



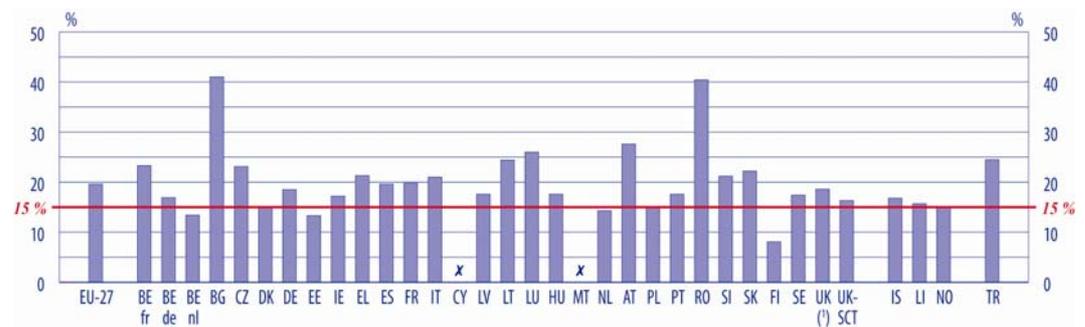
Teaching Reading in Europe: Contexts, Policies and Practices

For the first time, a pan-European study offers a comprehensive picture of reading literacy and identifies some of the key factors impacting on the acquisition of reading skills for 3-15 year olds. It addresses four key topics: teaching approaches, tackling reading difficulties, teacher education and the promotion of reading outside school. It investigates each key topic in the light of the results of academic research, the latest results of international surveys and an in-depth review of national policies, programmes and best practices. The study was produced for the Commission by the Eurydice network and covers 31 countries (all EU Member States, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Turkey).

The study reveals that while most European countries now have appropriate policies for promoting literacy, there is often a lack of focus on the groups most at risk for reading difficulties, such as boys, children from disadvantaged households and migrant children. The report also says that only in a few countries there are reading specialists at schools to support teachers and pupils.

In 2009, approximately one out of five 15-year olds in the European Union had reading difficulties. EU countries have therefore agreed to reduce the share of poor readers to less than 15 % by 2020. In only Belgium (Flemish Community), Denmark, Estonia, Poland, Finland and Norway was the number of low achievers 15 % or less.

Percentages of low-achieving 15 year-old students in reading, 2009



Source: OECD, PISA 2009 database.

What is Eurydice?

The **Eurydice Network** provides information on and analyses of European education systems and policies. As of 2011, it consists of 37 national units based in all 33 countries participating in the EU's Lifelong Learning programme (EU Member States, EFTA countries, Croatia and Turkey) and is coordinated and managed by the EU Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency in Brussels, which drafts its publications and databases.



APPROPRIATE POLICIES ADOPTED IN MOST EUROPEAN COUNTRIES FOR TEACHING READING

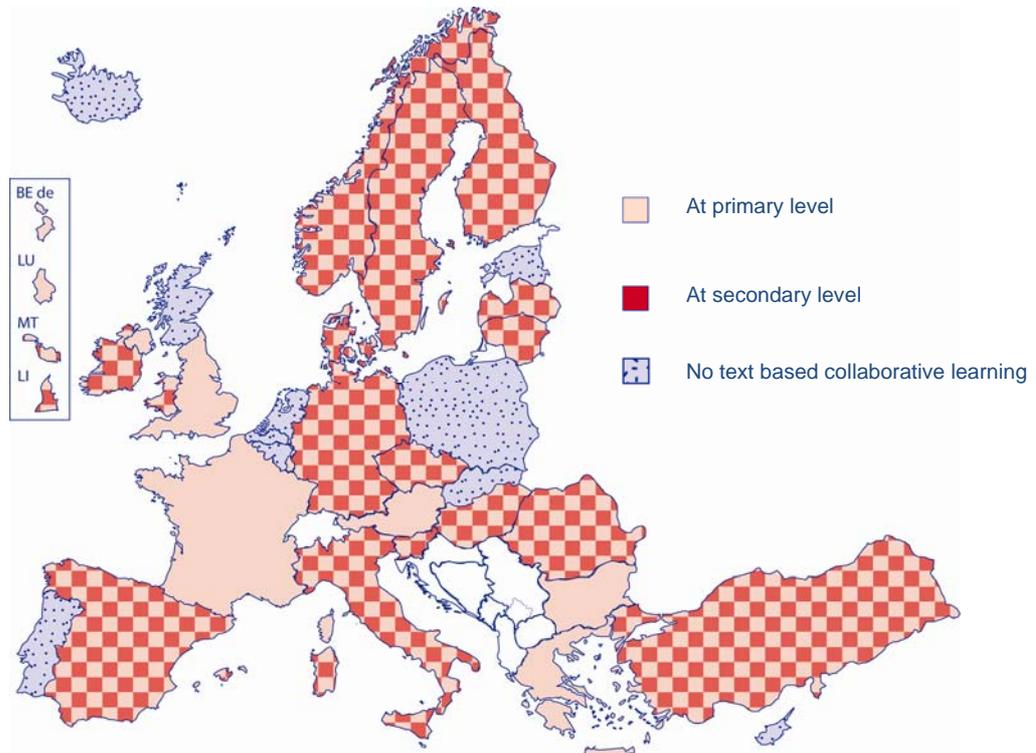
Policy makers have responded to evidence from the latest research on promotion of reading skills. Over recent years, considerable effort has gone into improving national guidelines and promoting the best pedagogical practices. European countries now commonly focus on building the foundations for learning to read in pre-primary education, diversifying reading materials and developing pupils' motivation for reading.

However, there is no one-size-fits-all approach. Research strongly supports the combined use of several strategies to improve reading comprehension, for example making inferences (i.e. encouraging pupils to make hypotheses on the basis of what they

have read) or monitoring comprehension (for example by reformulating parts of texts with its own words or rereading unclear passages). Text-based collaborative learning where pupils can be invited to read and discuss the same texts can further improve reading comprehension and benefit weak readers. Whereas most countries have assigned objectives in relation to pupils' reading comprehension, diverse strategies are not always present in national guidelines, especially in lower secondary education.

Overall though, good national curriculum guidelines are in place and attention should now shift to their implementation by teachers.

Text-based collaborative learning in national guidelines, primary and lower secondary levels, 2009/10



Source: Eurydice.

Recent changes in pre-primary education

All European central curricula include learning objectives or teaching content at pre-primary level for developing the emergent literacy skills. Increasing emphasis on early reading skills is especially visible through recent reforms carried out in four European countries:

- In **Denmark**, since 2009, 'Language and mode of expression' became a compulsory thematic area across the whole curriculum;
- In **Italy**, the 2007 guidelines for the curriculum at pre-primary level and the first cycle of primary level put a greater emphasis on reading practice;
- In **Austria**, since September 2010, the last year in kindergarden is compulsory for all pupils. During this year, all children are given the chance to engage in a range of pre-school reading activities in order to lay the foundations for further developments at primary level;
- In **Portugal**, two non-statutory documents ('The discovery of written language' and 'Language and communication') were published in 2008 in order to help teachers put the curricular guidance for pre-school education into practice.

All primary and/or lower secondary level curricula refer to the importance of promoting pupils' interest in, and enjoyment of, reading. There are various ways to achieve this goal: text-based collaborative learning, offering diverse reading materials, letting pupils read what they enjoy, and visiting places or people valuing books, are some of the most significant methods suggested by the literature and European curricula.

Pupils can be invited to read the same texts and then share their reading experience to draw interpretation and meaning. The **Irish curriculum**, for example, states that pupils should be able to recommend books to others and seek recommendations from them. In **Finland** and **Sweden**, teachers are advised to engage pupils from an early age in discussions about common literary experiences and the specific characteristic of literature.

FEW COUNTRIES HAVE READING SPECIALISTS AT SCHOOL TO SUPPORT TEACHERS AND PUPILS

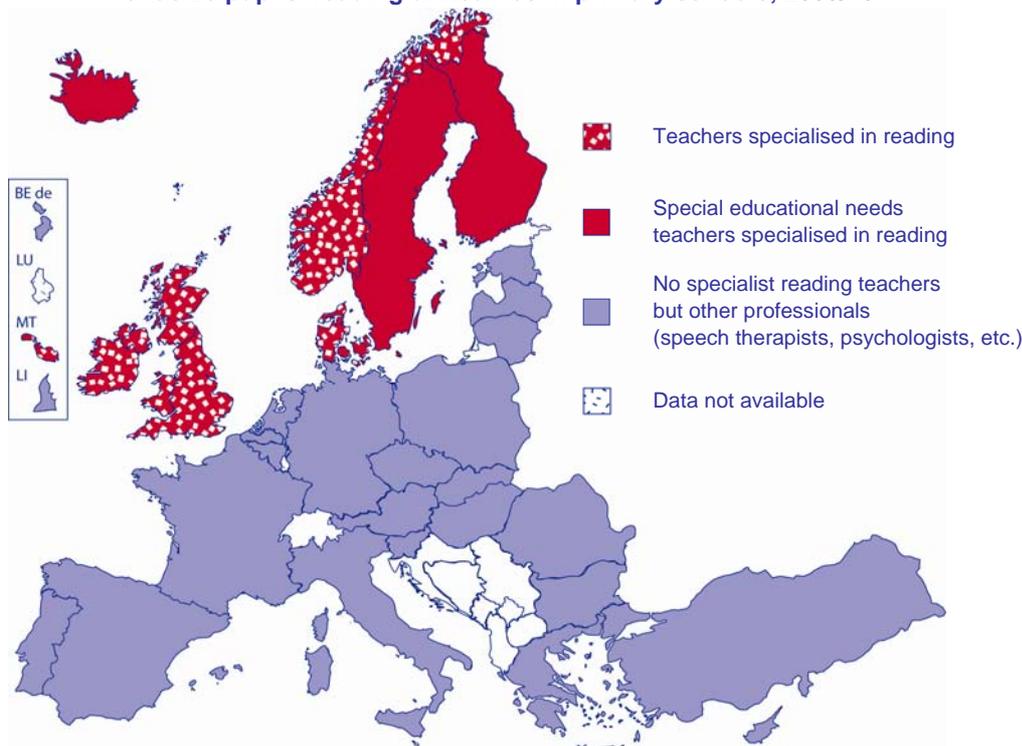
Reading difficulties can be tackled effectively if problems are identified and addressed as early as possible, teaching material is adapted and teachers are offered continuing professional development.

Intensive and targeted instruction, either of individuals or small groups, can be particularly effective to tackle reading difficulties.

However, few teachers have the opportunity to specialise in this area and reading specialists who can support teachers in the classroom are on hand only in Ireland, Malta, the United Kingdom and the five Nordic countries.

Lengthy procedures for requesting additional support can also be a barrier to providing early and effective help to pupils with reading difficulties.

Availability of specialist reading teachers for helping teachers to tackle pupils' reading difficulties in primary schools, 2009/10



Source: Eurydice.

Reading specialists in the classroom

Reading specialists offer a range of interventions across those countries where they exist that may deal with assessment, providing additional and targeted support to children or advising teachers and parents on appropriate methods and materials.

- In the **United Kingdom (England)**, specialist teachers acting in the framework of 'Reading Recovery', an early literacy intervention, are trained to assess young children's literacy difficulties and design and teach an individually-tailored, intensive intervention which will enable these children to catch up with their peers;
- In **Ireland**, teachers trained in 'First Steps' - a research-based literacy resource which originated in Australia and is now available in many countries worldwide - are provided an accurate means of assessing and monitoring children's competencies and progress in reading, writing, spelling and oral language;
- In **Finland**, it is the educational staff dealing with special needs who receive training on reading difficulties as part of a compulsory programme. They assist classroom teachers in various tasks: diagnosing pupils' reading skills; providing learning support in the form of individualised tasks and use of time; giving guidance and counselling; and developing flexible arrangements, such as flexible grouping, simultaneous teaching, etc.

PROMOTION SHOULD FOCUS MORE ON GROUPS AT RISK

The promotion of reading in society is widely supported by national policies and initiatives. However, these initiatives tend to address general audiences and not necessarily those more likely to experience reading difficulties, such as boys,

young people from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds or whose mother tongue is different from the language of instruction. In addition, materials used in such initiatives should be as varied as possible and include multimedia.

Country cases

Actions towards specific groups

They may focus on the needs of immigrant children and adults to learn the language of the host country as in the **German-speaking Community of Belgium** (*Multikulturelles Deutschatelier*), in **Cyprus** ('Promotion of Literacy') and in **Finland** ('Reading Literacy Training for Adult Immigrants'). Other programmes target families from low socio-economic backgrounds, for example in **France** (*Association de la Fondation Étudiante pour la Ville*) where student volunteers support socially disadvantaged families to develop a culture of reading, writing and learning. In a similar programme in **Slovenia** ('Reading for knowledge and pleasure'), professional mentors help less educated parents and their children with literacy education. In **Turkey**, a gender specific programme can be found which addresses literacy training for girls and women who live in poverty and have low educational attainment.

In other programmes, reading promotion is being connected to popular activities such as 'Playing for Success' in the **United Kingdom (England)** and 'SPL (Scottish Premier League) Reading Stars' in **Scotland** aiming to use the motivating power of sport to attract families who need support with literacy in a positive and friendly environment.

TEACHERS TRAINING IS ESSENTIAL TO STEP UP EFFORTS FOR BETTER READING SKILLS

A key aspect in reading instruction is teachers' ability to adopt the stance of research-oriented practitioner towards reading difficulties. Therefore, teachers need to receive appropriate initial training which provides them with solid foundations in educational research and methodology. In particular, coupling the development of theoretical knowledge with field experience appears to be very effective in reconstructing any prior beliefs inconsistent with effective reading instruction, such as attributing reading difficulties solely to

disadvantaged home background. Continuing professional development (CPD) also has a fundamental role to play in helping teachers to adopt research-oriented and reflective practices. However, most fruitful long-term and ongoing forms of professional development, such as conducting research or networking, are less common than short one-off workshops or courses. Measures that countries take to encourage attendance in CPD might influence the participation rates in various forms of CPD.

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The full study

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can be found in English, French and German on the Eurydice website:

http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/thematic_studies_en.php

Printed copies of the report are available upon request at

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