new technologies, to reshape Secondary Technical and Vocational Education with the aim of attracting female participation and to promote discussion of educational and career choices in the classroom.

With the aim of promoting gender equality and respect among all children in class, irrespective of their background or gender, the Educational Psychology Service is implementing similar programmes in schools every school year.

Furthermore, the Pedagogical Institute, in collaboration with the Gender Equality Committee in Employment and Vocational Training and the Directorates of Secondary General and Secondary Technical and Vocational Education, organize each year competitions on gender issues (eg. an Essay Contest about Gender Equality between the students of the 11th grade and a Drawing Contest for students between 7th and 9th grade).

Concerning the training of teachers of adolescents on gender gap issues, in-service training-organized by the Pedagogical Institute in collaboration with the Career Counselling and Educational Services of M.O.E.C and the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance- has included the promotion of awareness-raising and training on gender equality, the reflection of the educators' own identity, beliefs, values, prejudices, expectations, attitudes and representations of femininity/masculinity, as well as their teaching practice. The training courses have taken place during the years 2013-2015, aiming to raise awareness on gender issues (1-3 days trainings) targeting all teachers in Primary and Secondary Education, all career counsellors in Secondary Education and all inspectors in Primary and Secondary Education. Similar training courses have taken place for the parents of adolescents.

Setting active citizenship, with emphasis on social solidarity and elimination of stereotypes in the educational process, as one of the objectives of the school year 2013 – 2014, has also been a strategic to promote the elimination of gender stereotypes. Schools were encouraged to organize actions targeting all forms of stereotyping, and in particular that of eliminating the gap between girls and boys. Within this framework, the Pedagogical Institute has offered teachers training on issues related to active citizenship, multiculturalism, social inclusion/exclusion, identities and relationships between girls and boys, gender equality awareness, through school based training seminars. The Pedagogical Institute continues to offer school based seminars and programs on these issues.

The Pedagogical Institute has additionally launched a webpage dedicated to Gender Equality which includes useful information, bibliography and teaching material for teachers and students, promoting equal opportunities of both genders and gender mainstreaming in the educational process.²⁷

²⁷ See: http://www.pi.ac.cy/pi/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=910&Itemid=383&lang=el.

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