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ELINET

LITERACY IN FRANCE

COUNTRY REPORT
SHORT VERSION

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1 Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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[1] For more information about the network and its activities see: www.eli-net.eu.
[2] In the following, the final report of the EU High Level Group of Experts on Literacy is referenced as "HLG report". This report can be downloaded under the following link: http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/school/doc/ literacy-report_en.pdf.
[3] See: http://www.eli-net.eu/research/country-reports/.
[4] "Equity" was added by ELINET.
[5] See: http://www.eli-net.eu/good-practice/.

2 General Information about the French Education System

Schooling is centralised in metropolitan France and its overseas departments (Départements d'Outre Mer – DOM: French Guyana, Guadeloupe, Martinique, Mayotte - since 2011, and Reunion Island), and is for the most part delivered under the aegis of the Department for National Education, Higher Education and Research. At the start of the 2014-15 academic year over 15 million individuals in France and its DOM were in the education system, from preschool to higher education, representing almost 25% of the population; well over 12 million learners were in the school system (for the most recent statistics on every aspect of the system see DEPP 2015a, 2015b, 2015c).

The school system is organised into four major stages (see Figure 1): preschool (*école maternelle*), primary (*école élémentaire*), lower secondary (*collège*) and upper secondary (*lycée*).

Figure 1: Structure of the French School System
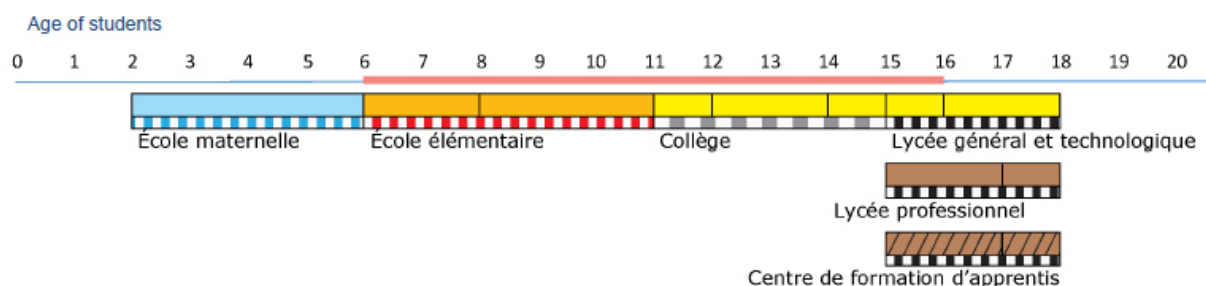
Source: Eurydice 2014

Preschool attendance, while formally optional, is now essentially universal for 3-5 year olds in France. Children begin their compulsory education during the year in which they have their 6th birthday, at which point they enter the first year of primary school. Following five years of primary education, and at the latest at age 12, they move on into the first year (named $6^{ème}$) of the four years they will spend in the lower secondary school. Compulsory education officially ends when students reach the age of 16, by which time most are in the first year (named *2nde*) of the upper secondary school. During their period of compulsory education, children and adolescents in France and its DOM follow the same curriculum.

Selection happens for the first time at the end of lower secondary education, when students are orientated to one or other of two types of upper secondary school – the *lycée général et technologique* (the traditional academic route to university) and the *lycée professionnel*, with a more vocational orientation – or to a Centre for apprenticeship training. The upper secondary school offers students a 3-year preparation for the *baccalauréat*, a qualification that has diversified over the past half century, through the introduction of technological and vocational strands.

France has a long history of survey-based system evaluation that predates the OECD's international survey programmes. Two sample-based monitoring programmes are currently underway in the school sector. The first (*Le cycle des évaluations disciplinaires réalisées sur échantillons*, CEDRE) is tightly curriculum-linked, while the second (a response to the *loi organique relative aux lois de finances*, LOLF)

focuses on literacy, numeracy and aspects of science. In addition, there is a long-standing annual census assessment of the basic literacy skills of 17-year-olds, conducted during the Defence and Citizenship Day (*Journée Défense et Citoyenneté,* JDC), and a sample-based survey programme focused on adult literacy (*Information et Vie Quotidienne,* IVQ).

3 Literacy Performance Data

France participated in all three of the IEA's PIRLS surveys, carried out in 2001, 2006 and 2011, and has taken part in the OECD's PISA since 2000. As a result, the reading attainment of French students at ages 10 and 15 can be set in an international context, complementing broader literacy achievement information furnished by the country's successive national assessment programmes.

Over the three PIRLS surveys, average student performance in France was essentially stable, at around 10-15 points below the average of the participating EU countries (whose number increased from 14 to 24 over the period). While performance in France was broadly similar across reading purposes (literary versus informational) it was uneven across reading processes, with a higher mean score on 'retrieve and inference' than on 'interpret, integrate and evaluate' (see, for example, Mullis et al. 2012a). In this sense France is unusual compared with most other countries, where performance tended to be even across all subscales.

While the average reading test performance of French 15-year-olds in the PISA surveys has fluctuated slightly over the period (2000-2012), it has always been above the average of participating EU countries by 10-15 points. The performance spread for French students has also been higher than that for the EU countries on average, with proportionally more students in the high-performing PISA bands and similar proportions in the lowest performing bands.

In PISA 2009 reading literacy was the principal focus in the survey (OECD 2010). Although based on rather small subsamples in the case of students with an immigrant background, the reading performance gap between native students and those with an immigrant background was higher in France than in EU countries on average, as was the performance gap between those students who always spoke the language of the test at home and those who did not.

As has been the case in many countries around the world, at both ages 10 and 15 girls produced significantly better reading performances than boys in all surveys, complementing national assessment findings for both reading and writing in the primary and secondary sectors. France has also evidenced a strong socioeconomic gap in performance, for reading in the international surveys and for reading and writing in national assessment surveys. In domestic surveys and research studies the performance gaps have been shown to enlarge rather than to reduce as students move through the lower secondary school, and to continue beyond compulsory schooling.

As far as levels of adult literacy are concerned, France benefits from several sources of information: its own annual test-based census surveys of the literacy skills of young adults (17-year-olds) on the 'Defence and Citizenship Day' (*Journée Défense et Citoyenneté,* JDC); its own domestic sample-based survey programme of the functional literacy and numeracy skills of 16-65 year olds (*Information et Vie Quotidienne,* IVQ); and the OECD's Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC).

On the basis of the 2014 JDC testing, just over 80% of the participant 17-year-olds were judged to be 'good' readers, just under 10% were 'mediocre', around 5% were 'very weak', with some reading difficulties, and around 4% had such severe reading difficulties that they could be considered to be illiterate (DEPP 2015a, pp54-55; Vourc'h et al. 2015). The individuals classified as 'illiterate' suffered from extremely scant vocabulary knowledge and lacked the skills necessary to decipher and to understand written text. The proportion of participants with reading difficulties was lower the higher

their level of education, and the higher the level of education the smaller the gender gap in reading ability.

IVQ surveys are sample-based, and currently focus on the 16-64 age group (Jeantheau 2014); prior to 2007 the target age-group was 18-65 (Degorre & Murat 2010). The first national (metropolitan) survey was carried out in 2004, along with three regional surveys (extensions), and repeated in 2011, with five regional extensions. Between 2005 and 2015 eight new surveys were implemented in France's overseas territories. Surveys are based on face-to-face oral interactions with sampled adults, using adult-relevant stimulus materials. Assessed adults are identified as facing literacy difficulties if they have problems with at least one of the three 'crucial' literacy domains – reading aloud, reading comprehension and writing – whatever their average literacy score. On the basis of the 2011 findings, just over 10% of adults in France (with proportionally more men than women in the group) were judged as experiencing literacy problems in their everyday lives. Illiteracy rates increased with age: just under 5% of 18-25 year-olds were estimated to be illiterate, in line with the JDC findings for 17-year-olds. There was also a strong association with socioeconomic background in the expected direction.

France was one of just 17 EU countries that took part in the PIAAC Survey of Adult Skills conducted by the OECD in 2012 (OECD 2013). France's performance was just below the EU-17 average, and the spread of achievement in France, i.e. the gap between the average performances of top and bottom performers, was very slightly wider. Over a fifth of adults performed at or below Level 1 in France, a proportion higher than the EU-17 average of just over 15%. Surprisingly, given IVQ findings and other evidence, there were no gender differences in the proportions of low performers in France, and the same average score was achieved by these two groups. The performance gap according to parents' level of education was very slightly higher than the average across the EU countries, as was the performance gap between native and non-native speakers.

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

4.1 Creating a Literate Environment

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 2012, p.41).

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

Schools play an important role in offering a literate environment for students. Schools may foster reading motivation and reading for pleasure in many ways. However, schools do not have sole responsibility. A broad range of actors may shape literacy motivation, from parents and peers to libraries. Particularly this is true in adolescence as it is a crucial phase in life where young people develop long-term *identities and self-concepts* related to reading and media use (cf. ELINET Country Reports, Frame of Reference, pp. 29ff, 45f).

4.1.1 Pre-Primary Years

Creating a literate environment at home: The home learning environment, particularly in the first three years, is extremely important. 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.

The 2011 PIRLS survey included a questionnaire enquiry for parents of the tested children. Among the issues explored was the extent to which parents engaged in literacy-relevant activities with their children before they began primary school (Mullis et al. 2012b). Nine activities were considered: reading books, telling stories, singing songs, playing with alphabet toys, talking about things done, talking about things read, playing word games, writing letters or words, reading signs and labels aloud. The situation in France reflected closely that across the EU-24 in this respect, according to the resulting Early Literacy Assessment Scale composite scores: on average, over the nine tasks, almost 40% of responding parents claimed to engage in the activities 'often', around 60% 'sometimes', and just 2% 'never or almost never'. There was an association, though not necessarily causal, between engagement in literacy-related activities and reading performance at age 10.

The same PIRLS questionnaire revealed that only around a fifth of French 10-year-olds had parents with positive attitudes to reading – markedly lower than the average of 35% for the participating EU countries – even though the availability of children's books in the home was apparently high in France.

It must be a matter of concern that over 60% of French children are only sometimes, at best, engaged in literacy activities by their parents before they begin primary school, and that as few as 20% of 10-year-olds in France in 2011 had parents with positive attitudes to reading. There is a need for programmes to raise awareness among all parents that literacy is a key to learning and life chances, and that the basis for good literacy achievement is laid in early childhood.

4.1.2 Children and Adolescents

Creating a literate environment in school: According to PIRLS 2011 (Mullis et al. 2012b), almost 90% of 10-year-olds in France were in classrooms which had class libraries – well above the corresponding EU-24 average of just over 70%. France is among nine European countries which provide a list of titles or authors as examples of what children might read (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2011a). These lists cover both primary and lower secondary levels. There is currently a bibliography of over 350 titles of young people's literature for children in the upper primary school (years 3, 4 and 5).

Offering digital literacy learning opportunities in schools: A literate environment can also be created by incorporating digital devices into the school environment. Primary schools in France have traditionally been less well-resourced with ICT equipment and digital services than schools in the secondary sector, and they remain less well-resourced than most other European countries as far as ICT is concerned (Ho 2014). According to teachers' reports, for example, just over one in ten 10-year-old students in France (the lowest among the 24 participating EU countries in the 2011 PIRLS survey) had a computer available for reading lessons that year, compared to the EU-24 average of 45% (Mullis et al. 2012b). In line with this, in France 10% of surveyed students claimed to use a computer at least monthly to look up information, compared with an EU-24 average of 40%. Just 9% of French students were in classrooms whose teachers reported that their students used computers to write stories or other texts at least monthly; the corresponding EU-24 average was 33%.

While digital devices are now widely used by French 12-17 year olds outside the classroom (Brice et al. 2015, Annexe 2), in the lower secondary school the youngest students, like students still in primary school, have not been well-resourced in this sense. This situation is rapidly changing, however, most recently in response to a wide range of Government reform initiatives (Terrades 2013; MEN 2015a), in particular the ICT Strategy for Schools. The availability of ICT equipment for instructional use has more than doubled over the past 10 years in lower secondary schools (Cormier & Rudolf 2015), and the expansion is continuing apace, along with the provision of ICT training for teachers.

There are relatively high levels of access to computers and to broadband internet in upper secondary schools in France. The proportions of students with access to a virtual learning environment in these schools is higher than the EU average, at between 83% for students studying for a general baccalaureate and 68% for those studying for a vocational baccalaureate. There are also more data projectors available than in Europe on average.

Literate environments for children and adolescents: Programmes, initiatives and examples: France is among several countries that have established national bodies whose main purpose is the

promotion of reading. There is, for example, the programme **lire et faire lire**[6] (*Reading together),* which tries to develop 'a joy of reading through intergenerational solidarity'. Volunteers, working together with many governmental and private institutions, spend some time in recreation centres, nurseries, libraries, schools, etc., reading for and with small groups of children and adolescents. Then there is the **National Reading Observatory**, which is part of the Ministry of Education and supports teaching at school, but also carries out research into the reading practices of adolescents. In addition, the **Association Française pour la Lecture**[7] (*French Reading Association*) aims to bring together teachers, librarians, parents and other parties in trying to organise lessons outside of classrooms. The **Association de la Foundation Étudiante pour la Ville**[8] (AFEV) provides a service of 'educational accompaniment', in which student volunteers support socially disadvantaged families whose children are experiencing difficulties at school to develop a culture of reading, writing and learning. The AFEV also offers programmes for adolescents. The **Agence Nationale pour la Lutte contre l'Illetrisme**[9] (*National Literacy Agency*) has a remit to coordinate and optimise resources provided by the state, regions and companies to combat illiteracy among adults, including young adults from age 16, and also disseminates information about literacy support initiatives more generally.

4.1.3 Adults

Fostering literacy provision for adults: In France, over 48,000 entities, public and private, are involved in the organisation and delivery of adult literacy provision. In the case of employees, training organisers are generally OPCAs (Authorised Paritary Collecting Organisations), while those delivering courses are either private organisations, including businesses large and small, which carry out around 80% of support activity, or organisations dependent on the national education system. The latter, while still relatively independent (GRETA/GRoups of EsTAblishments), must be officially authorised, and sign contracts with OPCAs and other organisers through a procurement process. The state, or the CNFPT (*National Centre For Territorial Public Service*), can in certain circumstances, e.g. a lack of internal resources, conclude agreements with training organisations for the training of civil servants. Job-seekers can be referred for basic literacy support by job centre advisers, or by local missions.

Every organisation offering literacy support must design an appropriate educational strategy to address the particular needs of the adults requiring their support. Since 2004 the *National Literacy Agency* (ANLCI), through its Forum for Good Practice (*Forum des bonnes pratiques*) has every 2-3 years identified initiatives that have proved effective in particular situations. Regional groups produce descriptions of such practices, along with associated implementation guidance and teaching materials, so that others can implement the same practices elsewhere. In addition to posting information about effective practices on its website[10], the ANLCI organises local, regional and national meetings for practitioners to share their experiences and products. Between 2004 and 2013, 11,000 participants and presenters from across France benefitted from this facility.

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[6] See: www.lireetfairelire.org.
[7] See: www.lecture.org.
[8] See: www.afev.fr.
[9] See: www.anlci.gouv.fr.
[10] See: http://www.anlci.gouv.fr/Actualites/Outils-Partenariats/Partager-les-bonnes-pratiques-Carte-en-region-2015-2017.

4.2 Improving the Quality of Teaching

The quality of teaching consists of several aspects:
- 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).

Particularly crucial is the quality of teaching and of teachers, and indeed of headteachers.

4.2.1 Pre-Primary Years

The quality of preschool education: France is at the middle point in the ranking of European countries for total public expenditure per child on pre-primary education and for the ratio of children to teachers. At almost 18%, the country has the highest percentage of male pre-primary teachers in Europe.

A Masters degree is now required of all intending teachers in France, whatever their target sector. Preschool teachers are drawn from those individuals who meet the criteria for recruitment into primary teaching, successful candidates having a choice between primary teaching and preschool teaching.

Preschool language and literacy curriculum: In France, as elsewhere, preschool teachers attempt to provide a literacy environment in which children learn and engage in the communicative functions of reading and writing, with the aim of developing curiosity and motivation to learn to read and write in school. Reading books aloud, telling stories, presenting picture books, using writing in communicative contexts (e.g. the teacher writes down words or sentences from the child's dictation) – these are all well-known methods of promoting literacy at a young age.

Early language and literacy screening and training: At the end of the last year in preschool, teachers are required to produce a 'report card' for each child, summarising development up to that point in a number of areas, including language and literacy. The report card is incorporated into the child's school record book (*livret scolaire*), a paper-based document that used to accompany the child through to the end of primary education, but which now, as a result of recent education reforms (MEN 2015a), is carried through from pre-school to the end of lower secondary education in an online form (MEN 2015c).

4.2.2 Children and Adolescents

Literacy curricula and reading instruction in schools: After many years of preoccupation and debate about its need and potential value, and stimulated by PISA, a *socle commun* was introduced in France in 2005, to be replaced in 2016 by a revised version, the *Socle commun de connaissances, de compétences et de culture* (MEN 2015b).

Despite the curriculum priority assigned to several important reading comprehension skills over the past decade, it seems that this has not been reflected in the work of teachers and students. A number of skills, such as comparing what students have read with experiences they have had, and making predictions about what will happen next in the text, are practised much less frequently on a daily or almost daily basis than on average across EU countries. In 2011, 55% of 10-year-olds in France were

deemed to have been taught by teachers who implemented instructional practices to engage learning in 'most lessons'; the corresponding EU country average was 70% (Mullis et al. 2012b).

The issues of instructional focus and style are currently priorities for action. All teachers throughout the primary and lower secondary school, including teachers of subjects other than French, are now expected to contribute to students' literacy development, so that by the end of compulsory schooling the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values outlined in the new *socle commun* should have been acquired. Grammar, vocabulary and spelling, the essential tools of language communication, are considered areas for special attention, given the evidence from national surveys of falling levels of mastery over recent years. Note that the framework of the *socle commun* does not afford any special prominence to reading literacy – writing and speaking are considered to be as important as reading in literacy skills development.

As mentioned earlier, all teachers, from pre-school to the end of the lower secondary school, are required to produce a 'report card' for each child at the end of the school year, summarising development up to that point. Literacy skills feature in the aspects of development that teachers report on. Each year the report card is incorporated into the child's ongoing record (*livret scolaire*), which accompanies the child through to the end of lower secondary education (MEN 2015c).

The quality of pre-service and in-service teacher training: Teacher education in France was subject to a major reform and reorganisation in 2010 (for details see Lapostolle & Chevaillier 2011). One important change was that, following a general move within Europe to upgrade the teaching workforce, a Master's degree became a requirement for all intending teachers in France, in both primary (subsuming pre-primary) and secondary sectors. The teacher training colleges that existed previously (IUFM) have been absorbed into the universities, and the teacher recruitment process has been modified.

A Master's degree is not, however, a guarantee of employment in teaching. During their 2-year postgraduate training, students hoping to teach in primary (or pre-primary) schools simultaneously prepare for competitive recruitment examinations, which are organised on a regional basis. Intending secondary school teachers, whose Master's degree can be in any subject discipline, not necessarily in education, also face a recruitment competition held nationally on a subject-by-subject basis. This involves examinations and interviews leading to different types of qualification (CAPES, CAPEPS, Agrégation – the latter required for future teachers in the upper secondary school). Whatever their chosen sector, after taking up their first post, all new teachers must satisfactorily complete a probationary year in service before becoming full members of the profession. All teachers are also now expected to be able to develop students' reading literacy skills, not just language teachers.

Digital literacy is included in the initial education of teachers in France. There are compulsory training and national accreditation standards for the programmes, competence frameworks and national certification (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2011b). Nevertheless, in the OECD's Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) of 2013, only around one-quarter of the surveyed lower secondary teachers in France reported using ICT for students' projects or class work, compared with an average of one-third across all participating European countries (European Commission 2014; Equipe TALIS 2014). Moreover, further training in the use of ICT in their teaching was identified as a need by the majority of French teachers. Training in the use of ICT in teaching and learning is currently a major priority in France for the lower secondary sector (MEN 2015a).

The quality and take-up of continuing professional development (CPD): Universities in France are in charge of the continuing professional development of fully qualified primary and secondary teachers. It is the responsibility of regional academic directors of education *(recteurs d'académie*[11]) to develop CPD plans, to determine priorities according to Ministry specifications, to guarantee coherence between the plan for initial training established by the university and the CPD plan, and to supervise continuing teacher education.

Teachers' engagement in CPD is not mandatory. However, voluntary participation in one or several on-going training activities may be taken into account in teacher appraisal, which will partly determine career advancement. Data on the participation rate of teachers in literacy-related professional development are scarce. However, in PIRLS 2011 teachers were asked how much time they had spent on professional development in reading during the two years before the survey. In France, fully 60% of 10-year-olds (compared to just under 30% on average across the EU-24) were being taught by teachers who had allocated no time at all to professional development in reading in the previous two years (Mullis et al. 2012a). This is currently a priority for action in France.

Among the many findings about teachers' attitudes, practices and concerns, TALIS 2013 confirmed that CPD involvement is relatively low among lower secondary school teachers in France (European Commission 2014; Equipe TALIS 2014). While almost all the French teachers surveyed felt confident about their disciplinary knowledge, only half felt equally confident about their general teaching ability. Priority needs were identified by respondents as use of ICT in teaching, individualised teaching to address student diversity, and giving advice and future study guidance to their students.

4.2.3 Adults

Monitoring the quality of adult literacy providers: There is no formal evaluation and monitoring of the quality of adult literacy courses in France, or of the effectiveness of adult literacy teachers. Teachers' qualifications are scrutinised, the existence of programmes established, and there is verification that there is no sectarian bias. Providers are accredited by regional authorities (*Directions Régionales des Entreprises, de la Concurrence, de la Consommation, du Travail et de l'Emploi*, DIRECCTE[12]), that also verify a number of required conditions. A number of providers have elected or been obliged to sign up to strict quality procedures when offering international (e.g. ISO), national (e.g. AFNOR[13]) or regional (e.g. GretaPlus[14]) certifications.

Developing curricula for adult literacy: There is currently no official national curriculum for adult literacy education. However, since the beginning of January 2016, working and job-seeking adults have been benefitting from a new opportunity to have their basic skills, including literacy skills, accredited in a national qualification – CléA certification[15] – whether the skills were acquired formally or informally.

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[11] Implementation of Government education policy is delegated to 17 *académies*, educational administrative entities each of which is based in a major university and has responsibility for the surrounding area.

[12] See: http://direccte.gouv.fr/.

[13] See: http://www.afnor.org.

[14] See: http://eduscol.education.fr/pid23192/demarche-qualite.html.

[15] For full details: www.certificat-clea.fr.

The CléA baseline framework is organised into seven skill domains with 28 subdomains, and there are 108 associated assessment criteria:

- French for communication
- Use of basic arithmetic and mathematical reasoning
- Use of standard techniques of ICT and digital communication
- Ability to work within well-structured teams
- Ability to work independently and to achieve individual goals
- Ability to acquire the capacity for lifelong learning
- Use of body language (gestes et postures), respect for principles of hygiene, safety and the environment.

While naturally interdependent, the seven domains can nevertheless be addressed independently in order to construct targeted personal or group education programmes, and for purposes of assessment.

CléA was approved, developed and implemented not by the state but by social partners (Unions and Management). While CléA education is financed in the main by the national employment agency for job seekers (*Pôle emploi*) and by the relevant accredited fund collecting agency (*Organisme paritaire collecteur agréé,* OPCA) for persons in employment, there are multiple funding sources, including applicants themselves. The legally recognised CléA baseline framework appears in the official national register of qualifications, and is therefore eligible for all current training grants, including the personal training account (*compte personnel de formation*, CPF).

Individuals interested in acquiring CléA certification must first contact one of numerous designated advisers located throughout the country in companies, employment organisations, vocational colleges, and so on, to learn more about the certification itself and the application procedure, to submit an application, and eventually to begin the process of skills assessment. Evaluation of skills acquisition can be global, i.e. across all seven domains in one session, or conducted domain by domain, both during the initial assessment, and, if necessary, later, as missing skills are successfully acquired. The nature of the methods used for skills assessment, and the standards of judgement applied, can vary from one assessment centre to another. Certification is awarded on demonstration of satisfactory acquisition of all the knowledge and competences specified by the framework, whatever the applicant's trade or profession.

Improving the qualification and status of teachers of adult literacy: There are no statutary requirements as regards the qualifications of adult literacy teachers. However, in order to obtain funding from the major funding sources, providers are obliged to participate in public procurement procedures, in which staff qualifications will be taken into account. Many adult literacy teachers will have formally qualified as upper secondary school teachers, and some will have studied further for a university diploma in adult literacy teaching (though these have regional recognition only). Actual qualifications vary widely from provider to provider and from region to region. Salaries vary widely also, as do working hours and conditions. One of the characteristics of the sector is great precariousness in employment.

## 4.3 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 socioeconomic gap, and the migrant gap (HLG 2012, pp46–50). Such gaps repeatedly emerge in national and international surveys of reading comprehension, including in France. Figure 2 shows that at age 10 performance gaps relating to gender and home language in 2011 were smaller in France than the average for the 24 EU countries that participated in the PIRLS survey that year, while the gap related to parents' level of education was higher (Mullis et al. 2012a, b). According to the most recent PISA surveys of 2009/2012, Figure 3 shows that migrant, home language and socioeconomic gaps in France were larger than the average for participating EU countries (OECD 2010, 2014); the gender gap, on the other hand, was of the same order of magnitude.

Figure 2: Performance Gaps in France and on Average across the EU-24 – PIRLS 2011
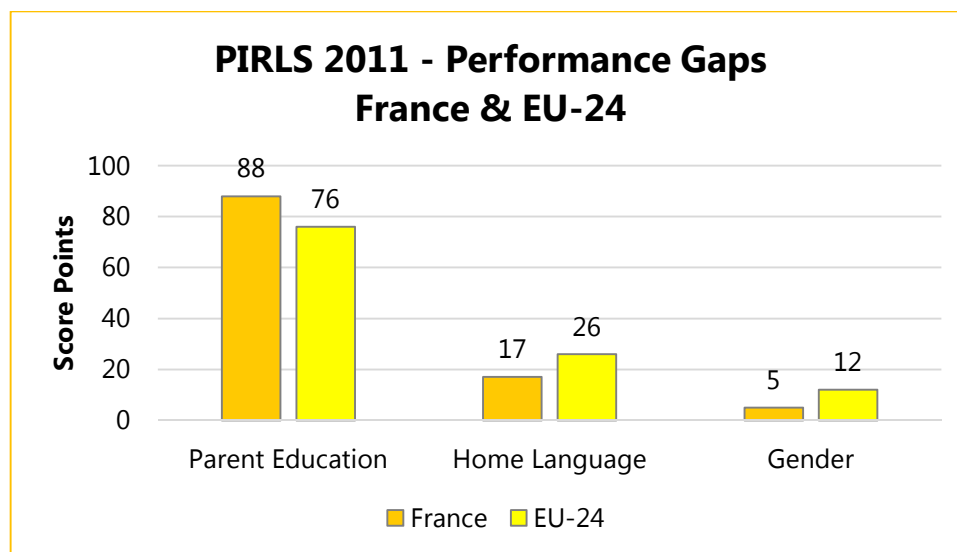
Education: University – Lower Secondary or lower; Language: Language of test spoken always – sometimes/never; Gender: Girls – Boys.

Figure 3: Performance Gaps in France and on Average across EU Countries – (PISA 2009, 2012)
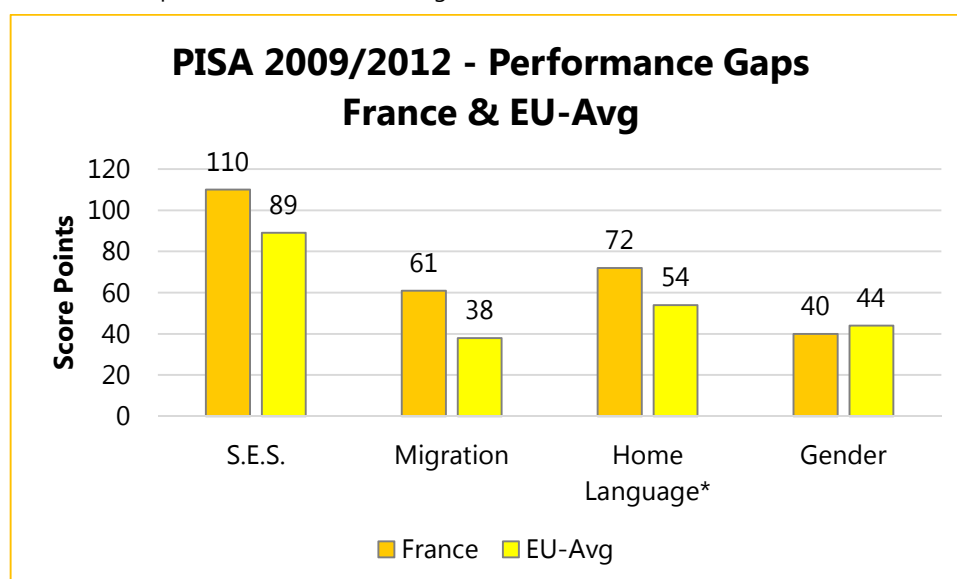
Migration: Native – first/second generation immigrants; Language: Speaks language of the PISA test at home – speaks another language; Gender: Girls – Boys.

4.3.1 Pre-Primary Years

Encouraging preschool attendance, especially for disadvantaged children: The preschool enrolment rate at ages 3 to 5 in France is 100%, and has been at that level for two decades (DEPP 2015a, pp34-35). The country is now giving attention to increasing the enrolment of 2-year-olds in preschools, priority being given to children from relatively deprived backgrounds. The educational staff-student ratio for 2-year-old children is lower than for older children (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice/Eurostat 2014).

Compensating socioeconomic and cultural background factors: France has a low child poverty rate and on average a relatively high educational level. So far, there has been a relatively small number of migrant families, but the number of these families is likely to increase significantly. Responding to the educational needs of migrants of different ages will be a challenge in the near future.

4.3.2 Children and Adolescents

Supporting struggling literacy learners: Arrangements for supporting children with special needs, including special educational needs, have recently changed as a result of the general reform of schooling in France. Different kinds of support, and associated procedures for recognising need and organising the appropriate support, are clearly identified for four different groups of children (MEN 2014):

- children with medical problems, such as asthma, life-threatening food allergies, dietary intolerances, and so on
- physically, mentally or psychologically challenged children
- children with reading difficulties, including as a result of dyslexia
- children experiencing general learning problems.

Depending on the nature of the special need, support can be requested by the head teacher, by parents or by students themselves, in some cases with confirmation of need from a medical or paramedical practitioner.

Once a learner is accepted as having a special need all relevant staff – teachers, administrative staff, canteen staff, and so on – are advised, and a support plan designed and introduced. In the case of students with reading problems the support plan (*plan d'accompagnement personnalisé*, PAP) will include extra individual learning support from the class teacher and/or from a specialist, as well as physical supports such as text with larger font size, tablets or other electronic reading devices in place of print, and so on.

PIRLS offers some data concerning issues of remedial instruction in primary schools. One question put to class teachers was whether all learners received remedial instruction when needed. Based on responses, it is estimated that just over 20% of students in fourth grade in France (CM1) were considered to be in need of remedial reading instruction that year. From teachers' responses, it was also estimated that just 16% of such students were actually in receipt of remedial reading instruction. Hence, there was a shortfall between those in need and those in receipt. These findings are very closely in line with the average across the EU-24 countries.

PIRLS 2011 also provides information about additional staff and availability of support personnel to assist with reading. Based on teacher responses to a series of questions, just around 4% of students in France were noted to have been in classes where there was always access to specialised professionals to work with students who had reading difficulties, compared with an EU-24 average of 25%.

Support for migrant children and adolescents whose home language is not the language of school: In 2012 the French government announced new arrangements for the integration of newly arrived non-French-speaking children into the education system, and for the schooling of children from traveller families. Together, the measures set the principles intended to:

- crack down on discrimination;
- harmonise welcome procedures;
- guarantee that the *Socle Commun* is acquired;
- take into consideration the multilingual wealth of these children.

All new arrivals are now assessed to establish the most appropriate point at which to be integrated into the school system, depending on their current level of educational achievement and mastery of the French language. Individual schools can find themselves receiving a single new student by this route (around a third of schools) to 20 or more (around 8% of schools), depending on their size and location (Robin & Touahir 2015).

The process of placement within a school differs between sectors. Assessment for a primary school placement is carried out locally either by the school's teaching team or, in the majority of cases, by the UPE2A teacher (a UPE2A is a special unit in the school able to offer individual linguistic support). In the 2014-2015 school year, across metropolitan France and its DOM, just over one in 10 of the new arrivals were placed into regular classes in their primary schools, without any extra linguistic support; 75% of the remainder were 'adopted' by the school's UPE2A, and another 20% were placed into regular classes and given additional linguistic support in parallel.

Where a secondary school placement is concerned, decisions are the responsibility of staff in one or other of two specialist centres: a CIO (*Centre d'information et d'orientation*) or a CASNAV (*Centre académique pour la scolarisation des enfants allophones nouvellement arrivés et des enfants issus de familles itinérants et de voyageurs*). A small proportion of newly arrived adolescents in the secondary sector are educated in dedicated classes that are not associated with any particular year group. Those in regular classes in the upper secondary school are generally assigned to the first year in the school, and they are roughly evenly divided between the two types of school, i.e. those that prepare students for the general baccalaureate and those that prepare them for the vocational baccalaureate.

At every stage in the school system non-French speaking newcomers can, after initial evaluation, be placed in classes one or more years below where they might otherwise be, given their age. Thus, in the primary school around one-third of placed children are in classes one year, or in a minority of cases, two years behind others of their age. In the lower secondary school around two-thirds of the newcomers are at least one year behind their peers, the majority being just one year behind. In the upper secondary school the proportion of newcomers placed at least one year behind rises to more than three-quarters, the great majority again being just one year behind. Boys are slightly over-represented in these figures compared with girls, the over-representation increasing through the system.

Addressing the gender gap: France, like most other Western European countries, witnesses persistent gender differences in many aspects of education and work (DEPP 2015d). Attainment surveys, both national and international, have repeatedly confirmed a general tendency for girls to be ahead of boys on average in their early language development, and in reading and writing throughout compulsory schooling, with boys demonstrating the better performances on average in mathematics and the physical sciences. Attitudes to different school subjects and associated motivation to learn are similarly

dfifferent. These differences in subject interests and related achievement continue beyond schooling into higher education and work, contributing to the persisting disparities in the representation of men and women in different education and employment sectors.

In November 2012, in an effort to address the problem, six ministers, representing different government ministries, signed an inter-ministerial agreement covering the 5-year period 2013-2018, to work together towards greater gender equality in the education system (DEPP 2015d). This pact identifies three priority areas:

1) The acquisition and transmission of a culture of gender equality.
2) Fostering the development of equality and mutual respect between girls and boys, women and men.
3) Aiming for a more even gender mix in subject choices at every level of education.

The initiative is to be monitored continuously, and will undergo a formal evaluation at the end of the five-year period.

Preventing early school leaving: The 2020 EU target value for the early school leaving (ESL) rate is 10%. As a result of various initiatives to address the issue, France, like the majority of Northern and Eastern European countries (Lefresne 2015), has already exceeded this target, having reduced its early leaving rate by 20% over the five years to December 2015 (MEN 2015d). The early leaving rate is now at 9% compared with an EU average of 11%. Nevertheless, the risk of early leaving without a qualification is 50% higher for boys than for girls, and 400% higher for the children of manual workers than for the children of managers (MEN 2015d).

Within the French Ministry of Education, the Mission to Tackle Early School Leaving - *Mission de lutte contre le décrochage* (MLDS) – is charged with preventing early school leaving and helping school leavers return to school or training. Multi-agency teams (*Groupe de prévention du décrochage scolaire*) are also in place within schools to identify and support learners who are demotivated as well as to support the integration of newcomers (European Commission 2013, p.39; MEN 2015b).

Under the leadership of the Ministry of Education, up to eight different Ministries are involved in reducing early school leaving, and regular policy dialogue across Ministries has been developed. Since 2010, within the framework of inter-ministerial coordination, 360 local 'platforms' (*Platesformes de suivi et d'appui aux décrocheurs)* have been created throughout the country. These work in partnership with local stakeholders and networks active in the fields of education, youth work, youth inclusion and provision of guidance, employment, health, justice and agriculture. The aim is to ensure that more coordinated and tailored solutions are offered to young people identified as early school leavers. In addition, linked to the platforms, the Ministry of Education has introduced a network of training, qualification and employment called 'FOQUALE' with the key aim of improving coordination between all the actions and actors it is responsible for. The purpose of the FOQUALE network is to support young people to re-engage in positive learning (European Commission 2013, p.34).

Local Platforms are supplied with information from the SIEI (*Système interministériel d'échanges d'informations*), which collects data from the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Agriculture schools, Apprentice Training Centres, and 'Missions locales' (access points for employment services for people under 25 years of age). This enables nominative lists of early school leavers to be drawn up twice a year, and has contributed to increased awareness and understanding in France of early school leaving processes (European Commission 2013, p.35). Access to the data is highly restricted; the system is only

accessible via secure software by the heads of the local Platforms, who redeploy all those working with early school leavers and disengaged learners within a specific area.

One measure to prevent early school leaving is via support for educational orientation, specifically concerning the choice between academic and vocational education at the end of lower secondary education, decsiions about which are taken by the school principal in consultation with students and their families. To ensure that family and student wishes are taken into account by the time the student is 18 years of age, a trial has been launched in 117 schools aimed at enabling families and students to have the final say in the decision-making process. The lack of choice is considered to be one factor leading to early school leaving, when students are obliged to take a route that does not necessarily correspond to their aspirations. The trial is expected to have an impact also on teaching and assessment styles (European Commission 2013, p.37).

Microlycées operate in some upper secondary schools, helping students who have not attended school for at least six months to prepare for the baccalaureate. They are staffed with full-time teachers and a psychologist, and benefit from flexible timetables and approaches to learning (European Commission 2013, pp44-45). A focus on mentoring helps students to identify their aims, understand their development needs and cope with their problems. The support provided to students is very intense (regular meetings with individual students, follow-up of absenteeism, common room for teachers and students, no separate teachers' room). In addition, teaching is more interdisciplinary with small learner groups, and teachers often work in pairs.

4.3.3 Adults

Increasing offers for second-language learners: Public policy for French language support for migrant adults is one of a number of public policy areas – education policy, urban policy, integration and immigration policy. At the operational level language learning provision is the responsibility of the departments (*Direction départementale de la cohésion sociale*, DDCS), while strategic responsibility lies at the regional level (*Directions régionales de la jeunesse, des sports et de la cohésion sociale*, DRJSCS, mandated by the regional prefect). Provision is currently targeted at immigrants from outside the EU.

French language teaching for migrants is aimed at three distinct learner cohorts: adults aged over 18 with leave to remain in France, adults who have been in France for more than five years, and parents of foreign students or immigrants from outside the EU.

1. Adults aged over 18 with leave to remain in France

Official responsibility for addressing migrants' language problems (state intervention) dates from 1956. Since that time several different organisations have in turn been tasked with this remit, currently the responsibility of the French Office for Immigration and Integration (OFII), a decentralised public entity created in 2009. The OFII is currently the sole state operator with responsibility for the 'linguistic integration' of immigrant populations during the first five years of their residence in France.

2. Adults who have been in France for more than 5 years

There is no longer a structure for providing language learning support based on an institutional and legislative framework for immigrants who have been resident in France for more than five years. Instead, adults in this category are generally placed in local programmes: sociolinguistic workshops which prioritise people's autonomy and access to rights.

3. Parents of foreign students or immigrants from outside the EU

Learners in this cohort can benefit from 120 hours of French language instruction during the school year, as part of a scheme called 'opening school to parents'.

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