

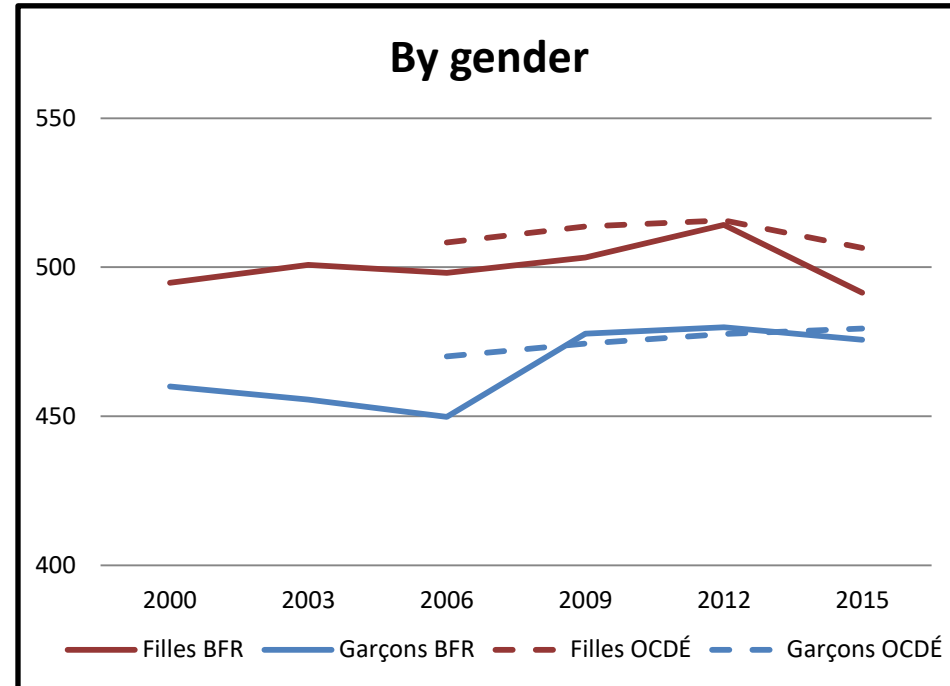
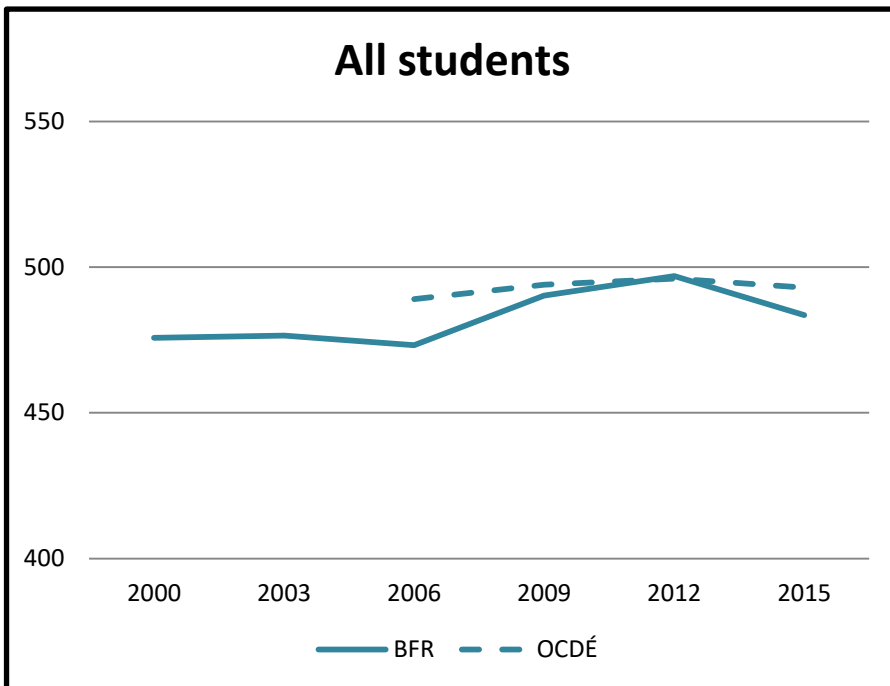


PISA reading literacy trends and literacy policy: connections and critical reflections in Belgium FS

Dominique Lafontaine
Patricia Schillings
University of Liege

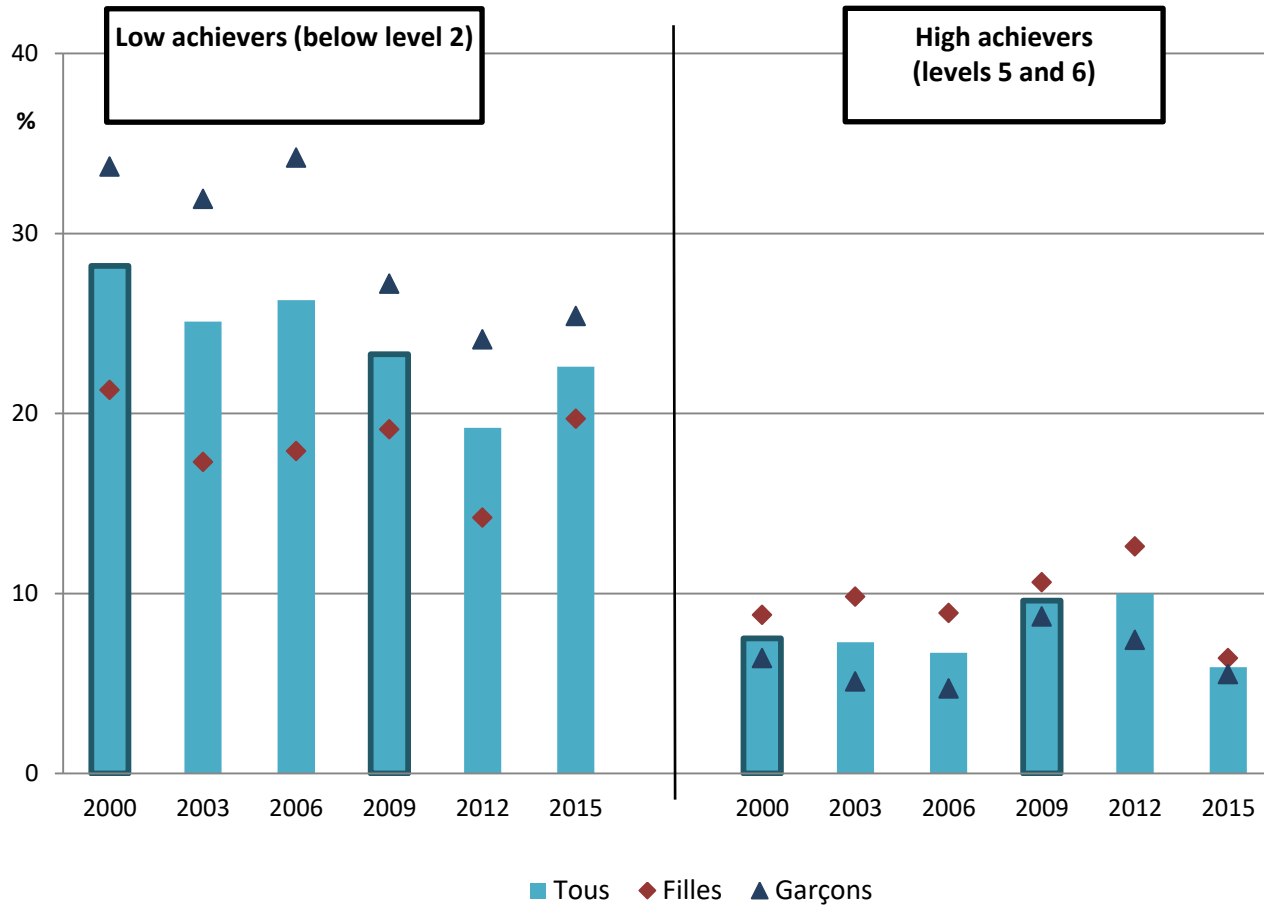
Trends in reading literacy

French-speaking Belgium and OECD average



Proportions of low and high achievers in reading

Trends 2000-2015



Two main questions

1. How can improvement in 2012 be explained?
2. How can decline in 2015 be explained?

Reforms and challenges in education

- No major changes in terms of education policies related to reading literacy between 2000 and 2015;
- Reading has been a concern, awareness was raised among policy makers, but no well-defined plan was defined, no change in initial or in service training, no new curriculum or standards;
- Some local initiatives;
- Challenges and recommendations as defined in the Elinet report were not met or implemented; some of them are planned in the coming years: reform of initial training, huge reform of the education system (« Pact for Excellence in education »).

How can we relate change in performance and change in policies?

- This is a major challenge and needs deep contextual knowledge of the education system;
- Difficult to do it by means of statistics; variables capturing change in educational policies are usually not captured in the background questionnaires; this is too specific and rooted in national contexts;
- Nevertheless it has to be driven by rigorous procedures.

How can we relate change in performance and change in policies?

Steps followed:

1. Check if substantial changes happened in the **target population** or **sampling** of students: more grade repetition, more students in vocational tracks, more or less or different migrants... which might reflect (un)intended changes in the education system;
2. Check **which students** improved or declined their performance: boys and/or girls, low or high SES, migrants...
3. Check at which **level of ability** the changes are observed: among low or top performers, are they evenly or not distributed?

How can we relate change in performance and change in policies?

Steps followed:

4. Check exactly **when** the change happened: is it progressive change or sudden change? If sudden change, search for a structural reform, pedagogically driven changes are always slow by definition.
5. Compare with **other sources** such as PIRLS or national assessments: are changes congruent or specific to age/grades?

Improvement in PISA 2012

These different steps brought evidence that:

- More students had repeated several grades (grades 7 & 8) => *why?*
- Both boys and girls improved, especially boys, no change in SES or migration gap => *not really the result of a targeted policy;*
- Change= mainly reduction of the rate of low-performers in reading (boys) => *search for a policy aimed at improving basic skills*

Improvement in PISA 2012

- The change was sudden (between 2006 and 2009, consolidation in 2012);
- Similar change was not observed in PIRLS => *not the result of general reading literacy policy or changes in teaching practices*

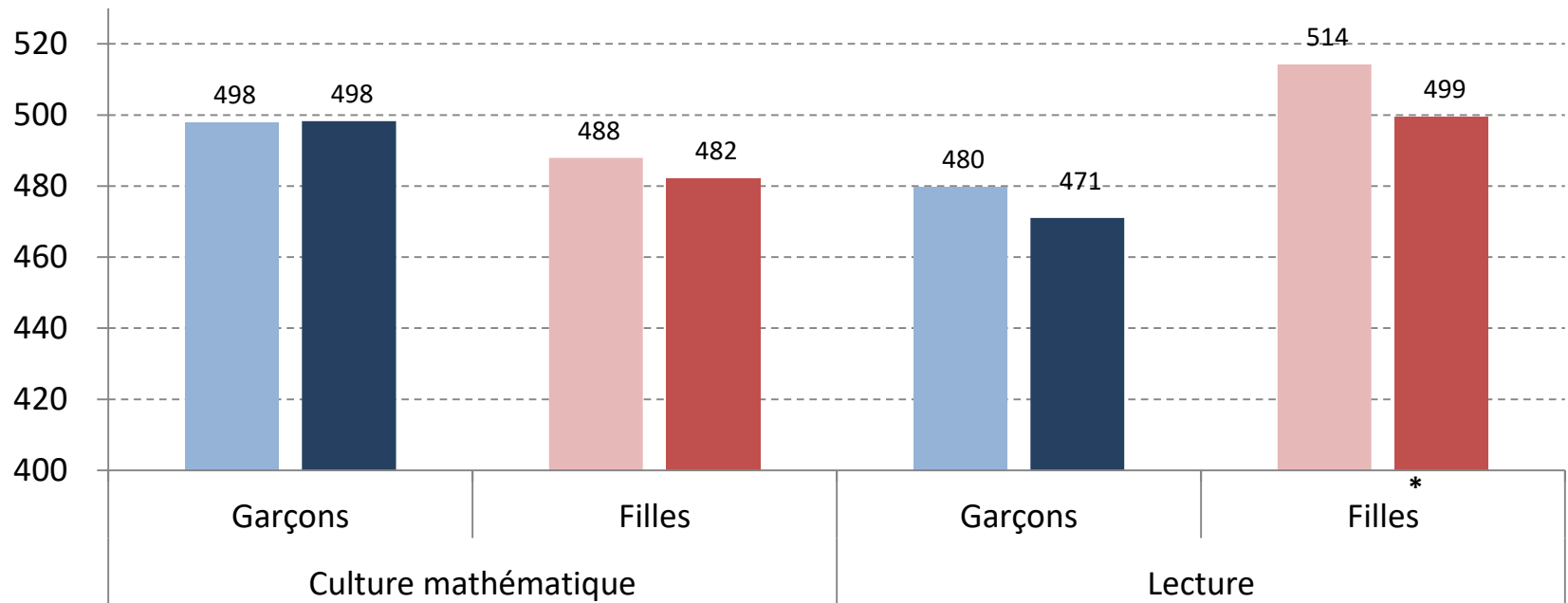
Our conclusion was that the change resulted from a very specific structural change impacting students of grades 7 & 8: low achievers got additional teaching in mother tongue and had to meet standards in basic skills before moving on to the next grades.

Decline in 2015

Much more challenging to explain:

- Decline was much stronger among girls (- 23 score points);
- There is a small decline among girls on average in OECD countries;
- Mode effect? PISA 2015 was delivered on computer instead of paper.

Performances by gender in FS-Belgium in mathematics and reading paper-based (light) vs computer based (dark) (PISA 2012 digital option)



Mode effect?

- The mode effect depends from the domain: almost no effect in mathematics, small effect in reading;
- There is an interaction with gender: the negative impact is somewhat stronger for girls, especially in reading;
- BUT the impact is quite marginal; in 2015, the reading test did not test online reading skills (paper units have just been transferred to computer).
- Answers in 2018... are there also changes in motivation, reading practices according to gender?

Elinet country reports: critical views

- Really challenging to link changes in performance to changes in educational policies; this is not a straight road;
- Whatever relevant are the challenges and recommandations listed in the ELINET country reports, they are broad and have by definition a general scope and cannot take into account the specificities of very diverse education systems;

Elnet country reports: critical views

- Most of the recommendations are based on an implicit model trying to tackle problems or issues by a policy targeting this specific problem: for instance gender gap => policy targeting boys, too much drop-out => policy to fix drop-out...
- In most of the cases, « symptoms » call for deeper, long-term, preventing policies, not directly linked to reading literacy...
- Structural not targeted changes such as having a comprehensive lower secondary school or reducing grade repetition potentially have a much stronger impact on the level of reading literacy than targeted literacy policies, which does not mean that the later are not useful. But they are not sufficient.

Syndrom of the street light



Thanks for your attention

Trends in Performance 2006-2011 (PIRLS) – Belgium (Fr) and EU-24

No or limited change =>
age/grade specific

	2006	2011	Change (2006-2011)
Belgium (Fr)	500	506	6
EU Countries	534	535	1