PROGRESS IN INTERNATIONAL READING LITERACY STUDY

PIRLS

PIRLS 2011 Encyclopedia

Education Policy and Curriculum in Reading

Volume 1: A–K

Edited by:

Ina V.S. Mullis, Michael O. Martin, Chad A. Minnich,
Kathleen T. Drucker, and Moira A. Ragan

TIMSS & PIRLS
International Study Center
Lynch School of Education, Boston College

PROGRESS IN INTERNATIONAL READING LITERACY STUDY

PIRLS

PIRLS 2011 Encyclopedia

Education Policy and Curriculum in Reading

Volume 1: A–K

Edited by
Ina V.S. Mullis, Michael O. Martin, Chad A. Minnich,
Kathleen T. Drucker, and Moira A. Ragan

Contents

Volume 1: A–K   *(see Volume 2 for L–Z and Benchmarking Participants)*

Foreword

For more than 50 years, the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) has been instrumental in developing an analytical model for understanding the relationships between educational policy (the intended curriculum), classroom and instructional practices (the implemented curriculum), and educational learning outcomes (the achieved curriculum).

The *PIRLS 2011 Encyclopedia* describes the intended curriculum in the countries and sub-national jurisdictions that participated in the PIRLS 2011 and prePIRLS assessments, providing a detailed description of the national contexts for the teaching and learning of reading. Each PIRLS 2011 participant contributed a chapter to this volume summarizing the overall structure of its education system, its reading curriculum and instructional approaches, its requirements for teacher preparation, and the types of assessments and examinations that are employed to monitor educational outcomes at the national level.

The policy-related information provided in the *PIRLS 2011 Encyclopedia* is intended to complement the data on educational outcomes that are provided in the companion report, *PIRLS 2011 International Results in Reading*. This information may be used not only to help understand the relationships among policies, practices, and outcomes within countries, but also to provide potentially powerful insights into international best practice.

Since its inception, PIRLS has relied on the extraordinary skill and professionalism of the staff at the TIMSS & PIRLS International Study Center at the Lynch School of Education, Boston College who provide the overall leadership for the project. In particular, IEA is indebted to the intellectual and organizational leadership provided by the PIRLS Executive Directors, Ina Mullis and Michael Martin, who have ensured the remarkable achievements of this project.

As well as the staff at Boston College, other key members of the consortium that conducts the PIRLS assessments, including Statistics Canada, Educational Testing Service, the IEA Secretariat, and the IEA Data Processing Center,

continue to make indispensable and exceptional contributions to the conduct and success of PIRLS. Ultimately, however, much of the credit for the content of the Encyclopedia must be reserved for the authors of the chapters who made this publication possible. Their efforts were supported by Chad Minnich, Kathleen Drucker, and Moira Ragan, who were responsible for editing the chapters and preparing the data for this volume. Paul Connolly oversaw and coordinated the publication of the Encyclopedia, which was designed by Mario Pita and Ruthanne Ryan, with production assistance provided by Susan Farrell, Jen Moher Sepulveda, and Steven Simpson.

IEA is very grateful to the members of the IEA Publications Committee who reviewed each chapter and provided valuable guidance for improvement, and in particular for the long-standing service of David Robitaille and Robert Garden. IEA continues to be thankful for the financial support it receives in order to make a project of this magnitude possible. The U.S. National Center for Education Statistics continues to provide critical financial support and remains IEA's major funding partner. The World Bank also plays an important funding role by providing support for a number of its partner countries. The support provided by these institutions, together with that of countries contributing by way of participation fees, has ensured the successful completion of the 2011 PIRLS and prePIRLS assessments.

Finally, I would like to express my thanks to the National Research Coordinators, whose responsibility it was to manage and conduct the study at the national level and who ensure the operational success of PIRLS. These individuals, together with policymakers and researchers in participating countries who provide critical support, combined with the willingness of principals, teachers, and students to participate, make possible not only the PIRLS assessments but also the basis for educational reform and improvement.

Hans Wagemaker
Executive Director, IEA

Introduction

The *PIRLS 2011 Encyclopedia* is a valuable compendium of how reading is taught around the world. Each PIRLS 2011 country and benchmarking participant prepared a chapter summarizing the structure of its education system, the language and reading curriculum in the primary grades, and overall policies related to reading instruction (e.g., teacher education, materials, and assessment). The chapters were prepared from each country's viewpoint, written primarily by experts from ministries of education, research institutes, or institutions of higher education with extensive knowledge about their country's education system. Taken together, the chapters present a concise yet rich portrait of reading curricula and instruction around the world, and make the *PIRLS 2011 Encyclopedia* an indispensable resource for policy and research in comparative education.

Overview of PIRLS

IEA's PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study) aims to help countries improve teaching and learning in reading. PIRLS 2011 continues IEA's series of highly significant international assessments of reading literacy conducted during its 50-year history of educational research. IEA (International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement) pioneered international comparative assessments of educational achievement to gain a deeper understanding of the effects of policies and practices across countries' different educational systems. IEA is an independent international cooperative of national research institutions and government agencies, with nearly 70 member countries worldwide, a permanent secretariat in Amsterdam, and a thriving data processing and research center in Hamburg (the IEA DPC).

IEA marked the beginning of the 21st century by inaugurating PIRLS to measure children's reading achievement after four years of schooling. Conducted at five-year intervals, PIRLS 2011 is the third assessment in the current trend series, following PIRLS 2001 and 2006. All of the countries, institutions, and agencies involved in successive PIRLS assessments have worked collaboratively in building the most comprehensive and innovative measure of reading comprehension possible, beginning in 2001 and improving with each cycle since then, with planning for PIRLS 2016 currently underway. PIRLS is directed by IEA's TIMSS & PIRLS International Study Center at Boston College.

As shown on the opposite page, 49 countries participated in PIRLS 2011, including some distinct education systems within countries that always have participated separately throughout IEA's long history (e.g., the French-speaking community of Belgium and Hong Kong SAR). In addition, PIRLS 2011 included nine benchmarking participants, which primarily are regions of countries that participated in PIRLS but which also included Malta and South Africa, who collected information relevant to their language of instruction policies. PIRLS 2011 also was pleased to welcome the inaugural prePIRLS participants—Botswana, Colombia, and South Africa. prePIRLS is based on the same view of reading comprehension as PIRLS but is designed to test basic reading skills that are prerequisites for success on PIRLS. The prePIRLS assessment has shorter and easier reading texts, and places less emphasis on higher-order reading skills.

Nationally representative samples of approximately 4,000 students from 150–200 schools participated in PIRLS 2011. In total, approximately 325,000 students participated in PIRLS 2011, including countries assessing students at more than one grade, benchmarking assessments, and prePIRLS.

Demographics of the PIRLS 2011 Countries

The PIRLS 2011 participants were from all around the world (all continents except Antarctica), and represent a wide range of geographic and economic diversity. Because such factors as population size and, in particular, economic resources can impact educational policies, the following table presents selected information about the demographic and economic characteristics of the PIRLS 2011 countries, primarily reproduced from the World Bank's *World Development Indicators 2011*.[1] It can be seen that the PIRLS 2011 countries vary widely in population size and geographic area, as well as in population density. The countries also vary widely on indicators of health, such as life expectancy and infant mortality rate. Nearly all the countries had life expectancies of 69–83 years, and the majority had infant mortality rates of between 2 and 20 out of 1,000 births. However, Botswana and South Africa had life expectancies of 52–55 years, and the highest infant mortality rates—both with 43 out of 1,000 births.

Economic indicators, such as the data for gross national income per capita, reveal great disparity in economic resources available among PIRLS 2011 countries, and also that different policies exist about the percentage of funds spent on education. Economically, the countries ranged from Kuwait, Norway, and the United Arab Emirates with relatively high gross national incomes per

Australia

Austria

Azerbaijan

Belgium (French)

Botswana

Bulgaria

Canada

Chinese Taipei

Colombia

Croatia

Czech Republic

Denmark

England

Finland

France

Georgia

Germany

Honduras

Hong Kong SAR

Hungary

Indonesia

Iran, Islamic Rep. of

Ireland

Israel

Italy

Kuwait

Lithuania

Malta

Morocco

Netherlands

New Zealand

Northern Ireland

Norway

Oman

Poland

Portugal

Qatar

Romania

Russian Federation

Saudi Arabia

Singapore

Slovak Republic

Slovenia

Spain

Sweden

Trinidad and Tobago

United Arab Emirates

United States

Benchmarking Participants

Alberta, Canada

Ontario, Canada

Quebec, Canada

Maltese - Malta

English/Afrikaans - South Africa

Andalusia, Spain

Abu Dhabi, UAE

Dubai, UAE

Florida, US

prePIRLS Participants

Botswana

Colombia

South Africa

Selected Characteristics of PIRLS 2011 Countries

Country	Population Size (in Millions)[1]	Area of Country (1,000 Square Kilometers)[2]	Population Density (People per Square Kilometer)[3]	Urban Population (% of Total)[4]	Life Expectancy at Birth (Years)[5]	Infant Mortality Rate (per 1,000 Live Births)[6]	Gross National Income per Capita (in US Dollars)[7]	GNI per Capita (Purchasing Power Parity)[8]	Public Expenditure on Education (% of GDP)[9]	Net Enrollment Ratio in Primary Education (% of relevant group)[10]	Primary Pupil-Teacher Ratio[11]
Australia	22	7,741	3	89	82	4	43,770	38,510	5	97	–
Austria	8	84	101	67	80	3	46,450	38,410	5	–	12
Azerbaijan	9	87	106	52	70	30	4,840	9,020	3	85	11
[12] Belgium (French)	11	31	356	97	81	4	45,270	36,610	6	98	11
Botswana	2	582	3	60	55	43	6,260	12,840	9	87	25
Bulgaria	8	111	70	71	73	8	6,060	13,260	4	96	16
Canada	34	9,985	4	81	81	5	41,980	37,280	5	–	–
[13] Chinese Taipei	23	36	639	70	79	4	16,471	34,520	4	98	16
Colombia	46	1,142	41	75	73	16	4,990	8,600	5	90	29
Croatia	4	57	79	58	76	5	13,770	19,200	5	91	11
Czech Republic	10	79	136	74	77	3	17,310	23,940	4	–	18
Denmark	6	43	130	87	79	3	59,060	38,780	8	95	–
[14] England	52	130	398	90	80	4	41,370	35,860	5	100	23
Finland	5	338	18	64	80	3	45,940	35,280	6	96	14
France	63	549	114	78	81	3	42,620	33,950	6	98	19
Georgia	4	70	61	53	72	26	2,530	4,700	3	100	9
Germany	82	357	235	74	80	4	42,450	36,850	5	98	13
Honduras	7	112	67	48	72	25	1,800	3,710	–	97	33
[15] Hong Kong SAR	7	1	6,721	100	83	2	31,570	44,540	5	94	16
Hungary	10	93	112	68	74	5	12,980	19,090	5	90	10
Indonesia	230	1,905	127	53	71	30	2,050	3,720	3	95	17
Iran, Islamic Rep. of	73	1,745	45	69	72	26	4,530	11,470	5	99	20
Ireland	4	70	65	62	80	4	44,280	33,040	5	97	16
Israel	7	22	344	92	82	3	25,790	27,010	6	97	13
Italy	60	301	205	68	81	3	35,110	31,870	4	98	10
Kuwait	3	18	157	98	78	8	43,930	53,890	–	88	9
Lithuania	3	65	53	67	73	5	11,410	17,310	5	92	13
[16] Malta	0.4	0.3	1,297	–	80	6	18,360	23,170	6	95	11
Morocco	32	447	72	56	72	33	2,770	4,400	6	90	27
Netherlands	17	42	490	82	81	4	48,460	39,740	5	99	–
New Zealand	4	268	16	87	80	5	28,810	27,790	6	99	15
[17] Northern Ireland	2	14	133	63	80	6	41,370	35,860	5	98	20
[18] Norway	5	324	16	78	81	3	84,640	55,420	7	99	11
[19] Oman	3	310	9	72	76	9	17,890	24,530	4	77	12
Poland	38	313	125	61	76	6	12,260	18,290	5	95	10
[19] Portugal	11	92	116	60	79	3	21,910	24,080	5	99	11
[20] Qatar	1	12	122	96	76	10	71,008	–	–	93	11
Romania	21	238	93	54	73	10	8,330	14,540	4	90	16
[21] Russian Federation	142	17,098	9	73	69	11	9,340	18,330	4	94	17
Saudi Arabia	25	2,000	13	82	73	18	17,210	24,020	6	86	11
[22] Singapore	5	1	7,125	100	81	2	37,220	49,780	3	100	19
Slovak Republic	5	49	113	57	75	6	16,130	22,110	4	–	17
[23] Slovenia	2	20	101	48	79	2	23,520	26,470	6	97	17
South Africa	49	1,219	41	61	52	43	5,760	10,050	5	85	31
Spain	46	505	92	77	82	4	32,120	31,490	4	100	12
Sweden	9	450	23	85	81	2	48,840	38,050	7	95	10
[24] Trinidad and Tobago	1	5	261	14	70	31	16,700	24,970	6	93	17
[25] United Arab Emirates	5	84	55	78	78	7	54,738	59,993	1	90	16
United States	307	9,832	34	82	79	7	46,360	45,640	6	92	14

TIMSS & PIRLS International Study Center
Lynch School of Education, Boston College

Country	Population Size (in Millions)[1]	Area of Country (1,000 Square Kilometers)[2]	Population Density (People per Square Kilometer)[3]	Urban Population (% of Total)[4]	Life Expectancy at Birth (Years)[5]	Infant Mortality Rate (per 1,000 Live Births)[6]	Gross National Income per Capita (in US Dollars)[7]	GNI per Capita (Purchasing Power Parity)[8]	Public Expenditure on Education (% of GDP)[9]	Net Enrollment Ratio in Primary Education (% of relevant group)[10]	Primary Pupil-Teacher Ratio[11]
Benchmarking Participants—Responses Pertain to Benchmarking Provinces/Regions/Emirates/States											
[26] Alberta, Canada	4	640	6	82	–	6	70,826	–	4	–	–
[26] Ontario, Canada	13	909	14	85	–	5	46,304	–	6	–	–
[26] Quebec, Canada	8	1,357	6	80	–	4	40,395	–	7	–	–
[27] Andalusia, Spain	8	88	96	96	80	4	24,494	24,153	6	100	13
[28] Abu Dhabi, UAE	2	59	33	66	76	8	–	–	–	79	11
Dubai, UAE	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
[29] Florida, US	19	86	215	89	80	7	37,387	–	–	–	15

All data taken from the World Development Indicators 2011 (World Bank, 2011) unless otherwise noted.

A dash (–) indicates comparable data are not available.

1   Includes all residents regardless of legal status or citizenship, except refugees not permanently settled in the country of asylum as they are generally considered part of their country of origin (pp. 10–13).

2   Area is the total suface area in square kilometers, including areas under inland bodies of water and some coastal waterways (pp. 10–13).

3   Midyear population divided by land area in square kilometers (pp. 10–13).

4   Urban population is the midyear population of areas defined as urban in each country and reported to the United Nations (pp. 166–169).

5   Number of years a newborn infant would live if prevailing patterns of mortality at the time of its birth were to stay the same throughout its life (pp. 118–121).

6   Infant mortality rate is the number of infants dying before reaching one year of age, per 1,000 live births in a given year (pp. 118–121).

7   GNI per capita in U.S. dollars is converted using the World Bank Atlas method (pp. 10–13).

8   An international dollar has the same purchasing power over GNI as a U.S. dollar in the United States (pp. 10–13).

9   Current and capital expenditures on education by local, regional, and national governments, including municipalities (pp. 76–79).

10   Ratio of total enrollment of children of official school age to the population of the age group that officially corresponds to the level of education shown (pp. 80–83).
    Please note that because educational systems vary in the ages and grades covered by primary and secondary education, World Bank ratios may underestimate actual net enrollment in some countries.

11   Primary school pupil-teacher ratio is the number of pupils enrolled in primary school divided by the number of primary school teachers (regardless of their teaching assignment) (pp. 76–79).

12   Figures for Belgium (French) are for the whole country of Belgium.

13   All data taken from *2010 Social indicators statistics* (Directorate General of Budget, Accounting and Statistics, Executive Yuan, R.O.C., 2011).

14   Population size and population density taken from *Annual mid-year population estimates, 2010* (Office of National Statistics, 2011); Area of country taken from *The UK and its countries: Facts and figures* (Office of National Statistics, 2010); Urban population taken from *OECD rural policy review, United Kingdom* (OECD, 2011); Life expectancy at birth, gross national income per capita, and GNI per capita (purchasing power parity) reported for United Kingdom; Infant mortality rate taken from *Vital statistics: Population and health reference tables* (Office of National Statistics, 2011); Public expenditure on education reported for United Kingdom, taken from *UK Education expenditure as a proportion of GDP* (Department for Education, 2011); Net enrollment ratio in education reported for United Kingdom, taken from *Global education digest 2010* (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2010); Primary pupil-teacher ratio taken from *Education at a glance 2011: OECD indicators* (OECD, 2011).

15   Infant mortality rate taken from *Hong Kong monthly digest of statistics* (Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department, December, 2011).

16   Infant mortality rate taken from *Demographic review 2010* (Malta National Statistics Office, 2011); Public expenditure on education taken from *Expenditure on education as % of GDP or public expenditure* (Eurostat, 2008); Net enrollment ratio in primary education and primary pupil-teacher ratio taken from *Global education digest 2011* (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2011).

17   Population size and population density taken from *Annual mid-year population estimates, 2010* (Office of National Statistics, 2011); Area of country taken from *The UK and its countries: Facts and figures* (Office of National Statistics, 2010); Urban population taken from *Settlement population estimates, 2008* (Demography and Methodology Branch, NISRA, 2008); Life expectancy at birth, gross national income per capita, and GNI per capita (purchasing power parity) reported for United Kingdom; Infant mortality rate provided by Demography and Methodology Branch, NISRA; Public expenditure on education reported for United Kingdom, taken from *UK Education expenditure as a proportion of GDP* (Department for Education, 2011); Net enrollment ratio in education provided by Department of Education, based on number of students ages 4–10 enrolled in education divided by total number of children ages 4–10; Primary pupil-teacher ratio provided by Department of Education.

18   Primary pupil-teacher ratio taken from *Education at a glance 2011: OECD indicators* (OECD, 2011).

19   Public expenditure on education taken from *Global education digest 2011* (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2011).

20   GNI per capita for 2009 taken from *World statistics pocketbook: Qatar* (United Nations Statistics division, 2011).

21   Public expenditure on education and net enrollment ratio in primary education taken from *Global education digest 2011* (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2011).

22   Net enrollment ratio in education for 2010 taken from Ministry of Education (2011).

23   Public expenditure on education taken from *Expenditure for formal education, Slovenia, 2009* (Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia, 2009).

24   Public expenditure on education taken from *Facing the issues, turning the economy around: Budget statement for financial year 2011* (Republic of Trinidad and Tobago Ministry of Finance, 2011).

25   GNI per capita for 2009 taken from *World statistics pocketbook: United Arab Emirates* (United Nations Statistics Division, 2011); GNI per capita (purchasing power parity) taken from *National human development indicators: United Arab Emirates* (United Nations Development Programme, 2011).

26   Population, area of country, population density (2011), urban population (2006), and infant mortality rate (2008) provided by Statistics Canada; Gross national income per capita for 2010 taken from *Statistical report: PEA comparison tables – Per capita table* (Ministry of Finance, Office of Economic Policy, Economic and Revenue Forecasting and Analysis Branch, 2011). Please note gross domestic product is reported in place of gross national income and is in Canadian dollars. Public expenditure on education taken from *Education indicators in Canada: An international perspective 2011* (Canadian Education Statistics Council, 2011), and includes private expenditure.

27   Population, area of country, and population density taken from *Population, area and density by regions and provinces* (National Institute of Statistics, 2011); Urban population taken from *The figures in education in Spain: Statistics and indicators.* (Ministry of Education and Science, 2011); Life expectancy at birth and infant mortality rate taken from *Basic data 2010 and Basic data 2008*, respectively (Institute of Statistics of Andalusia, 2011 and 2009); GNI per capita and GNI per capita (purchasing power parity) taken from *Regional accounts of Spain* (National Institute of Statistics, 2010); Public expenditure on education taken from *Statistics of public expenditure on education* (Ministry of Education, 2009); Net enrollment ratio in primary education taken from *State system of indicators* (Ministry of Education, 2011); Primary pupil-teacher ratio taken from *Statistics unit technica project* (Ministry of Education, Government of Andalusia, 2011).

28   All data taken from Statistics Centre – Abu Dhabi (2011).

29   Population size taken from *Intercensal estimates of the resident population for the United States, regions, states, and Puerto Rico* (United States Census Bureau, 2011); Area of state taken from *Guide to state and local census geography* (United States Census Bureau, 2011); Population density taken from *United States: Population density by state* (United States Census Bureau, Population Division, 2009); Urban population taken from *Statistical abstract of the United States: 2012* (United States Census Bureau, 2011); Life expectancy at birth taken from *The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics mortality data and US Census Bureau population data, 2007* (statehealthfacts.org); Infant mortality rate from *National vital statistics report, Vol. 59, No. 6* (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, 2011); Gross National Income is substituted with Personal Income per Capita from the Bureau of Economic Analysis, U.S. Department of Commerce (2009); Primary pupil-teacher ratio includes public schools only, from *Numbers and Types of public elementary and secondary schools from the common core of data – School year 2009–10* (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011).

capita (above $50,000 USD, adjusted for purchasing power parity) to Georgia, Honduras, Indonesia, and Morocco with relatively low gross national incomes per capita (less than $5,000 USD, adjusted for purchasing power parity). Although more than half of the countries had 95 percent or more of their primary and secondary students enrolled in school, there was some degree of variation in enrollment rates in primary education (e.g., 77% in Oman) and pupil-teacher ratios (as high as 27 and 29 Morocco and Colombia, and 31 in South Africa).

The Importance of Country and School Contexts in Making International Comparisons

The results of high-quality international assessments such as PIRLS 2011 can make important contributions to improving educational quality. Yet, it must be kept in mind that countries are very different from one another in fundamental ways, and educational systems reflect these differences. One of the most important features of IEA studies is the substantial effort expended to address the more substantive and important questions about the meaning of the achievement results. PIRLS has the specific goal of increasing understanding of the effects of educational policies and practices within and across countries.

The *PIRLS 2011 Encyclopedia* provides an overview of the context in which learning to read takes place in each country. A country's education system is the result of a series of decisions made in response to the specific goals, priorities, politics, resources, and historical traditions of its government representatives and citizens, and the encyclopedia chapters provide an opportunity to better understand each country's approach to teaching reading. Although the regional benchmarking participants all are sub-national jurisdictions of participating countries, they also have prepared chapters explaining how the educational systems in their province, emirate, state, or region relate to the national systems in their countries.

Each PIRLS assessment routinely includes a curriculum questionnaire to collect background information from each country and benchmarking participant about its reading curriculum, school organizational approaches, and instructional practices. This curriculum data supports the encyclopedia chapters by providing some information about the participants' educational systems and curricula that can be answered in a questionnaire format. The results from the *PIRLS 2011 Curriculum Questionnaire* are presented following this introduction and, together with the countries' chapters, provide an important

vehicle for beginning to compare and contrast the common and unique features of the country contexts and curricular goals used in teaching reading around the world.

There is a distinction between overarching system-level decisions such as those described in the *PIRLS 2011 Encyclopedia* and what actually is taught in school and classroom situations. In IEA parlance, there is a difference between the intended curriculum, as specified in official documents, and the implemented curriculum that actually is taught in the schools. The report titled *PIRLS 2011 International Results in Reading* summarizes fourth grade students' trends in reading achievement and provides considerable information about how reading is taught in schools.[2] To provide trends in reading achievement in the context of different schools and classrooms with diverse policies, practices, and resources, the students assessed in PIRLS as well as their parents, teachers, and school principals completed questionnaires about their school and classroom conditions, including the background and experiences of teachers and students. Much of this information is provided together with the PIRLS reading achievement results in the report, *PIRLS 2011 International Results in Reading*. The *PIRLS 2011 Encyclopedia* provides a qualitative complement to the quantitatively oriented *PIRLS 2011 International Results in Reading*.

One of the most important uses of the *PIRLS 2011 Encyclopedia* is to gain a sense and appreciation of the uniqueness of each educational setting represented in PIRLS 2011. All of the countries have the common goal of teaching their children to read; yet national and regional contexts and instructional situations can differ dramatically depending on particular country characteristics, such as resources, culture, demographics, and educational philosophies.

The remaining sections of the introduction provide a flavor of the wide variety of educational contexts represented across the countries that participated in PIRLS 2011 by briefly summarizing information about the topics addressed in the chapters. After the introduction, the next part of the encyclopedia contains the *PIRLS 2011 Curriculum Questionnaire* data, followed by the country chapters in alphabetical order and the chapters for the benchmarking participants.

Language and Literacy in the PIRLS 2011 Countries

As reported in their encyclopedia chapters, it is clear that having a high level of literacy is fundamental to each of the PIRLS 2011 countries, and a number of them have developed ambitious national plans to improve literacy (e.g., Denmark, Hong Kong SAR, Portugal, and Trinidad and Tobago). The

ministries of most countries have supported initiatives to promote reading, sometimes in partnership with libraries, such as Foster Reading! (Austria), Literacy Movement Organization (Iran), kidsREAD and READ! (Singapore), Reading Is Fundamental (United States), and the ABCXXI All of Poland Reads to Kids Foundation.

Most countries reported considerable language diversity, which presents a substantial challenge in providing reading instruction. For example, the Russian Federation 2010 census found 200 nationalities and ethnic groups speaking 239 languages and dialects. Whether language diversity reflects historic cultural regions (e.g., Spain), indigenous groups (e.g., New Zealand), more recent immigration (e.g., France and Italy), or all three (e.g., Canada), many of the PIRLS countries have more than one official language of instruction in at least some regions, and most provide instruction in some ethnic languages. South Africa recognizes eleven home languages (first language) learned by students, although English becomes the primary language of learning in the fourth grade.

Whether students' home language is different than the language of instruction because of a country's cultural and ethnic diversity or because of immigration, this creates the additional necessity of teaching these students the language of reading instruction as a second or additional language. About one-third of the countries reported that significant percentages of children did not have the language of instruction as their home language, so teaching the language of instruction as a second language was a significant part of the language curriculum. For other countries, students needing to learn the language of instruction were offered various levels of support, including separate classes, preparatory classes, support teachers, and "bridge classes."

Overview of the Education Systems

According to the country chapters, nearly all the education systems represented in PIRLS 2011 were managed by the central government, mostly by a single education ministry (although in several countries responsibilities were divided among two or three ministries). However, these countries reported a range in the degree of centralization in decision-making, from "highly centralized" (e.g., Austria, Honduras, and Iran) to "decentralized" (e.g., New Zealand, Spain, and Sweden). With less centralization, typically the role of educational policy-making was maintained by the central government, while implementation of services (sometimes including administration and various levels of decision-making) was delegated to the regional or state level, or even to municipalities.

In four PIRLS 2011 countries, education is managed at the state or provincial level, including Australia, Canada, Germany, and the United States. Countries' education systems often included private as well as public schools, and some included other types of schools such as vocational schools, religious schools, and special language schools (e.g., Maori in New Zealand and Sami in Sweden).

Exhibit 1 from the *PIRLS 2011 Curriculum Questionnaire* (see section following the Introduction) shows that most of the PIRLS 2011 participants had formal policies to ensure parental involvement in schools. In approximately half of the countries, school governing bodies were mandated to include parents.

In general, the PIRLS 2011 participants structured their education systems according to three general levels of schooling—primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary. The PIRLS 2011 students typically were a product of primary schools because primary education usually spanned Grades 1–4 or Grades 1–6, but there were variations. Exhibit 2, summarizing countries' questionnaire responses, shows that schooling typically was compulsory through age 16 (with some variation), although most countries provided schooling through Grade 12.

Because the distribution of students' ages across and within grades is determined by the policy of age of entry to primary school (ISCED Level 1) and how this is implemented in practice, as well as by promotion and retention practices through the grades, Exhibit 3 summarizes countries' policies on age of school entry, the usual age of entry in practice, and promotion/retention from grade to grade. (Research based on PIRLS 2006 shows how the age of entry policies were related to fourth-grade students' ages at the time of the assessment, with those fourth-grade students entering school at younger or older ages generally being younger or older, respectively, at the time of the assessment.[3]) Although most children participating in PIRLS 2011 were required to enter school at age six or seven, there were variations in age of entry policies and in how the policies were implemented. There were also variations in promotion policies, from automatic for Grades 1–8 (e.g., Chinese Taipei) to "depending on academic progress" beginning with Grade 1 (e.g., Italy).

A recent report from the Economist Intelligence Unit observes that preprimary or early childhood education has been becoming more prevalent internationally since the 1980s.[4] The report explains that early childhood education develops children's readiness for school and life, and has the additional benefits of facilitating more women to enter the workforce and helping children overcome issues related to poverty and disadvantage. Exhibit 4 shows the PIRLS 2011 countries' responses to the curriculum

questionnaire questions about preprimary education, with all participants indicating that preprimary education was available. More importantly, in their encyclopedia chapters, many countries reported that even though preprimary education was voluntary, it was a very important part of the education systems. A number of countries reported that nearly all children attended preprimary education (e.g., Chinese Taipei, Croatia, England, France, Portugal, Romania, Singapore, and Sweden) beyond the eight countries reporting that preprimary education was mandatory (Exhibit 4). Most of the PIRLS 2011 participants had a national preprimary curriculum including reading skills. Undoubtedly, the level of these skills varies considerably, but a number of countries mentioned in their chapters that reading instruction begins in the preprimary grades.

Language/Reading Curriculum in the Fourth Grade

Nearly all of the PIRLS 2011 countries had a national curriculum that included reading, and typically the curriculum had been introduced since 2000, although about half were under revision (*PIRLS 2011 Curriculum Questionnaire*, Exhibit 5). Only six countries had a national curriculum specifically for reading, including France, Hungary, the Netherlands, Northern Ireland, the Russian Federation, and Sweden. As explained in the chapters, reading usually is taught as part of the national language curriculum that also includes writing and other communication skills.

Across the PIRLS 2011 countries, the national language curriculum may be the most comprehensive subject in primary school. Of the countries with national policies allocating instructional time across curricular subjects, there was variation but most allocated 20–40 percent of their fourth grade instructional time to language/reading instruction (Exhibit 6). All of language/reading curricula had goals and objectives, while most also included assessment standards and methods, about half instructional methods, and about one-third materials (Exhibit 7).

According to the chapters, nearly all the PIRLS 2011 countries had the central curriculum goal that fourth grade students should be able to read with comprehension. Also, the majority of curricula included the goal that students be able to read a variety of text types, often mentioning literary and informational texts (or similar, such as literary and non-literary or fiction and non-fiction). About one-third of the curricula included the goals of reading aloud with fluency and correct intonation, identifying main ideas (and

secondary information), acquiring information, and being able to discuss opinions about what had been read.

A variety of higher-order comprehension strategies were mentioned, with the most frequent (by about 5–10 countries) being summarizing, analyzing, inferring, interpreting, evaluating, justifying, thinking critically, and making connections (within parts of texts, across texts, and with the real world). Some goals were specific to literary texts, such as recognizing different genres (e.g., fairy tale, story, poem, and play), recognizing figurative language, and describing a story's characters, plot, and setting. Goals related to informational texts also were mentioned, such as recognizing organization and structure and learning about headings. Some curricula also included goals about non-text features, such as visuals, images, illustrations, and captions. Several curricula mentioned digital or electronic texts as well as print.

About one-third of the curricula included helping students develop reading as habit for pleasure and/or to learn, and in their responses to the curriculum questionnaire most countries reported placing major or at least some emphasis on reading for enjoyment (Exhibit 9). For example, Malta aims to have learners "look positively upon reading and enjoy the reading and writing adventure."

In the *PIRLS 2011 Curriculum Questionnaire*, the PIRLS participants were asked how much emphasis their language/reading curricula placed on each the four reading comprehension strategies and two purposes for reading underpinning the *PIRLS 2011 Assessment Framework*.[5] Regarding the four reading comprehension strategies (Exhibit 8), the countries reported considerable emphasis on "focusing on and retrieving explicitly stated information" and on "making straightforward inferences," especially identifying main ideas. Summarizing across countries, moderate emphasis was reported for "interpreting and integrating ideas and information" (particularly for describing the overall message or theme) and some emphasis was placed on "examining and evaluating content, language, and textual elements." Regarding the two reading purposes (Exhibit 9), about three-fourths of the countries placed major emphasis on "reading for literary experience" with most of the rest reporting some emphasis, and there were similar results for "reading to acquire information."

Every PIRLS 2011 country reported making their language/reading curriculum available via an official publication (Exhibit 10). Many also reported using ministry notes and directives. Some curricula were accompanied by mandated or recommended textbooks, instructional or pedagogical guides,

or recommended instructional activities. Nearly every country reported that curriculum implementation was monitored by school self-evaluation, and most reported having curriculum inspectors or supervisors or national or regional assessments (Exhibit 11). Many countries also reported monitoring curriculum implementation via research programs.

Reading Instruction in the Primary Grades

According to the country chapters, most national curricula recommended (or mandated) using textbooks, readers, and other books containing a variety of literature (primarily stories and poems). In about half the countries, the ministry played a role in textbook selection (Exhibit 12). The textbooks often were accompanied by workbooks and sometimes by teacher guides or sets of instructional activities. Community and school libraries as well as classroom libraries were mentioned as an important source for books. In some countries, instructional materials for reading also included the Internet, newspapers and magazines, and audio recordings. Several countries mentioned the large variety of reading instructional materials available to teachers (e.g., Denmark, New Zealand, and the Russian Federation).

In general, the overview of the instructional materials to be used for reading was confirmed by the teachers' reports published in the *PIRLS 2011 International Results in Reading* report. Internationally, on average, teachers used textbooks most often as the basis of reading instruction (for 72% of the fourth grade students) and workbooks or worksheets were used the next most often (for 40%) followed by children's books (for 27%). Typically, a variety of supplemental instructional materials were used in addition to the primary resource. Teachers also reported that, on average, 72 percent of fourth grade students had classroom libraries and principals reported that 86 percent attended schools with a library.

Regarding technology, a few countries reported considerable use of computers and various media in language instruction (e.g., Singapore and Qatar). However, a more typical pattern was considerable school-wide emphasis on Information Technology, but less use by reading teachers. For example, Denmark reported that using computer technology was a national priority, but a Danish school services report found that many teachers still preferred books to technology-based instructional materials. The chapters did mention some technology use besides the Internet, such as interactive white boards and reading instructional software, primarily for struggling readers. England

mentioned that software can be a tool for engaging boys in reading. The *PIRLS 2011 International Results in Reading* report indicates that nearly half of all students internationally had teachers who used computer software as a supplementary instructional resource.

National policies about helping children with reading difficulties spanned the range from "virtually no special attention" in Lithuania to "early identification of children with special educational needs and reading disorders is paramount" in Hong Kong SAR. Several countries reported national diagnostic screening (e.g., England, France, Iran, and Norway), and several more had centers where children could be assessed (e.g., Botswana and Sweden). In some countries, primary schools had teams of specialists, and in other countries, schools had a reading specialist or at least a specialist of some type (e.g., psychologist, speech therapist, or remedial reading teacher). However, in about one-third of the countries, it was the teacher's responsibility to diagnose reading difficulties (sometimes they were given special tools or training). Once a student was diagnosed, several countries reported the policy of trying to keep the student in the regular classroom with some special help, several reported the policy of individualized learning plans, and others reported separate remedial classes or support. Some countries reported special education laws and provisions that covered reading disabilities, particularly dyslexia.

Teachers and Teacher Education

In the chapters, countries reported that fourth grade students typically are taught reading by general purpose primary school teachers that are responsible for teaching all basic subjects. As described in the chapters (and in Exhibit 13), primary teachers' education routes typically were through a four-year university bachelor's degree program in primary education, although there was some variation. For example, several countries had three-year bachelor's degree programs or teacher colleges with a three-year diploma program, and several countries required primary school teachers to have master's degrees (e.g., Croatia and Finland). Some countries mentioned that primary teacher certification required passing a national examination, and several mentioned a one-year induction program.

With the exception of Sweden, which instituted a requirement in 2006 for all teachers in Grade 1–7 to obtain training as reading teachers, most primary school teachers were not required to have training in teaching reading per se. For the most part, training to become a primary school teacher covered a range

of educational foundations and methods courses as well as basic subject content, such as mother tongue language, basic mathematics, science, and social studies. In most cases, studying reading was embedded in language study and the degree of emphasis on reading varied substantially from country to country. However, most primary school teachers had some teacher education in reading. Based on teachers' reports, internationally, on average across the PIRLS 2011 countries, 72 percent of the fourth grade students had reading teachers with an educational emphasis on language, 62 percent had teachers with an emphasis on pedagogy/teaching reading, and 33 percent had teachers with an emphasis on reading theory (see *PIRLS 2011 International Results in Reading*).

Since 2000, about one-third of the PIRLS 2011 countries have increased the requirements for becoming a primary school teacher. Approximately a dozen countries added an additional year or a degree requirement (e.g., extending programs from three to four years, or replacing teacher college diplomas with university bachelor's degrees). Croatia, France, and Portugal reported new regulations requiring a master's degree. In addition, several countries added examination requirements (e.g., Georgia added a national examination and the Netherlands added examinations in the Dutch language and mathematics skills).

About one-third of the countries reported that teachers have opportunities for professional development, but that it is not mandatory, and in some of these countries, teachers have a recognized right to participate in such voluntary professional development. In the majority of countries, however, some professional development is mandatory and either is integrated into teaching responsibilities or is offered through specific programs or courses, often at institutions of higher education. Professional development requirements varied considerably internationally, from 15–100 hours per year. In several countries, incentives were attached to professional development such as increases in salary or rank.

Mandatory professional development did not necessarily translate into training related to teaching reading. Sometimes teachers were required to take specific overarching courses (e.g., counseling or student development), and, even if choices were provided, sometimes professional development in teaching reading was not an available option. This may help explain why most teachers, according to their own reports (see *PIRLS 2011 International Results in Reading*), had not spent much time on reading professional development during the two years prior to the PIRLS 2011 assessment. On average, 24 percent of the fourth grade students had teachers reporting 16 hours or more of reading-related

professional development in the past two years, 50 percent had teachers that had spent some time but less than 16 hours, and 25 percent had teachers that had not spent any time in professional development for reading.

Monitoring Student Progress in Reading

In the chapters, countries described a range of school, regional, and national testing practices in primary schools. About one-third of the countries described national assessments or national testing in one or two primary grades (e.g., Grade 3, or Grade 2 and 5) and some of the countries reported giving school-based standardized tests in the primary grades. All countries reported classroom assessments, and all also mentioned policies and procedures for reporting students' progress to parents.

Use and Impact of PIRLS

As reported in their chapters, countries use PIRLS data for system-level monitoring of educational achievement in a global context. They compare their reading achievement levels and contexts for learning with those of other countries, and monitor progress in reading achievement over time. Some countries use PIRLS as the primary source of national information, whereas others consider it to be an external measure of reading literacy. Participating countries reported taking advantage of varying amounts of PIRLS assessment information for evidence-based decision-making, in addition to using other IEA and OECD international assessments as well as national and regional assessments.

Many countries reported initiating educational reforms when PIRLS achievement results were low compared to other countries, or lower than expected (e.g., Morocco, South Africa, and Trinidad and Tobago). Also, countries with declines in reading achievement between 2001 and 2006 sometimes have implemented new goals and policies to encourage improvement (e.g., the Netherlands and Sweden). Working to achieve equity provided another impetus for reform, and a number of countries report having made special efforts to reduce achievement disparities among ethnic, social, or regional groups (e.g., Australia, New Zealand, and Slovenia). Countries implementing educational changes typically look to future PIRLS assessment cycles to monitor improvement.

PIRLS often was a basis for improving classroom instruction, primarily through teacher workshops and training programs using PIRLS materials

(e.g., results, framework, released items, and scoring guides). Some countries have updated their reading curriculum and textbooks, and several mentioned improving pre-service education in reading. Many countries reported increased sponsorship of reading research activity, including research using PIRLS data, and several have established national reading centers (e.g., Austria, Denmark, and Norway).

In summary, PIRLS has contributed to an increased awareness internationally of the importance of primary education, and reading instruction, in particular.

References

1   World Bank. (2011). *World development indicators 2011*. Washington, D.C.: Author.

2   Mullis, I.V.S., Martin, M.O., Foy, P., & Drucker, K.T. (2012). *PIRLS 2011 international results in reading*. Chestnut Hill, MA: TIMSS & PIRLS International Study Center, Boston College.

3   Martin, M.O., Mullis, I.V.S., & Foy, P. (2011). Age distribution and reading achievement configurations among fourth-grade students in PIRLS 2006. *IERI monograph series: Issues and methodologies in large-scale assessments, 4,* 9–33. Retrieved from http://www. ierinstitute.org/dissemination-area.html

4   Economist Intelligence Unit. (2012). *Starting well: Benchmarking early education across the world*. London: Author. Retrieved from http://www. managementthinking.eiu.com/sites/ default/files/downloads/Starting%20 Well.pdf

5   Mullis, I.V.S., Martin, M.O., Kennedy, A.M., Trong, K.L., & Sainsbury, M. (2009). *PIRLS 2011 assessment framework*. Chestnut Hill, MA: TIMSS & PIRLS International Study Center, Boston College. Retrieved from http://timssandpirls.bc.edu/pirls2011/ downloads/PIRLS2011_Framework.pdf

Reading Curriculum and Policies in PIRLS 2011 Countries

Results from the Curriculum Questionnaire

Country	Description of Policy
Australia	Varies by state but, in general, there is a mandated parent position on school-governing bodies. Other forms of parental involvement, possibly included in official policy, include the following: parents' clubs (for support and advocacy); Parent-Teacher Evenings (to discuss student progress); and volunteering within the school (e.g. to assist in class, on excursions, and in support functions like the cafeteria).
Austria	A class forum must be held at least once a year, to elect a class parental representative and determine classroom level decisions. The class parental representative also represents class interests at the school forum. Principals must support the establishment of parental communities, and the curriculum specifies that close contact between parents and school is necessary to effectively promote children.
Azerbaijan	No specific policy, but the vast majority of schools have parent committees that seriously affect school activities and work closely with governmental educational institutions.
Belgium (French)	Some elected parent delegates must be included in the School Participation Council, which is responsible for writing and assessing the school project. The school project includes the educational options and the priorities defined by schools 3-year timelines, including priority goals, actions to be implemented by the school staff with all the school partners, control process, and final assessment. It also specifies how the communication between students, parents, and school staff is organized.
Botswana	Per government policy, the community should be as involved as possible in the development and management of education.
Bulgaria	Selected parents are members of the school board, whose role is to discuss issues and give recommendations to the school's governing body.
Canada	Schools are mandated to have a school council that must include parent representatives. School councils may provide advice to the principal about school policies, activities and organization, fund-raising, annual budgeting, school reviews, and other activities.
Chinese Taipei	The Educational Fundamental Act regulates parental involvement in school affairs during the period of compulsory education. The main policies include the following: parents, parent groups, and parent committees have the right to participate in educational affairs in schools; parents must take good care of their own children and actively work with schools to improve children's growth and learning; parents have the responsibility to participate in school and classroom activities; schools must set up Parent Teacher Associations (PTA), and all parents have the right to be involved; schools must publically inform parents of school regulations, content, methods of instruction, and assessment criteria; and schools should schedule a parent-teacher interview within one week before to three weeks after the beginning of the semester.
Colombia	Each school establishes a school board consisting of several school entities where parents are expected to participate. The board allows parents to make suggestions and be present in social, cultural, sporting, and similar activities within the schools. Parents also may participate in certain decisions regarding disciplinary issues and student evaluations. Furthermore, policy states that the results of assessment processes must be clearly disclosed to parents so that they are able to monitor their children's progress. It is mandatory for schools to have accountability strategies for parents regarding student results.
Croatia	Each class has one parent representative, who is included in the school governing body.
Czech Republic	Parents participate in school management through participation in a School Council.
Denmark	Cooperation between parents and schools is required by law. Students and parents are to be informed twice a year about student academic achievement, as well as the student's social and personal development. All schools must have a School Board with a majority of parent members elected by the parents of all students at the school. The School Board establishes all general principles for the school, including school-home cooperation.
England	Schools are required to have two parent governors on their governing bodies. Schools typically go to great lengths to encourage parental engagement.
Finland	By law, schools must communicate and cooperate with parents. Parents should be informed about student work, progress, and behavior frequently. The national framework curriculum emphasizes shared parent/school responsibility for student upbringing (primary responsibility of parents) and education (primary responsibility of school). In practice, schools may organize parents' evenings and, especially in Grades 1–6, assessment discussions together with individual teachers, parents, and students.
France	By law, parents are members of the educational community with the following rights: a right to receive information about the schooling and behavior of their children; a right to collective or individual meetings; and a right to participation, by their elected representatives, on school boards.
Georgia	According to the law on general education, parents must be members of school boards in Georgia. They are elected for 3 years. The number of parents involved in school boards is regulated by the school charter.
Germany	Parental involvement is regulated by the state constitution and the school's policy, with the latter falling under the state's supreme authority. According to the Basic Law, the care and upbringing of children are a right and duty primarily incumbent on parents, although the state oversees the exercise of parental rights. While the state is fundamentally responsible for the schooling of children, the state's right to regulate the education of children at school is limited by parental rights to raise their children. At the school and classroom level, the states are free to equip parent councils with rights of participation, although approaches vary by state, and parents generally exercise their rights, individually or collectively, through parent groups and their representatives on other consulting and decision-making bodies at schools. Parent representatives at the school level are most often involved in organizing school life, student protection, and organizing events outside, though under the supervision, of school. Parents also may be involved with general education and teaching questions, school organization, discipline, parent counseling, and head teacher selection.
Honduras	As of 2011, parents and civil society organizations must be included in school governing bodies at the local and regional levels.
Hong Kong SAR	Almost every school has a Parent Teacher Association. For a school with an Incorporated Management Committee (IMC), parent representatives are nominated to serve as parent managers of the governing body.
Hungary	Schools must set up a parental team, which has the right to give its opinion on various issues.

Country	Description of Policy
Indonesia	No policy
Iran, Islamic Rep. of	Parent-School Associations are required to meet during the school year to discuss school management policies and to discuss parents' perspectives regarding their children's education.
Ireland	The Education Act requires all schools to encourage parental involvement in the education of students and in the achievement of school objectives. All schools are required to support the establishment of a Parents Association, whose role is to adopt a program of activities promoting parental involvement in the operation of the school. Schools are expected to develop a clearly defined policy for parental involvement and to share information with parents on all aspects of learner progress and development. In addition, schools with a socio-economically disadvantaged enrollment can avail of the services of the Home/School/Community/Liaison Scheme (HSCL), a preventative strategy targeting students at risk of not reaching their potential that establishes a partnership and collaboration between parents and teachers in the interests of children's learning. Objectives specified in the July 2011 National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy require most schools to increase current levels of support for, and communication with, parents.
Israel	No comprehensive policy. However, 10 years ago a national center for the promotion and development of parent-teacher relations was established within the Ministry of Education. The framework of this center was adopted by 30% of schools. Parents can be included in school bodies and are welcome to participate, though only in a volunteer capacity. They are also welcome to participate and be involved in their children's studies and achievements through special internet sites, where they can follow their children's pedagogical data.
Italy	In each school, there are parent representatives on the school and class governing boards. Teachers are available to meet parents at school to provide updates on children's progress throughout the school year.
Kuwait	With headmaster approval, parents can participate in the Parents' Council, which is involved in some school activities but not in the school's educational policy. Parents' proposals are studied and submitted to the relevant authorities for consideration.
Lithuania	Parents usually participate in a school council. There also is a national parent organization that participates in discussions related to important documents regulating the education process.
Malta	All State Schools have School Councils made up of eight members: the Council President (who is nominated by the Ministry of Education), the Council Secretary/Treasurer (the Head of School), and three teachers' and three parents' representatives who are elected for two-year terms by the school and the parents. Guidelines are in place regarding the role and duties of School Councils. Each school is required to hold one Parents' Evening and one Parents' Day during each school year when children's progress is discussed.
Morocco	The Charter for Education and Training stipulates that parents shall be involved in their children's educational affairs. Parents are present in at least two important school councils, parent associations, and school management council. Parents guarantee openness to the school environment, contribute to parent awareness-raising, establish bidirectional cooperation, help combat student absenteeism and encourage retention, and contribute to the establishment of improvement plans based on student results.
Netherlands	By law, schools should provide parents the opportunity to help with all kinds of school tasks, and to take part in a school's Participation Council.
New Zealand	Parent representation on school governing boards is mandatory. Parents are actively encouraged to be involved in their child's learning. All schools are required to provide feedback to parents on their children's achievement. Primary schools must give parents written reports twice a year on their children's progress in relation to the national standards for literacy and mathematics.
Northern Ireland	"Every School a Good School - a policy for school improvement" sets out the Department of Education's overarching approach to raising standards. One of the policy's priorities is promoting greater parental involvement and engagement in their child's education. Schools are required to provide parents with regular updates on their child's progress, including an annual report. The Extended Schools program supports schools serving disadvantaged communities in encouraging and supporting greater parental involvement by enabling them to provide services for students and parents. These might include parenting classes or literacy, numeracy, and homework support classes for parents. Parent governors form part of every school's Board of Governors. By legal requirement, these governors are formally elected by the parents of students attending the school. Many schools also have Parent Teacher Associations (PTA), which bring together parents and teachers to encourage greater involvement of parents in the life of the school. Many PTAs also carry out fundraising activities on behalf of the school.
Norway	At the national level, there is a National Parents' Committee for Primary and Secondary Education based in Oslo for parents who have children in primary and/or secondary education. At the local level, all parents who have a child at a school are members of the school's parents' council. The parents' council elects a working committee, which represents the voice of the parents with respect to the school. The working committee is responsible for ensuring that parents have a real influence and also is jointly responsible for ensuring that the students' learning environment is secure and good.
Oman	Parents' councils are set at each school, members of which are elected by the school and parents. There are special guidelines regarding the role and duties of the council. Regional parent committees also are formed by the Wali of each region, where the heads of the parents council at schools serve as members on this committee. This committee discusses broader issues and makes decisions accordingly.
Poland	A school is obliged to have a parent committee.
Portugal	Parents must be included in school governing bodies, and local parent associations are invited to participate in school decisions and activities.
Qatar	The Supreme Education Council seeks to encourage the role of the community in independent schools through boards of trustees. These boards link the community and the schools and are responsible for ensuring the quality of education provided in the schools. All members of boards of trustees perform their functions voluntarily, representing the interests of parents and the school community. Their roles are simultaneously supervisory and fiscal.
Romania	A parent is on each school's administration council. Parents also are involved in the choice of optional subjects. As of 2012, parents will make up one-third of council of administration membership.

Country	Description of Policy
Russian Federation	Parents participate in the school supervisory board.
Saudi Arabia	Parents can join the school administration council, where they attend meetings and discuss issues related to student needs.
Singapore	Schools are encouraged to engage parents and the community as partners in education. Schools tailor specific parent outreach programs to engage parents in their children's education (e.g., formation of Parent Support Groups and providing student performance reports).
Slovak Republic	Every school must have a School Board that includes parents and other local community representatives. The School Board is mainly responsible for electing the school headmaster and monitoring the conceptual objectives of the school progress. Though not obligatory, most schools also establish Parents Boards, constituted by parent representatives from particular grades. A few times per year, parents generally are asked to meet with teachers and discuss academic progress, student behavior, and organizational issues.
Slovenia	Parents must be included in school governing bodies, informed about student achievement by the school, and are expected to regularly participate in meetings with class teachers. Parents are invited to participate at school celebrations prepared by students, and are asked permission for all activities in which their child is included yet which are not considered formal schooling.
South Africa	Parents are elected to participate in school governing bodies, and many schools also have parent-teacher associations.
Spain	Parent representatives must be included in the school governing council, together with student representatives, teacher representatives, the principal, and a member of the local council.
Sweden	The curriculum states that parents and schools have the responsibility to create the best possible conditions for the development and learning of children and young persons. The guidelines state that all who work in the school should work together with parents to develop both the content and the activity of the school. Teachers should work together with parents and continuously provide them with information concerning their student's school situation, well-being, and acquisition of knowledge. Teachers also should stay informed about individual students' personal situations and, in doing so, show respect for student integrity. The responsibility lies with the school and not with the parents.
Trinidad and Tobago	Parents are represented on School Boards and Parent Teachers Associations, as well as the National Parent Teachers Association.
United Arab Emirates	Parent Councils at the school and educational zones levels give parents the opportunity to be involved in some educational decisions regarding their children's learning. Parents also are allowed to participate in school events such as open day, camps, trips, competitions, and cultural and community activities.
United States	Encouraging parent involvement in elementary schools is widespread. The No Child Left Behind Act recognizes the role of parents in improving student outcomes and includes among its purposes, "affording parents substantial and meaningful opportunities to participate in the education of their children." For example, there are specific provisions to support Parental Assistance and Local Family Information Centers, which are intended to promote parental involvement toward higher student achievement. Many federal programs also encourage parental participation, but these programs do not apply to all schools and students. Most, if not all, schools welcome and encourage parent participation in both routine and special activities, and have volunteer programs often coordinated by parent/teacher associations.

Benchmarking Participants—Responses Pertain to Benchmarking Provinces/Regions/Emirates/States

Country	Description of Policy
Alberta, Canada	The School Act states that parents have a right and responsibility to make decisions respecting the education of their children. Public schools, including charter schools, are required to establish school councils, each of which must include the school principal, teacher(s), parents of students enrolled in the school, in addition to student(s) (at the secondary level only).
Ontario, Canada	All district school boards have Parent Involvement Committees, and each school has an advisory school council through which parents and other school community members can contribute to improving student achievement and school performance.
Quebec, Canada	By law, a minimum of four parents must be on the Establishment Council. In addition, school boards have some parent committees.
Andalusia, Spain	Regional law encourages parental involvement in schools, though involvement is not compulsory.
Abu Dhabi, UAE	All schools have an advisory Parent Council that provides a vehicle for participation.
Dubai, UAE	Public schools follow UAE regulations. Private school policies vary by school type.
Florida, US	Parents must be members of the school advisory council, which assists in the preparation and evaluation of the school improvement plan. School districts must provide parents specific information about their child's educational progress, and choices and opportunities for involvement in their child's education, as well as provide a framework for building and strengthening partnerships among parents, teachers, principals, district school superintendents and other personnel. Each year, school districts must submit the following to the Department of Education: a copy of their school board rules on parent involvement, a hard copy of the parent guide, a copy of the parent checklist, and copies of report cards that document a student's performance or non-performance at grade level.

TIMSS & PIRLS
International Study Center
Lynch School of Education, Boston College

Country	Ages and/or Grades of Compulsory Schooling		Grades Provided for Primary and Secondary Schooling (Not Including Preprimary)
	Ages	Grades	
Australia	6–16	1–10	1–12
Austria	6–15	1–9	1–12 or 13
Azerbaijan	6–17	1–11	1–11
Belgium (French)	6–18 (16–18 part-time)	n/a	1–12
Botswana	Not compulsory	Not compulsory	1–12
Bulgaria	7–16	n/a	1–12
Canada	Varies by province	Varies by province	1–12 (1–11 in Quebec)
Chinese Taipei	6–15	1–9	1–12
Colombia	5–16	K–9	1–11
Croatia	6 or 7–13 or 14	1–8	1–12
Czech Republic	6–15	1–9	1–12 or 13
Denmark	6–16	0–9	1–12 or 13
England	5–16	K–10	1–10
Finland	7–16	1–9	1–12
France	6–16	n/a	1–12
Georgia	6–15	1–9	1–12
Germany	Varies by state (6–18)	Varies by state (full-time Grades 1–9 or 10)	1–12 or 13
Honduras	7–12	n/a	1–12
Hong Kong SAR	6–15	1–9	1–12
Hungary	6–18	1–12	1–12 or 13
Indonesia	7–16	1–9	1–12
Iran, Islamic Rep. of	6–15	1–9	1–12
Ireland	6–16	n/a	1–12
Israel	5–16	n/a	1–12
Italy	6–16	1–10	1–13
Kuwait	6–17	1–9	1–12
Lithuania	7–16	n/a	1–12
Malta	5–16	1–11	1–11
Morocco	6–15	1–9	1–12
Netherlands	5–18 (or 16 with a diploma)	n/a	1–12
New Zealand	6–16	n/a	Years 1–13
Northern Ireland	4–16	1–12	1–14
Norway	6–16	1–10	1–13
Oman	Not compulsory	Not compulsory	1–12
Poland	7–18	1–9	1–11, 12, or 13
Portugal	6–18	1–12	1–12
Qatar	6–15	1–9	1–12
Romania	n/a	1–10	1–12
Russian Federation	6.5–18	1–11	1–11
Saudi Arabia	6–18	1–12	1–12
Singapore	n/a	1–6	1–10
Slovak Republic	6–16	n/a	1–13
Slovenia	6–15	1–9	1–12 or 13
South Africa	7–15	1–9	1–12
Spain	6–16	1–10	1–12
Sweden	7–16	1–9	1–12
Trinidad and Tobago	5–18	1–11	1–11 or 12
United Arab Emirates	5.5–16	1–9	1–12
United States	Varies by state	Varies by state	1–12

Benchmarking Participants—Responses Pertain to Benchmarking Provinces/Regions/Emirates/States

Alberta, Canada	6–16	Typically 1–10	1–12
Ontario, Canada	6–18	n/a	1–12
Quebec, Canada	6–16	n/a	1–11
Andalusia, Spain	6–16	1–10	1–12
Abu Dhabi, UAE	6–16	n/a	1–12
Dubai, UAE	n/a	1–9	1–12
Florida, US	6–16	n/a	1–12

*For policies on preprimary education see Exhibit 4.

SOURCE: IEA's Progress in International Reading Literacy Study – PIRLS 2011

Reported by National Research Coordinators

Country	Official Policy on Age of Entry to Primary School	Based on Parental Discretion, Usual Practice on Age of Entry to Primary School	Age of Entry Policy has Changed Within Past 10 Years	Policy on Promotion and Retention in Grades 1–8
Australia	Varies by state, but generally children must begin school by age 6.	Most children begin school at the minimum age of 4.5–5 years but some wait until the compulsory age, either on advice from preschool staff or on the judgment of parents, usually because of maturity.	●	Varies by state; generally, automatic promotion for Grades 1–8.
Austria	Children must begin school on the September 1st following their 6th birthday.	Parents can request early admission for children who turn 6 years old by March 1st of the following calendar year, provided that they are mature for schooling and have the required social competence for attending school.	○	Automatic promotion for Grade 1; retention in Grades 2–4 for students failing one or more compulsory subjects.
Azerbaijan	Children must begin school at age 6. Children must be 6 years old by the end of September to begin school on September 15 of the same year.	Children born before the end of November the year they turn 6 who are identified as talented by the Ministry of Education testing commission can begin school on September 15 of the same year.	○	Automatic promotion for Grades 1–4, dependent on academic progress for Grades 5–8.
Belgium (French)	Children must begin at the beginning of September in the calendar year of their 6th birthday.	n/a	○	Students may have to complete one additional year in Grades 1–2, Grades 3–6, and Grades 7–8.
Botswana	Children must be 6 years old by the end of June to begin in January of the same calendar year.	Even though the official policy is that children begin school in the year they turn 6, children from remote areas may begin later than age 6.	○	Up to 12.5% retention in each class; accelerated progression after parent consultation.
Bulgaria	Children start the calendar year of their 7th birthday.	Students may begin at age 6, at parent or guardian discretion.	○	Automatic promotion for Grades 1–4, with remedial summer courses instead of retention; two chances to pass a supplementary exam before retention for Grades 5–8.
Canada	Varies by province	Varies by province	○	Varies by province
Chinese Taipei	Compulsory schooling begins at age 6. Children must be 6 years old before September 1st to begin in September of the same calendar year.	n/a	○	Automatic promotion for Grades 1–8.
Colombia	Children must be at least 6 years old.	Some students start school somewhat older than 6 years old.	○	Schools define promotion and retention policies.
Croatia	All children must begin school by 7 years old. Children must be at least 6 years old by the end of March to begin the following September.	Children typically begin school at age 7 because their parents feel they will benefit from being more mature.	●	Students in Grades 1–3 must obtain minimum standards in most subjects; students in Grades 4–8 must obtain all minimum standards for promotion to the next grade.
Czech Republic	Compulsory schooling begins at the beginning of the school year (September 1st) following the child's 6th birthday, unless granted a postponement.	Children's maturity is assessed during their enrollment to school. If a child is not considered mature enough to attend school, he/she continues to attend either a nursery school or a preparatory class. In rare cases, a child younger than 6 years old may be admitted to compulsory school. However, a gradually increasing number of parents (about 20%) are choosing to postpone the beginning of school attendance for their children.	○	Promotion dependent on academic progress in all compulsory subjects; automatic promotion for students having repeated a year.
Denmark	Children begin preprimary education the year they turn 6. Primary education begins the following year.	The municipal board must approve parental requests to delay one year, but parents can elect to begin children one year earlier.	●	Automatic promotion; in special cases, students may be promoted or retained based on individual assessments, with parental consent.

● Yes
○ No

SOURCE: IEA's Progress in International Reading Literacy Study – PIRLS 2011

Country	Official Policy on Age of Entry to Primary School	Based on Parental Discretion, Usual Practice on Age of Entry to Primary School	Age of Entry Policy has Changed Within Past 10 Years	Policy on Promotion and Retention in Grades 1–8
England	Children begin the term (typically September, January, or April) of their 5th birthday.	Some local authorities maintain two points of entry, typically September and January, and many make provision for all children to begin in September of the school year in which they will turn 5. Some local authorities have changed the discretionary time so that children can begin at a younger age. All of this is subject to parental discretion.	○	No policy
Finland	Children begin the autumn of the year of their 7th birthday.	It is possible to enter school either one year earlier or one year later than the official policy. This is usually initiated by the parents or preprimary teachers if there are concerns about the child's maturity for school, and discussions with an expert (e.g., school psychologist) are required.	○	Automatic promotion for Grades 1–8, retention only in extreme situations.
France	Children must start at the beginning of the school year (September) in the calendar year of their 6th birthday.	Parents and/or teachers can request children start school before age 6 if they are ready to begin primary school.	○	Promotion and retention based on academic progress. Aside from exceptional circumstances, students can only be retained once during primary school.
Georgia	Compulsory schooling begins at age 6. According to the Law on General Education, children can begin the calendar year of their 6th birthday.	n/a	●	Automatic promotion for Grades 1–4, dependent on academic progress for Grades 5–8.
Germany	Compulsory schooling begins the year a child turns 6. Children must be at least 6 years old before a statutory qualifying date (which varies by state; in most states the date falls between June 30th and September 30th) to begin on August 1st.	Official policy grants the right to parents to request early admission or postponed enrollment, but the school administration has the final decision.	●	Automatic promotion in Grade 1; promotion policies differ between states for later grades.
Honduras	Compulsory schooling begins at age 7. Children must be 7 years old by the end of January to begin the following February.	About 30% of children typically begin primary school at age 6, per principals' decisions.	○	Dependent on academic progress on exams prepared and administered by teachers.
Hong Kong SAR	Children begin the September after they turn 5 years, 8 months old.	n/a	○	Representatives of Education Bureau may prescribe maximum rate of repetition.
Hungary	Children begin school during the calendar year they turn 6 if their birthday is before May 31st.	Per parental request, children may begin during the calendar year of their 6th, 7th, or 8th birthday.	○	Automatic promotion in Grades 1–3, dependent on academic progress for Grades 4–8.
Indonesia	Children must be 7 years old by the end of June to begin on July 12th.	Parents have some choice in starting children at age 6.	○	Promotion dependent on academic progress for Grades 1–8.
Iran, Islamic Rep. of	Children must be 6 years old by September 22nd to begin September 23rd.	Few private schools allow registration at 6.5 years.	○	Students with failing grades in June must take cumulative exam in September to determine promotion or retention.
Ireland	The Education (Welfare) Act of 2000 requires children to attend primary school from the time that they are 6 years old but not before they are 4.	In practice, nearly half of 4-year-olds and almost all 5-year-olds are enrolled in infant classes in primary schools.	○	Children only allowed to repeat a year for educational reasons and in exceptional circumstances.
Israel	Children begin the calendar year of their 6th birthday.	Parents have final say if they feel their children are not ready to begin school.	○	Retention only in exceptional cases.
Italy	Children begin the calendar year of their 6th birthday.	If a child will turn 6 years old by April 30th of the following calendar year, parents may enroll the child in the calendar year of their 5th birthday.	●	Dependent on academic progress for Grades 1–8.

● Yes
○ No

Country	Official Policy on Age of Entry to Primary School	Based on Parental Discretion, Usual Practice on Age of Entry to Primary School	Age of Entry Policy has Changed Within Past 10 Years	Policy on Promotion and Retention in Grades 1–8
Kuwait	Children must be 6 years old by March 15th to begin school that calendar year.	Children typically begin primary school at age 5.5 or 6; policy does not allow for parental discretion.	○	Automatic promotion for Grades 1–3, dependent on academic progress for Grades 4–8.
Lithuania	Children must begin by the calendar year of their 7th birthday.	Parents can enroll children 1 year early if the child satisfies the requirements of the Ministry of Education and Science.	●	No national policy, decisions made at school level.
Malta	Children begin in late September of the calendar year of their 5th birthday.	n/a	○	At the primary level, students repeat a class only in exceptional circumstances and after consultation between head of school, teacher, and parents. At the secondary level, students may repeat a year on the basis of their academic performance and other factors in exceptional circumstances. Grade retention can be resorted to only once during each education cycle.
Morocco	Children must be at least 5 years and 6 months old by the beginning of September.	Parents rarely postpone the start of school for their children.	○	Promotion depends on academic progress for both primary and secondary grades. Promotion in primary school exceeds 90%.
Netherlands	Children must begin kindergarten on the first school day of the month after their fifth birthday.	Most children begin kindergarten when they turn 4. Most children are 6 years old when they enter primary education. Some children begin primary education a year later (7 years old) because teacher and parents agree that their child would benefit from being more mature.	○	Promotion and retention decided by the school, dependent on academic progress.
New Zealand	Children must be enrolled by their 6th birthday but have the right to begin school at age 5.	Nearly all children begin school on or soon after their 5th birthday.	○	Automatic promotion; retention only in very special circumstances, with both school and parents involved in making the decision.
Northern Ireland	Compulsory schooling begins at age 4. Children must be 4 years old by July 1st to begin in September.	n/a	○	The majority of children start and continue class with their age group, but some transfer to post-primary a year late or early.
Norway	Children must begin the calendar year of their 6th birthday.	n/a	○	Automatic promotion for all grades.
Oman	Children begin the year of their 6th birthday. Children must be at least 5 years, 9 months old at the start of the academic year (beginning of September).	Parents can enroll their children in private schools where official entry age is 5 years, 5 months.	●	Automatic promotion for Grades 1–4, dependent on academic progress for Grades 5–8.
Poland	Children must begin the calendar year of their 7th birthday.	Parents can postpone the beginning of school for medical or psychological reasons.	●	Parental consent required for retention in Grades 1–6, dependent upon academic progress in higher grades.
Portugal	Children must begin the year of their 6th birthday if they turn 6 years old by September 15th.	Parents can enroll children who turn 6 years old by the end of December, dependent on school availability. In rare situations, children with an exceptional level of development can begin at 5 years old.	●	Automatic promotion for Grade 1, dependent on academic progress for Grades 2–8.
Qatar	Children must begin school in September of the calendar year of their 6th birthday.	Parents can enroll their children in private schools where official entry age is 5 years, 5 months.	○	Promotion is dependent on academic progress for Grades 1–8.
Romania	According to the law of education, children must begin school at age 6.	Parents can postpone enrollment for one year.	●	Automatic promotion for Grade 1, dependent on academic progress for Grades 2–8.

● Yes
○ No

Country	Official Policy on Age of Entry to Primary School	Based on Parental Discretion, Usual Practice on Age of Entry to Primary School	Age of Entry Policy has Changed Within Past 10 Years	Policy on Promotion and Retention in Grades 1–8
Russian Federation	Children must be at least 6 years, 6 months old by the end of August to begin in September.	Children typically begin at age 7 because their parents feel they will benefit from being more mature.	○	Promotion is automatic for Grade 1 and dependent on academic progress for Grades 2–8.
Saudi Arabia	Children must begin the calendar year of their 6th birthday.	n/a	○	No policy
Singapore	According to the Compulsory Education Act, children must begin school the calendar year of their 7th birthday.	Parents may seek a deferral of registration based on medical grounds.	○	Automatic promotion for Grades 1–4, retention at principal's discretion for Grade 5 and dependent on academic progress for Grades 6–8.
Slovak Republic	Children must begin in September if they turn 6 years old by August 31st.	Children may begin school early or after an approved delay, based on psychological tests and professional recommendations.	○	Promotion dependent on academic progress. Students failing 1–2 required subjects must pass makeup exam; students failing more than 2 are retained.
Slovenia	Children must begin the calendar year of their 6th birthday.	In some cases, children who are 6 years old in January enter school in September of the calendar year before they turn 6.	●	Generally, automatic promotion for Grades 1–8, except students with learning difficulties.
South Africa	Compulsory schooling begins at age 7. Children must be 6 years old by June 30th of the year in which they enroll.	Children are encouraged to begin at age 7 because schools and parents feel that they will benefit from being more mature.	●	Automatic promotion in all grades; for retention, an application has to be made to the provincial authorities for permission. Students may only be retained once within a phase of about 3 years.
Spain	Children must begin the calendar year of their 6th birthday.	Almost every child begins kindergarten at the age of 3 even though it is not compulsory.	○	Students can be retained for 1 year during Grades 1–6, but students with special needs can be retained twice. Students that do not reach the goals in Grades 7 and 8 can be retained in both grades.
Sweden	Children begin in the fall of the calendar year of their 7th birthday.	Children can begin the year they turn 6 or 8 years old for special reasons.	○	Automatic promotion for all grades.
Trinidad and Tobago	Children must begin in September of the calendar year of their 5th birthday.	Children may begin at age 4, at discretion of parents and preprimary teachers, or at an older age based on socio-economic status.	○	Dependent on academic progress for Grades 1–6, automatic promotion for Grades 7–8.
United Arab Emirates	Children can begin when they are 5.5 years old, but must begin by age 8.	Parents or guardians can decide when children begin school, but it must by age 8.	●	Students in Grades 1–5 who have not achieved 50% or more of the subject grade must receive remedial instruction to be promoted. Promotion in grades 6–8 dependent on academic achievement.
United States	Varies by state	Children typically begin kindergarten at age 5.	○	Varies by state

● Yes
○ No

SOURCE: IEA's Progress in International Reading Literacy Study – PIRLS 2011

Country	Official Policy on Age of Entry to Primary School	Based on Parental Discretion, Usual Practice on Age of Entry to Primary School	Age of Entry Policy has Changed Within Past 10 Years	Policy on Promotion and Retention in Grades 1–8
Benchmarking Participants—Responses Pertain to Benchmarking Provinces/Regions/Emirates/States				
Alberta, Canada	The law requires all children who are 6 by September 1 to attend school. However, school boards may set their own age requirements for entering school. Many boards allow children to enter Grade 1 if they are six years old by March 1 of the following year.	Parental discretion or choice is allowed. Kindergarten is a voluntary program intended for children in the year prior to entering Grade 1.	○	School principal makes promotion decisions in line with school policies.
Ontario, Canada	Children must attend school in September if they turn 6 years old by September 1. However, they have the right to attend school in September if they will turn 6 by December 31 of that calendar year.	Parents may enroll their children in junior kindergarten at age 4 or senior kindergarten at age 5, but this is not mandatory.	○	School principal makes promotion decisions, appealable to school board.
Quebec, Canada	Children must be 6 years old by September 30th to begin in September of that calendar year.	n/a	○	School boards determine promotion, Ministry sets rules for obtaining diplomas.
Andalusia, Spain	Children begin in September of the year of their 6th birthday.	Only children considered advanced during preprimary education begin one year early.	○	Automatic promotion after Grades 1, 3, and 5; teachers may retain students once after Grades 2, 4, or 6 and at any point in Grades 7–8.
Abu Dhabi, UAE	Compulsory schooling begins at age 6. Children must be 6 years old by October 1st of the school year in which they enroll.	Parents sometimes place students in private schools that accept younger students, then transfer to the public system once the student has completed one or two years and has a promotion certificate.	●	Automatic promotion in Grades 1–5, except in special cases and with parental consent; promotion dependent on academic progress in Grades 6–8.
Dubai, UAE	Children can begin school the calendar year of their 5th birthday.	n/a	○	Varies by school type
Florida, US	Florida law, [Section 1003.21 (1)(a), Florida Statutes], specifies that all children who are 6 or who will be 6 by February 1st of that school year are required to attend school. If a child enters public school at age 6 without completing kindergarten, then they will be placed in kindergarten.	Florida law (Section 1003.21(1)(a)2, Florida Statutes) specifies that children who have attained the age of 5 on or before September 1 of the school year are eligible for admission to public kindergarten during that school year, based on rules prescribed by the school board. Children are eligible for kindergarten attendance provided they meet the age requirement.	○	Statewide, students are retained after Grade 3 if they do not pass the state reading assessment. Otherwise, policies for promotion and retention are determined by districts, based on academic performance.

● Yes
○ No

Exhibit 4: **Preprimary Education**

Reported by National Research Coordinators

Country	Preprimary Education Available	Mandatory Preprimary Education	Number of Years Preprimary Education Required	National Preprimary Curriculum	Language, Reading, and Writing Skills Included in National Preprimary Curriculum
Australia	●	○	n/a	Varies by state	Varies by state
Austria	●	●	1	○	n/a
Azerbaijan	●	○	n/a	○	n/a
Belgium (French)	●	○	n/a	●	●
Botswana	●	○	n/a	●	●
Bulgaria	●	●	1	●	●
Canada	●	○	n/a	Varies by province	Varies by province
Chinese Taipei	●	○	n/a	●	●
Colombia	●	●	1	●	○
Croatia	●	○	n/a	○	n/a
Czech Republic	●	○	n/a	●	○
Denmark	●	●	1	●	●
England	●	○	n/a	●	●
Finland	●	○	n/a	●	●
France	●	○	n/a	●	●
Georgia	●	○	n/a	●	●
Germany	●	○	n/a	○	n/a
Honduras	●	○	n/a	○	n/a
Hong Kong SAR	●	○	n/a	●	●
Hungary	●	●	1	●	●
Indonesia	●	○	n/a	●	○
Iran, Islamic Rep. of	●	○	n/a	●	●
Ireland	●	○	n/a	●	●
Israel	●	●	1	●	●
Italy	●	○	n/a	●	●
Kuwait	●	○	n/a	○	n/a
Lithuania	●	○	n/a	●	●
Malta	●	○	n/a	●	●
Morocco	●	○	n/a	●	●
Netherlands	●	●	1	●	●
New Zealand	●	○	n/a	●	●
Northern Ireland	●	○	n/a	○	n/a
Norway	●	○	n/a	●	○
Oman	●	○	n/a	●	●
Poland	●	●	1	●	○
Portugal	●	○	n/a	○	n/a
Qatar	●	○	n/a	●	●
Romania	●	○	n/a	●	●
Russian Federation	●	○	n/a	○	n/a
Saudi Arabia	●	○	n/a	●	●
Singapore	●	○	n/a	○	n/a
Slovak Republic	●	○	n/a	●	●
Slovenia	●	○	n/a	●	●
South Africa	●	○	n/a	●	●
Spain	●	○	n/a	●	●
Sweden	●	○	n/a	●	●
Trinidad and Tobago	●	○	n/a	●	●
United Arab Emirates	●	○	n/a	●	●
United States	●	Varies by state	Varies by state	Varies by state	Varies by state

Benchmarking Participants—Responses Pertain to Benchmarking Provinces/Regions/Emirates/States

Country	Preprimary Education Available	Mandatory Preprimary Education	Number of Years Preprimary Education Required	National Preprimary Curriculum	Language, Reading, and Writing Skills Included in National Preprimary Curriculum
Alberta, Canada	●	○	n/a	●	●
Ontario, Canada	●	○	n/a	●	●
Quebec, Canada	●	○	n/a	●	●
Andalusia, Spain	●	○	n/a	●	●
Abu Dhabi, UAE	●	○	n/a	●	●
Dubai, UAE	●	○	n/a	●	●
Florida, US	●	●	1	●	●

● Yes

○ No

TIMSS & PIRLS
International Study Center
Lynch School of Education, Boston College

Reported by National Research Coordinators

Country	National Curriculum	Reading as a Separate Curriculum Area	Grade to Grade Structure (Not Including Preprimary)	Year Introduced	Being Revised	Examinations with Consequences for Individual Students	Grades at Which Examinations with Consequences for Individual Students are Given
Australia	Varies by state	○	Varies by state, usually covers 2–3 grade levels at a time; many states have curricula for Grades 1–2, 3–4	Varies by state	●	●	Varies by state, at end of secondary education
Austria	●	○	Grades 1–2, 3, 4	2003	○	○	n/a
Azerbaijan	●	○	Grades 1–4	2002	●	●	At end of basic secondary education (Grade 9) and secondary education (Grade 11)
Belgium (French)	●	○	Grades 1–2, 3–6	1999	○	●	Grade 6
Botswana	●	○	Grades 1–4	2002	○	●	At end of junior-secondary education (Grade 10), and senior-secondary education (Grade 12)
Bulgaria	●	○	Grades 1–4	2003	○	●	Grade 7 and at end of secondary education
Canada	Varies by province	○	Varies by province	Varies by province	Varies by province	●	Varies by province
Chinese Taipei	●	○	Grades 1–3, 4–6	2003	●	●	Grades 9, 12
Colombia	●	○	Grades 1–3, 4–5	2006	○	●	At end of secondary education
Croatia	●	○	Grades 1–8	2006	○	●	At end of secondary education
Czech Republic	●	○	Grades 1–3, 4–5	2007	○	●	At end of secondary education
Denmark	May vary by municipality, but based on national standards	○	Grades 1–2, 3–4	2009	○	●	At end of secondary education (Grade 12)
England	●	○	Grades 1–5	1999	●	●	Ages 11, 16, 18
Finland	●	○	Grades 1–2, 3–5	2004	○	●	At end of secondary education
France	●	●	Grades 1–2, 3–5	2008	○	●	Grades 9, 12
Georgia	●	○	Grades 1–6	2006	●	●	Grade 12
Germany	Varies by state, but national standards	○	Varies by state, many have curricula for Grades 1–2, 3–4 (Berlin, Brandenburg: Grades 5–6)	2004 or later	Varies by state	●	Grades 9/10, 12/13
Honduras	●	○	Grades 1–3, 4–6	2003	○	○	n/a
Hong Kong SAR	●	○	Grades 1–6	2004	○	●	Grade 12
Hungary	●	●	Grades 1–4	2007	●	●	At end of secondary education
Indonesia	●	○	Grades 1–6	1994	○	●	Grades 6, 9, 12
Iran, Islamic Rep. of	●	○	Grades 1–5	2000	●	●	Grades 5, 8, 12
Ireland	●	○	Grades 1–2, 3–4	2000	●	●	Grades 9, 12
Israel	●	○	Grades 1–2, 3–4	2003	●	●	At end of secondary education
Italy	●	○	Grades 1–3, 4–5	2007	●	●	Grades 8, 13
Kuwait	●	○	Grades 1–5	2006	●	●	Grade 12
Lithuania	●	○	Grades 1–2, 3–4	2008	○	●	Grades 10, 12
Malta	●	○	Grades 1–6	2005	●	●	At end of primary education, secondary education, and upper secondary education
Morocco	●	○	Grades 1–2, 3–6	2002	●	●	Grades 6, 9, 12
Netherlands	●	●	No compulsory grade structure	2006	○	●	Grade 6 and at end of secondary education
New Zealand	●	○	No grade structure; curriculum is structured around 8 levels of learning	2010 for English curriculum; 2011 for Maori curriculum	○	●	In the last 3 years of secondary education
Northern Ireland	●	●	Grades 1–2, 3–4	2008	○	●	Ages 16, 18
Norway	●	○	Grades 1–4	2006	○	●	Grade 10
Oman	●	○	Grades 1–4	2000	●	●	Grades 5–12

● Yes
○ No

TIMSS & PIRLS
International Study Center
Lynch School of Education, Boston College

Country	National Curriculum	Reading as a Separate Curriculum Area	Grade to Grade Structure (Not Including Preprimary)	Year Introduced	Being Revised	Examinations with Consequences for Individual Students	Grades at Which Examinations with Consequences for Individual Students are Given
Poland	●	○	Grades 1–3, 4–6	1999	●	●	At the end of primary education, lower secondary education, and upper secondary education
Portugal	●	○	Grades 1–2, 3–4	1992	●	●	Grades 9, 11–12
Qatar	○	○	Grades 1–6	n/a	n/a	●	Grade 12
Romania	●	○	Grades 1–4	2003	●	●	Grades 8, 12
Russian Federation	●	●	Grades 1–4	2004	●	●	Grades 9, 11
Saudi Arabia	●	○	Grades 1, 2, 3, 4	2008	●	●	Grade 12
Singapore	●	○	Grades 1–2, 3–4, 5–6	2003	●	●	Grade 6, at end of secondary, and at end of pre-university education
Slovak Republic	●	○	Grades 1–4	1997	●	●	Grade 9 and at end of secondary education
Slovenia	●	○	Grades 1–3, 4–6	1998	●	●	Grade 9 and at end of secondary education
South Africa	●	○	Grades 1–3, 4–6	1997	●	●	Grade 12
Spain	●	○	Grades 1–2, 3–4	2007	○	●	Grades 6, 7–12
Sweden	●	●	Grades 1–3, 4–5	2000	●	○	n/a
Trinidad and Tobago	●	○	Grades 1, 2–3, 4–6	1999	●	●	At end of primary education
United Arab Emirates	●	○	Grades 1–3, 4–5	2002	●	●	Grades 6–11, 12
United States	Varies by state	●	Varies by state and/or district	Varies by state	Varies by state	Varies by state	Many states require examination by the end of secondary education

Benchmarking Participants—Responses Pertain to Benchmarking Provinces/Regions/Emirates/States

Country	National Curriculum	Reading as a Separate Curriculum Area	Grade to Grade Structure (Not Including Preprimary)	Year Introduced	Being Revised	Examinations with Consequences for Individual Students	Grades at Which Examinations with Consequences for Individual Students are Given
Alberta, Canada	●	○	Grades 1–9	2000	●	●	Grade 12
Ontario, Canada	●	●	Grades 1–8	2006	○	●	Grade 10
Quebec, Canada	●	○	Grades 1–6	2001	○	●	At end of secondary education
Andalusia, Spain	●	○	Grades 1–2, 3–4	2008	●	●	Grade 12
Abu Dhabi, UAE	●	○	Grades 1–5	2002	●	●	Grades 6–11, 12
Dubai, UAE	Varies by school type	Varies by school type	Grades 1–3, 4–5 in public schools; Grades 1–5 in private schools	Varies by school type	Varies by school type	Varies by school type	Varies by school type
Florida, US	Statewide standards	●	Grades 1, 2, 3, 4	2007	●	●	Grade 10

● Yes
○ No

Reported by National Research Coordinators

Country	Percent of Total Instructional Time
Australia	Varies by state
Austria	Approximately 30%
Azerbaijan	37%
Belgium (French)	Not specified in curriculum
Botswana	25%
Bulgaria	30%
Canada	Varies by province (20–37%)
Chinese Taipei	20–30%
Colombia	25%
Croatia	28%
Czech Republic	Not specified in curriculum
Denmark	Varies by municipality (24% minimum)
England	Not specified in curriculum
Finland	Not specified in curriculum
France	33%
Georgia	20%
Germany	Varies by state (approximately 19%)
Honduras	Not specified in curriculum
Hong Kong SAR	18%
Hungary	32–42%
Indonesia	15%
Iran, Islamic Rep. of	60%
Ireland	18%
Israel	21%
Italy	Not specified in curriculum
Kuwait	26%
Lithuania	26%
Malta	15% for English; 15% for Maltese
Morocco	31%
Netherlands	Not specified in curriculum
New Zealand	Not specified in curriculum
Northern Ireland	Not specified in curriculum
Norway	Not specified in curriculum
Oman	17%
Poland	Not specified in curriculum
Portugal	32%
Qatar	25%
Romania	24–29%
Russian Federation	36%
Saudi Arabia	Not specified in curriculum
Singapore	33%
Slovak Republic	35%
Slovenia	20%
South Africa	25%
Spain	25%
Sweden	Not specified in curriculum
Trinidad and Tobago	20%
United Arab Emirates	57%
United States	Varies by state

Benchmarking Participants—Responses Pertain to Benchmarking Provinces/Regions/Emirates/States

Alberta, Canada	25%
Ontario, Canada	Not specified in curriculum
Quebec, Canada	28%
Abu Dhabi, UAE	57%
Dubai, UAE	Varies by school type
Andalusia, Spain	25%
Florida, US	25%

SOURCE: IEA's Progress in International Reading Literacy Study – PIRLS 2011

TIMSS & PIRLS
International Study Center
Lynch School of Education, Boston College

PIRLS 2011 4th Grade

Reported by National Research Coordinators

Country	Goals and Objectives	Instructional Methods or Processes	Materials	Assessment Standards and Methods
Australia	●	○	○	●
Austria	●	○	○	●
Azerbaijan	●	●	●	○
Belgium (French)	●	○	○	○
Botswana	●	●	●	●
Bulgaria	●	●	○	○
Canada	●	○	○	●
Chinese Taipei	●	●	●	●
Colombia	●	○	○	○
Croatia	●	○	○	○
Czech Republic	●	○	○	○
Denmark	●	○	○	○
England	●	○	○	●
Finland	●	○	○	●
France	●	○	○	○
Georgia	●	●	●	●
Germany	●	○	○	○
Honduras	●	●	●	●
Hong Kong SAR	●	●	●	●
Hungary	●	○	○	●
Indonesia	●	●	●	●
Iran, Islamic Rep. of	●	●	●	●
Ireland	●	●	○	●
Israel	●	●	○	●
Italy	●	●	○	○
Kuwait	●	●	●	●
Lithuania	●	●	○	●
Malta	●	●	●	●
Morocco	●	●	●	●
Netherlands	●	○	○	○
New Zealand	●	○	○	○
Northern Ireland	●	○	○	●
Norway	●	○	○	●
Oman	●	●	●	●
Poland	●	○	○	○
Portugal	●	●	○	●
Qatar	●	●	●	●
Romania	●	○	●	●
Russian Federation	●	○	○	○
Saudi Arabia	●	●	●	●
Singapore	●	●	●	●
Slovak Republic	●	○	○	○
Slovenia	●	●	○	●
South Africa	●	○	○	●
Spain	●	○	○	●
Sweden	●	●	○	○
Trinidad and Tobago	●	●	○	●
United Arab Emirates	●	●	●	●
United States	●	●	●	●

Benchmarking Participants—Responses Pertain to Benchmarking Provinces/Regions/Emirates/States

Country	Goals and Objectives	Instructional Methods or Processes	Materials	Assessment Standards and Methods
Alberta, Canada	●	○	○	○
Ontario, Canada	●	○	○	●
Quebec, Canada	○	○	○	●
Andalusia, Spain	●	●	○	○
Abu Dhabi, UAE	●	●	●	●
Dubai, UAE	●	●	●	●
Florida, US	●	○	○	○

● Yes
○ No

SOURCE: IEA's Progress in International Reading Literacy Study – PIRLS 2011

TIMSS & PIRLS
International Study Center
Lynch School of Education, Boston College

Reported by National Research Coordinators

Country	Focusing on and Retrieving Explicitly Stated Information		Making Straightforward Inferences			Interpreting and Integrating Ideas and Information			Examining and Evaluating Content, Language, and Textual Elements	
	Retrieving Explicitly Stated Information from a Sentence or Phrase	Locating and Reproducing Details from a Clearly Defined Section of Text	Connecting Two or More Pieces of Information or Ideas	Identifying Main Ideas	Recognizing Plot Sequences and Character Traits	Describing Overall Message or Theme	Comparing Information Within and Across Texts	Making Generalizations and Drawing Inferences with Textual Support	Describing Style or Structure of Text	Determining Author's Perspective or Intention
Australia	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Austria	◉	◉	○	◉	◉	○	◉	○	○	○
Azerbaijan	●	◉	○	○	◉	●	○	○	○	○
Belgium (French)	●	●	◉	●	◉	●	◉	◉	●	◉
Botswana	●	●	●	●	◉	●	◉	●	○	○
Bulgaria	●	○	○	●	◉	◉	●	◉	◉	●
Canada	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Chinese Taipei	●	●	●	●	●	○	●	◉	◉	○
Colombia	○	○	◉	◉	◉	●	◉	◉	◉	◉
Croatia	●	●	◉	●	●	◉	◉	●	○	●
Czech Republic	●	●	○	●	●	●	◉	◉	○	○
Denmark	●	●	○	◉	◉	◉	◉	○	◉	○
England	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Finland	◉	○	◉	◉	◉	◉	◉	○	◉	○
France	●	●	◉	●	●	●	◉	●	◉	○
Georgia	◉	◉	◉	●	●	●	●	○	◉	●
Germany	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	◉	●	◉
Honduras	●	●	◉	●	●	◉	◉	◉	○	○
Hong Kong SAR	●	●	◉	●	◉	●	◉	◉	●	●
Hungary	●	●	◉	●	●	●	○	●	○	◉
Indonesia	◉	◉	◉	◉	◉	◉	◉	◉	○	○
Iran, Islamic Rep. of	●	●	◉	●	●	●	◉	◉	◉	◉
Ireland	●	●	●	●	●	◉	◉	●	○	○
Israel	●	●	◉	●	●	●	◉	●	●	●
Italy	●	○	○	●	◉	●	○	●	●	◉
Kuwait	●	●	◉	◉	●	◉	◉	○	●	◉
Lithuania	●	●	◉	●	●	●	◉	◉	○	○
Malta	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	◉	◉
Morocco	●	●	◉	●	○	○	○	◉	◉	○
Netherlands	●	●	●	◉	●	●	◉	◉	◉	○
New Zealand	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Northern Ireland	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Norway	●	●	●	●	◉	●	●	●	◉	◉
Oman	●	●	◉	●	○	●	○	◉	○	○
Poland	●	◉	●	○	◉	◉	●	◉	○	○
Portugal	●	●	◉	●	●	●	○	◉	◉	◉
Qatar	●	●	●	●	◉	●	◉	◉	◉	◉
Romania	○	◉	○	◉	◉	○	○	○	◉	◉
Russian Federation	●	●	◉	●	●	●	◉	◉	◉	●
Saudi Arabia	●	●	●	●	◉	◉	◉	◉	○	◉
Singapore	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	◉	◉
Slovak Republic	●	●	○	●	●	◉	○	◉	●	○
Slovenia	●	●	●	●	◉	●	◉	◉	○	◉
South Africa	◉	◉	○	◉	◉	◉	◉	◉	◉	◉
Spain	●	●	●	●	●	●	◉	◉	○	○
Sweden	◉	◉	◉	◉	◉	◉	◉	◉	◉	◉
Trinidad and Tobago	●	●	◉	●	●	◉	○	◉	○	○
United Arab Emirates	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
United States	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

● Major Emphasis ◉ Some Emphasis ○ Little or No Emphasis

TIMSS & PIRLS
International Study Center
Lynch School of Education, Boston College

Country	Focusing on and Retrieving Explicitly Stated Information		Making Straightforward Inferences			Interpreting and Integrating Ideas and Information			Examining and Evaluating Content, Language, and Textual Elements	
	Retrieving Explicitly Stated Information from a Sentence or Phrase	Locating and Reproducing Details from a Clearly Defined Section of Text	Connecting Two or More Pieces of Information or Ideas	Identifying Main Ideas	Recognizing Plot Sequences and Character Traits	Describing Overall Message or Theme	Comparing Information Within and Across Texts	Making Generalizations and Drawing Inferences with Textual Support	Describing Style or Structure of Text	Determining Author's Perspective or Intention

Benchmarking Participants—Responses Pertain to Benchmarking Provinces/Regions/Emirates/States

Country										
Alberta, Canada	◉	◉	●	●	●	●	●	●	◉	●
Ontario, Canada	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Quebec, Canada	●	●	●	○	●	◉	○	○	○	○
Andalusia, Spain	●	●	●	●	◉	●	●	◉	○	○
Abu Dhabi, UAE	●	◉	◉	●	●	●	○	◉	○	○
Dubai, UAE	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Florida, US	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

● Major Emphasis   ◉ Some Emphasis   ○ Little or No Emphasis

SOURCE: IEA's Progress in International Reading Literacy Study – PIRLS 2011

Reported by National Research Coordinators

Country	Reading to Improve Reading	Reading for Literary Experience	Reading to Acquire Information	Reading for Enjoyment
Australia	●	●	●	●
Austria	●	◉	●	●
Azerbaijan	●	●	●	◉
Belgium (French)	○	○	●	○
Botswana	●	●	●	●
Bulgaria	◉	●	◉	◉
Canada	●	●	●	●
Chinese Taipei	●	◉	◉	○
Colombia	◉	●	◉	◉
Croatia	●	◉	●	◉
Czech Republic	●	●	◉	○
Denmark	●	◉	●	◉
England	●	●	●	●
Finland	●	●	●	●
France	●	●	●	◉
Georgia	○	●	◉	◉
Germany	●	◉	●	●
Honduras	●	●	◉	○
Hong Kong SAR	●	●	◉	◉
Hungary	●	●	◉	◉
Indonesia	◉	◉	◉	○
Iran, Islamic Rep. of	●	◉	●	●
Ireland	●	◉	●	●
Israel	◉	●	●	●
Italy	◉	●	●	●
Kuwait	●	◉	◉	◉
Lithuania	●	●	◉	◉
Malta	●	●	●	●
Morocco	●	○	●	◉
Netherlands	●	◉	●	◉
New Zealand	●	●	●	●
Northern Ireland	●	●	●	●
Norway	●	●	●	●
Oman	●	●	●	●
Poland	●	●	◉	○
Portugal	●	●	◉	◉
Qatar	●	○	●	◉
Romania	●	◉	○	○
Russian Federation	●	●	◉	◉
Saudi Arabia	●	◉	◉	◉
Singapore	●	●	●	●
Slovak Republic	●	●	○	◉
Slovenia	◉	○	◉	◉
South Africa	○	●	●	●
Spain	●	●	●	●
Sweden	◉	◉	◉	◉
Trinidad and Tobago	◉	◉	●	◉
United Arab Emirates	●	●	●	●
United States	●	●	●	●

Benchmarking Participants—Responses Pertain to Benchmarking Provinces/Regions/Emirates/States

Country	Reading to Improve Reading	Reading for Literary Experience	Reading to Acquire Information	Reading for Enjoyment
Alberta, Canada	●	◉	●	●
Ontario, Canada	●	●	●	◉
Quebec, Canada	○	●	●	●
Andalusia, Spain	●	◉	●	◉
Abu Dhabi, UAE	●	◉	●	◉
Dubai, UAE	●	●	●	●
Florida, US	●	●	●	◉

● Major Emphasis ◉ Some Emphasis ○ Little or No Emphasis

TIMSS & PIRLS
International Study Center
Lynch School of Education, Boston College

Exhibit 10: Format in Which the Language/Reading Curriculum Is Made Available

Reported by National Research Coordinators

PIRLS 2011 4th Grade

Country	Official Publication Containing the Curriculum	Ministry Notes and Directives	Mandated or Recommended Textbooks	Instructional or Pedagogical Guide	Specifically Developed or Recommended Instructional Activities
Australia	●	●	○	●	○
Austria	●	●	●	●	○
Azerbaijan	●	●	●	●	●
Belgium (French)	●	○	○	○	○
Botswana	●	●	●	●	●
Bulgaria	●	●	○	●	○
Canada	●	●	●	●	●
Chinese Taipei	●	●	●	●	●
Colombia	●	●	○	○	○
Croatia	●	○	○	○	○
Czech Republic	●	○	●	○	○
Denmark	●	●	○	●	●
England	●	○	○	●	●
Finland	●	○	○	○	○
France	●	●	○	●	○
Georgia	●	○	●	○	○
Germany	●	●	●	○	○
Honduras	●	●	●	●	●
Hong Kong SAR	●	●	●	●	●
Hungary	●	●	○	○	○
Indonesia	●	○	●	○	○
Iran, Islamic Rep. of	●	●	●	●	●
Ireland	●	○	○	●	●
Israel	●	●	○	●	●
Italy	●	●	○	○	●
Kuwait	●	●	●	●	●
Lithuania	●	●	●	●	○
Malta	●	●	●	●	●
Morocco	●	●	●	●	●
Netherlands	●	●	●	●	●
New Zealand	●	○	○	●	●
Northern Ireland	●	●	○	○	○
Norway	●	●	○	●	○
Oman	●	●	●	●	●
Poland	●	○	○	○	○
Portugal	●	●	○	●	●
Qatar	●	●	○	○	○
Romania	●	○	●	○	●
Russian Federation	●	●	●	●	○
Saudi Arabia	●	●	○	●	●
Singapore	●	●	●	●	●
Slovak Republic	●	○	●	○	○
Slovenia	●	●	●	○	○
South Africa	●	●	○	○	○
Spain	●	●	○	○	○
Sweden	●	●	○	○	○
Trinidad and Tobago	●	●	●	●	○
United Arab Emirates	●	●	●	●	●
United States	●	○	●	●	●

Benchmarking Participants—Responses Pertain to Benchmarking Provinces/Regions/Emirates/States

Country	Official Publication Containing the Curriculum	Ministry Notes and Directives	Mandated or Recommended Textbooks	Instructional or Pedagogical Guide	Specifically Developed or Recommended Instructional Activities
Alberta, Canada	●	○	●	○	●
Ontario, Canada	●	○	○	●	●
Quebec, Canada	●	○	○	○	●
Andalusia, Spain	●	○	○	●	○
Abu Dhabi, UAE	●	●	●	●	●
Dubai, UAE	●	●	●	●	●
Florida, US	●	●	●	○	●

● Yes
○ No

SOURCE: IEA's Progress in International Reading Literacy Study – PIRLS 2011

PIRLS 2011 4th Grade

Reported by National Research Coordinators

Country	Visits by Inspectors / Supervisors	Research Programs	School Self-Evaluation	National or Regional Assessments
Australia	○	●	●	●
Austria	●	○	○	○
Azerbaijan	●	●	●	●
Belgium (French)	●	○	●	●
Botswana	●	●	●	●
Bulgaria	●	●	●	●
Canada	○	○	●	●
Chinese Taipei	○	○	●	●
Colombia	○	●	●	●
Croatia	○	○	○	●
Czech Republic	●	●	●	○
Denmark	○	○	○	●
England	●	○	●	●
Finland	○	●	●	●
France	●	○	○	●
Georgia	○	○	●	●
Germany	●	○	●	●
Honduras	●	○	○	○
Hong Kong SAR	●	●	●	●
Hungary	○	○	●	●
Indonesia	●	○	●	○
Iran, Islamic Rep. of	●	●	○	●
Ireland	●	●	●	●
Israel	●	●	○	●
Italy	○	●	●	●
Kuwait	●	●	●	●
Lithuania	●	○	●	○
Malta	●	○	●	●
Morocco	●	●	○	●
Netherlands	●	●	●	○
New Zealand	●	●	●	○
Northern Ireland	●	●	●	●
Norway	○	●	●	●
Oman	●	●	●	●
Poland	●	●	●	○
Portugal	○	○	●	●
Qatar	●	●	●	●
Romania	●	●	●	○
Russian Federation	●	●	●	●
Saudi Arabia	●	○	●	●
Singapore	○	●	●	●
Slovak Republic	●	○	●	○
Slovenia	○	●	●	●
South Africa	●	●	●	●
Spain	●	○	●	●
Sweden	●	○	●	○
Trinidad and Tobago	●	○	●	●
United Arab Emirates	●	●	●	●
United States	●	●	●	●

Benchmarking Participants—Responses Pertain to Benchmarking Provinces/Regions/Emirates/States

Alberta, Canada	○	○	●	●
Ontario, Canada	○	●	●	●
Quebec, Canada	○	○	○	○
Andalusia, Spain	●	○	●	●
Abu Dhabi, UAE	●	○	○	●
Dubai, UAE	●	○	●	●
Florida, US	●	○	○	●

● Yes
○ No

TIMSS & PIRLS
International Study Center
Lynch School of Education, Boston College

Reported by National Research Coordinators

Country	Description of Process
Australia	No process for approving textbooks
Austria	Authors submit their textbooks/materials to the Federal Ministry of Education, Arts & Culture for evaluation based on ministry-defined criteria. One important aspect is coverage of the entire curriculum. Only approved textbooks are permitted for school use. While many textbooks are approved, none are explicitly recommended; teachers may freely choose from the list.
Azerbaijan	The Ministry of Education defines and announces the list of newly created textbooks, and announces competitions in any subject according to the rules for creating new textbooks. After the Ministry's announcement, publishing houses send applications for participation in the competition. The competition commission determines the list of acceptable proposals and presents them to the Textbook Assessment Council. In other cases, the Ministry orders textbooks from authors and publishing companies. These textbooks are sent to the Textbook Assessment Council. The Ministry holds the right to publish and distribute ordered textbooks, and approves textbooks based on the Textbook Assessment Council's presentation. Early each year, the Ministry prepares and approves the list and number of copies of textbooks to meet demand. Textbooks for general education schools are prepared for 5 years.
Belgium (French)	A group of inspectors examines textbooks proposed by an author, an editor, a teacher/group of teachers, or a governing body. Inspectors must notify the commission whether each proposed textbook is in accordance with a list of criteria. The conformity agreement is valid for 8 years.
Botswana	The Ministry of Education's Department of Curriculum Development and Evaluation invites publishers to submit texts for particular levels, and provides details on the types of texts to submit and the level of education required. A textbook evaluation committee evaluates the textbooks and recommends the most suitable for the available curriculum. The authorized list is then sent to schools so they may order the textbooks.
Bulgaria	The Bulgarian Ministry of Education, Youth, and Science approves up to 3 textbooks (with accompanying supplements) for each subject and each grade. Teachers then decide which approved textbook(s) to use for instruction.
Canada	In most provinces, a rigorous process involving provincial personnel, school district personnel, and teacher experts evaluates all approved classroom resources.
Chinese Taipei	A Ministry of Education committee reviews the contents of textbooks according to the Nine-Year Integrated Curriculum guidelines.
Colombia	No process for approving textbooks
Croatia	The School Textbooks Board and expert committees for each individual subject or area are in charge of evaluating textbooks. Approval of new textbooks is conducted according to the elements and instruments for textbook and handbook evaluation, and in correspondence with textbook standards, educational programs, and goals. The Ministry of Education, Science and Sports prescribes textbooks for Croatian language and literature.
Czech Republic	The Ministry of Education publishes the list of approved textbooks and teaching texts in the Bulletin of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, and on the Internet. These are approved on the basis of compliance with educational objectives stipulated in the Education Act, in the Framework Educational Programs, and legal regulations. The approximate 3-month approval process begins when a publisher submits a textbook. The ministry asks two reviewers, one of whom usually is from a higher education institution, for comments with which the publisher fine-tunes the textbook. If the reviewers have strong differences of opinion about a textbook, a third is used.
Denmark	No process for approving textbooks
England	No process for approving textbooks
Finland	No process for approving textbooks
France	No process for approving textbooks
Georgia	The National Curriculum and Assessment Center has a rigorous and uniformly applied process for approval of textbooks and instructional materials. Analysts of language textbooks are evenly divided between experienced, practicing classroom teachers, and higher education faculty knowledgeable about research on language learning and teaching. Language textbooks are an important component of language instruction, because many teachers rely on textbooks to present students with language activities to further learning.
Germany	Varies by state and grade. In the state with the largest population, North Rhine-Westphalia: extended approval by the ministry, which requires a review of authorized specialists.
Honduras	No process for approving textbooks
Hong Kong SAR	The textbook review process begins when the Curriculum Development Council (CDC) finalizes the curriculum framework of a Key Learning Area (KLA) and the Education Bureau (EDB) asks publishers to indicate subjects on which they intend to publish textbooks. The CDC then publishes a KLA curriculum and assessment guide, and publishers update textbook development plans for EDB. KLA officers hold briefings and feedback sessions for publishers during the textbook development process. Once all prospective publishers submit complete sets of textbooks for review, EDB sends textbook review reports to publishers and finally releases the recommended textbook list. Those "not recommended" textbooks can be resubmitted at this stage. Final proof copies of the recommended textbooks are submitted to EDB for verification of compliance with the required amendments given in the textbook review reports before publishers submit printed copies of the textbooks to EDB.
Hungary	Textbooks must be accredited by the Ministry of Education's Educational Authority.
Indonesia	All mandatory books must be approved by content specialists.
Iran, Islamic Rep. of	Once a textbook is completed, a 1-year pilot evaluates the text through review of feedback from teachers, curriculum specialists, and child psychologists.
Ireland	No process for approving textbooks
Israel	Private companies and publishers write textbooks in both Hebrew and Arabic and submit them to the Ministry of Education for approval. The approval process includes: evaluation based on a list of criteria (currently under revision); correction, if necessary, based on a report; and submission of the revised textbook to the Chief Inspector for final approval.

Country	Description of Process
Italy	Textbooks must be approved by the school's teaching staff.
Kuwait	Textbooks are approved by special committees.
Lithuania	To be included in the textbook database, textbooks must receive two positive reviews from independent experts, and confirmation from the Lithuanian language committee regarding correspondence with language standards. Teaching staff is responsible for choosing the textbooks used for learning, and schools and teachers may choose from a wide range of texts in the database.
Malta	Textbooks are chosen by a board established to evaluate and select suitable books submitted by publishers. The Directorate for Education then supplies state schools with the selected and approved textbooks. The Director responsible for Curriculum issues a list of "Readers" for schools to choose from, and funds are given to schools for their acquisition.
Morocco	Textbook writers submit manuscripts for review and approval in accordance with provisions of the National Charter for Education and Training, and specifications of the Ministry of Education. Ad-hoc committees of experts read manuscripts, provide feedback, and finally select the most suitable textbooks. Three textbooks for teaching Arabic have been specifically designed for fourth graders since 2002.
Netherlands	No process for approving textbooks
New Zealand	No process for approving textbooks
Northern Ireland	No process for approving textbooks
Norway	No process for approving textbooks
Oman	Language instruction textbooks are produced by the ministry, which forms teams to translate specific grades' curriculum goals and learning outcomes into textbook lessons and activities. These teams consist of specialists in each subject, a supervisor, a curriculum officer, an assessment officer, and a teacher educator. A focus group of teachers in particular grades in different parts of the country check the written material, proposed activities, and time frames for each unit. Textbooks then go to a higher committee headed by the Undersecretary of Education for approval. Special committees are formed to check the suitability of commercially produced materials before they are purchased by the ministry or the school.
Poland	Publishers must submit every new textbook for expert review by Ministry of Education designates. Based on their evaluation, the Minister may approve the textbook for use in schools. There are no separate textbooks for language instruction in Grades 1–3.
Portugal	Textbooks must be approved by a scientific committee regarding evaluation criteria defined by the Ministry of Education. Teachers/schools then choose from an extensive approved list according to their preferences.
Qatar	No process for approving textbooks
Romania	The Ministry of Education holds a competition for publishers according to a set of terms concerning the textbook development, which publisher-appointed authors use to develop proposals. Proposals must be sent to the ministry by a set deadline for evaluation by a group appointed by the textbook-specialization board of the ministry. The evaluation process is blind and the results are made public when evaluation of all proposals is complete.
Russian Federation	The textbooks used for language/Reading are reviewed by experts from the Russian Academy of Education in accordance with the requirements of the National Educational Standards and age characteristics of primary school children. The Federal Ministry of Education and Sciences provides a list of recommended textbooks.
Saudi Arabia	A specialized committee of supervisors is responsible for approving the textbooks.
Singapore	The Ministry of Education provides an approved list of instructional materials for teaching reading and the English language, such as: textbooks, workbooks, and audio-visual or multimedia instructional materials. Curriculum Planning Officers at the Ministry of Education conduct a comprehensive review of the materials before they are approved.
Slovak Republic	The Ministry of Education (MoE) announces competitions for textbooks with specific requirements and various authors can apply. Once approved by a specially-assembled committee and two reviewers, authors submit draft textbooks to the National Institute for Education (NIE) or National Institute for Professional Education (NIPE). If requirements are met, NIE or NIPE complete an approval report used by MoE to issue "approval closure." There can be various textbooks with approval closure for a particular subject. Approved textbooks are listed in a national register of textbooks from which schools may choose and receive textbooks free of charge. If MoE does not issue the approval closure, further competition is announced.
Slovenia	Textbooks and workbooks are to be approved by the National Expert Council for Education.
South Africa	Currently varies by province, but there are plans to possibly centralize this process nationally.
Spain	No process for approving textbooks
Sweden	No process for approving textbooks
Trinidad and Tobago	Textbooks are usually evaluated by a Learning Materials Evaluation Committee. All publishers and authors are invited via advertisements in the national media to submit copies of textbooks for evaluation. A list of textbooks meeting criteria is sent to all schools, from which teachers select those textbooks they deem suitable for their students.
United Arab Emirates	Textbooks are reviewed by a textbook preparation committee as well as by curriculum department administrators, who then assign the committee the task of editing the text per reviewer recommendations.
United States	States use one of two methods to select the textbooks used in their schools. The majority of states allow school districts or schools to choose the textbooks they will use. A number of states (21 in 2008) have a process for approving or recommending textbooks and materials to be used in local districts and schools. Because some of these states, known as textbook adoption states, have large student populations (e.g., California, Florida, and Texas), they can greatly influence the market of published textbooks. School districts' roles in approving textbooks also vary. School districts in many states have a process for approving or recommending textbooks and materials, while districts in other states leave the decision to individual schools.

Country	Description of Process
Benchmarking Participants—Responses Pertain to Benchmarking Provinces/Regions/Emirates/States	
Alberta, Canada	A Call for Resources, with specific criteria for review, is issued to publishers and distributors. Resources are submitted to Alberta Education and go through a thorough review process, usually involving teams of teachers and lead by Alberta Education. Prior to being authorized, resources are reviewed for curriculum fit, instructional design (basic or support), appropriateness (respecting diversity and promoting respect), and technical considerations. For English Language Arts, the resource review is done through the Western and Northern Canadian Protocol partners, and resources from that list are authorized for Alberta. School authorities then select from the list those resources that best suit their students' needs.
Ontario, Canada	Ontario has a Trillium List containing the textbook titles approved by the Minister of Education for use in Ontario schools. These textbooks have been subjected to a rigorous evaluation in accordance with criteria specified in the Guidelines for Approval of Textbooks. Key eligibility criteria include the following: congruence with curriculum policy; provision of a teacher resource guide; Canadian orientation and product; and detailed criteria for content and format. Ontario has a separate list of Ministry approved textbooks for both English-language and French-language schools. In addition to the criteria identified above, French-language textbooks must integrate cultural content and references to support student identity building, and must align with the Aménagement Linguistique Policy for the French-language schools in Ontario.
Quebec, Canada	Separate Ministry departments are responsible for didactic material and the approval of this material.
Andalusia, Spain	All textbooks, including but not limited to reading/language, must be supervised and approved by the Educational Administration before use in schools.
Abu Dhabi, UAE	Textbooks are reviewed by a textbook preparation committee as well as by curriculum department administrators, who then assign the committee the task of editing the text per reviewer recommendations.
Dubai, UAE	Textbooks for schools using the national curriculum are reviewed by a textbook preparation committee as well as by curriculum department administrators, who then assign the committee the task of editing the text per reviewer recommendations. No process for approving textbooks is specified for private schools that teach other curricula.
Florida, US	Policies and procedures for the adoption of instructional materials are developed annually by the Department of Education. Selected subject areas are called for adoption each year on a rotating basis. Prior to each adoption, the Department of Education publishes the Instructional Materials Specifications for the subjects to be adopted. These specifications outline the courses for which materials are being sought, as well as the standards that those materials are expected to meet. State Instructional Materials Reviewers review and evaluate the materials submitted for adoption. It is the Commissioner of Education who formally adopts the recommendations of the reviewers. The Commissioner may accept the recommendations or amend them. Each county (Local Education Agency) may choose which materials to purchase from the adoption list. Florida schools and school districts must purchase adopted materials through the publishers Florida depository.

Country	Main Teacher Preparation Route	Current Requirements			
		Supervised Practicum During Teacher Education Program	Passing a Qualifying Examination (e.g., licensing, certification)	Completion of Probationary Teaching Period	Completion of Mentoring or Induction Program
Australia	Most teachers receive a 4-year university degree in education, or complete a 1–2 year postgraduate qualification program following a 4-year non-education degree.	●	○	●	○
Austria	Teachers receive a bachelor's degree from a 6-semester education at University Colleges of Teacher Education.	●	●	○	○
Azerbaijan	Most teachers receive their education through a university degree program.	●	●	○	●
Belgium (French)	Teachers attend a 3-year teacher's college program.	●	●	○	○
Botswana	Teachers obtain a Diploma in Primary Education from colleges of education.	●	●	●	○
Bulgaria	Teachers at primary schools must have at least a bachelor's degree in primary pedagogy.	●	●	○	○
Canada	In most provinces, teachers require a Bachelor of Education university degree.	●	○	○	○
Chinese Taipei	Most teachers receive their education through a university degree program.	●	●	○	○
Colombia	Fourth grade teachers have three main preparation routes: a 2-year degree from a "Higher Normal School"; a bachelor's degree in education; or a non-education bachelor's degree followed by a post-graduate degree in education.	●	●	●	●
Croatia	Until the 2005–06 academic year, teachers had to obtain a 4-year university degree. After implementation of the Bologna process, teachers must obtain a Master's degree in Primary Education in the Department of Teacher Education.	●	●	●	●
Czech Republic	All teachers receive their education through a university degree program. Teachers of Grades 1–5 receive a master's degree after a 5-year course at a university department of education.	●	●	○	○
Denmark	All teachers receive their education at a university school for teacher education with a 4-year professional bachelor program.	●	●	○	○
England	Teachers receive either a degree in education or a degree in a subject plus a post-graduate certificate in education.	●	●	●	○
Finland	All teachers must receive a university master's degree. Grade 4 teachers have majored in education.	●	○	○	○
France	Most teachers have obtained a 2- or 3-year degree followed by a period of teacher training. From 2011, teachers obtain a 5-year master's degree.	●	●	●	●
Georgia	Most teachers receive their education through a university degree program.	○	●	○	●
Germany	Teacher education is offered at universities, colleges of education, and colleges of art and music. Programs for primary school teachers typically last 4–5 years.	●	●	●	●
Honduras	All teachers receive their education through a high school degree program.	●	○	○	○
Hong Kong SAR	Teachers receive their education either through a teacher college program or, more commonly, through a university degree program.	●	●	○	○
Hungary	Teachers receive their education through a university degree program where they are trained in all subjects.	●	●	○	○
Indonesia	Most teachers receive their education through a teacher college program.	●	●	○	○
Iran, Islamic Rep. of	Most teachers receive their education through a university (bachelor's degree) or teacher training center (associate degree) program in primary education.	○	●	○	○
Ireland	Teachers either receive a 3-year bachelor's degree in education or an 18-month post graduate diploma in education after a non-education degree.	●	●	●	○
Israel	Most teachers receive their education through teacher college programs. Some receive their education through a university degree followed by 1 year of study towards teaching licensure.	●	○	●	●
Italy	All teachers must have a university degree in education. Before 1999–2000, a high school diploma with teacher training specialization was sufficient.	○	●	●	●
Kuwait	Teachers in primary education must have a university degree from the Department of Education at the University of Kuwait, the College of Basic Education, or any equivalent university degree from the other countries.	●	○	●	●
Lithuania	Primary school teachers are trained either at 4-year pedagogical universities (baccalaureate) or 3-year teacher training colleges.	●	○	○	○
Malta	Most primary teachers have a Bachelor of Education in Primary teaching from a 4-year university degree program.	●	●	●	●

● Yes
○ No

TIMSS & PIRLS International Study Center
Lynch School of Education, Boston College

SOURCE: IEA's Progress in International Reading Literacy Study – PIRLS 2011

Country	Main Teacher Preparation Route	Current Requirements			
		Supervised Practicum During Teacher Education Program	Passing a Qualifying Examination (e.g., licensing, certification)	Completion of Probationary Teaching Period	Completion of Mentoring or Induction Program
Morocco	Most teachers have a general university diploma and then complete a teacher training course.	●	●	●	●
Netherlands	Most teachers receive their education from a 4-year teacher training college program.	●	●	●	○
New Zealand	Most teachers complete either a 3-year Bachelor of Education program, a 4-year conjoint degree program, or a 1-year compressed graduate diploma after a non-education degree.	●	○	●	○
Northern Ireland	Teachers have either a 4-year Bachelor of Education degree or a 1-year Postgraduate Certificate in Education.	●	●	○	●
Norway	Most teachers attend a 4-year teacher education college program.	●	●	○	○
Oman	All teachers receive their education through a university degree program.	●	○	○	●
Poland	Most teachers receive their education through a university degree program; some have attended a teacher college, but most then complete a 2-year master's degree university course.	●	○	●	○
Portugal	Most teachers receive their education through a university or a polytechnic degree program (high education diploma).	●	○	●	○
Qatar	Teachers must have a degree in primary education from a university or teacher college, with many now having specialized majors in the subject they teach.	○	○	○	○
Romania	Most teachers receive their education through a university degree program.	●	●	●	●
Russian Federation	Most teachers receive their education through a pedagogical institute or university degree program. Some have attended a teacher college program, but this is becoming less common.	●	●	○	●
Saudi Arabia	Most teachers have attended a teacher college program, though some teachers receive their education through a university degree program.	●	●	○	○
Singapore	All prospective primary school teachers are required to undergo pre-service teacher education conducted by the National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University. They can obtain either a 2-year Diploma in Education, a 4-year Bachelor of Arts/Science (Education), or a 1- or 2-year Postgraduate Diploma in Education.	●	●	●	●
Slovak Republic	Teachers are mostly educated at Departments of Pedagogy, and are required to have a master's degree.	●	●	○	●
Slovenia	Most teachers receive their education through a university degree program.	●	●	●	●
South Africa	Most teachers complete either a 4-year university degree in education or a 3-year non-education degree followed by a 1-year postgraduate certification in education. Before 1996, teachers could attend a teacher college instead of university.	●	●	○	○
Spain	Primary teachers need to complete a 3-year university degree program. Since 2010, future teachers entering university need to complete a 4-year degree.	●	●	●	○
Sweden	Most teachers receive their education through a university degree program.	●	●	○	○
Trinidad and Tobago	Teachers have attended a teacher college program in order to be certified. Since 2006, new teachers entering the education system are required to have a university degree (Bachelor of Education).	●	●	●	○
United Arab Emirates	Most teachers receive their education through a university degree program.	○	●	●	○
United States	Requirements set by states. Most teachers receive their education through a university degree program in education; candidates with degrees in other areas may become certified to teach through an alternative teacher certification program. Typically, state licensing boards grant credentials to teachers, with recertification after a set period of time.	●	●	●	●

● Yes
○ No

Country	Main Teacher Preparation Route	Current Requirements			
		Supervised Practicum During Teacher Education Program	Passing a Qualifying Examination (e.g., licensing, certification)	Completion of Probationary Teaching Period	Completion of Mentoring or Induction Program
Benchmarking Participants—Responses Pertain to Benchmarking Provinces/Regions/Emirates/States					
Alberta, Canada	Most teachers receive their education through a university degree program.	●	○	●	○
Ontario, Canada	Most teachers obtain a university degree, followed by a 1-year Bachelor of Education program.	●	○	○	●
Quebec, Canada	Most teachers receive their education through a university degree program.	●	●	○	○
Andalusia, Spain	All teachers receive their education through a 3-year university degree program.	●	●	●	○
Abu Dhabi, UAE	All public school teachers have a university degree. Recently hired teachers are required to have an education degree or teaching certificate. There is enormous range in private schools, from teachers with high school diplomas to licensed teachers with graduate degrees.	●	○	○	○
Dubai, UAE	Most teachers have a qualified background in teaching and a teaching certificate.	Varies by school type	Varies by school type	Varies by school type	Varies by school type
Florida, US	Most teachers complete an Initial Teacher Preparation program. Individuals who complete this program earn a bachelor's or master's degree in education specific to the subject area in which they are being prepared.	●	●	●	●

● Yes
○ No

TIMSS & PIRLS
International Study Center
Lynch School of Education, Boston College

Australia

Language and Literacy

English is the language spoken by the majority of the Australian population, although Australia has no official language. Proficiency in standard Australian English is essential for effective social, economic, and cultural participation in Australian society. English is the language of instruction for the majority of school students.

Language diversity is a key characteristic of the Australian population, and a large proportion of Australians speak a language other than English. The 2006 Census reported that almost 400 different languages were spoken in homes across Australia.[1] Close to 79 percent of Australia's population spoke English at home, a decrease from 82 percent in 1996. The five most common languages other than English in 2006 were Italian (accounting for 1.6% of the population), Greek (1.3%), Cantonese (1.2%), Arabic (1.2%), and Mandarin (1.1%). Of these, Cantonese is the only language that showed an increase in the number of speakers since 1996—21 percent growth. The recent growth of Asian languages and the decline of European ones reflect trends in the birthplaces of Australia's foreign-born population. Lastly, over 55,000 people spoke an Australian Indigenous language at home (including Australian Creoles), which equates to 11 percent of all Indigenous Australians and less than 1 percent of the total Australian population.

For the past two decades, the goal of improving literacy and numeracy achievement for all students has been central to the educational policies of the Commonwealth, state, and territory governments. The emphasis on literacy and numeracy can be traced through a sample of key policy statements and initiatives from 1997 to the present.

In 1997, all Australian Education Ministers agreed to a national literacy and numeracy goal: "every child leaving primary school should be numerate and be able to read, write, and spell at an appropriate level."[2] A related sub-goal states that, "every child commencing school from 1998 will achieve a minimally acceptable literacy and numeracy standard within four years." A decade later, in December 2008, the Australian Education Ministers released the Melbourne

Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians, affirming that literacy, numeracy, and knowledge of key disciplines remain the cornerstone of schooling for young Australians.[3]

The continuing policy focus on literacy is clearly reflected in the four-year Literacy and Numeracy National Partnership Agreement accepted by the Council of Australian Governments. This initiative commenced in 2009 with funding support of $540 million from the Commonwealth to focus on the following:

♦ Achieving sustainable improvements in literacy and numeracy, as a key indicator of ability to complete Grade 12 for all students;

♦ Improving literacy and numeracy for primary school students; and

♦ Developing a national understanding of what is the most effective way to teach literacy and numeracy.[4]

At the end of 2011 all Australian Ministers of Education agreed to the progressive implementation of the first phase of a national curriculum to be known as the *Australian Curriculum*. Implementation of the curriculum in some states began in 2011 and is expected to reach all schools by 2013. Literacy is emphasized in a number of ways within this new Australian curriculum, both within the discipline of English and more broadly as a general capability.

Overview of the Education System

Australia does not have a single national education system. According to the Australian Constitution, the six states and two territory governments hold primary responsibility for education. As such, the states and territories administer school systems from school entry to Grade 12. Parallel to public schools, a large non-government sector includes both systemic and independent schools, which are supported by state and territory governments. For reporting purposes, the non-government sector is generally described as Catholic and independent.

During 2009, 3.48 million students, including part-time students, attended schools across Australia; sixty-six percent attended government schools, and 34 percent attended non-government schools. The proportion of students attending government and non-government schools varies across the states and territories.[5]

In Australia, curriculum and assessment development has traditionally been the responsibility of state authorities. However, the landscape of Australian

education is currently changing through a series of agreements between all state, territory, and Commonwealth Ministers of Education. These agreements have introduced increasing national consistency in key aspects of early childhood education and school education, including school leaving age, curriculum, and teacher registration.

The Australian Curriculum, Assessment, and Reporting Authority, which became operational in 2009, is responsible for developing a national curriculum from school entry to Grade 12 in specified learning areas, a national assessment program that measures students' progress, and a national data collection and reporting program. Statutory authorities for the regulation of the teaching profession oversee all states and territories, and their responsibilities include initial registration of all teachers. In 2010, the Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership was established to provide national leadership for federal, state, and territorial governments in improving teacher quality. In October 2011, education ministers endorsed a nationally consistent approach to teacher registration.

Early childhood education, from birth to school entry, is currently managed by the states and territories. However, the current Australian national policy commitment to the years prior to school includes a national agreement on early childhood education. This national agreement provides federal funding to ensure that by 2013 every child will have access to a quality early childhood education program in the year before formal school.

Minimum school starting ages vary by state and territory, from four years and five months to five years old, but the compulsory starting age is six years old in most states. All states now provide one year of school before Grade 1, variously called Kindergarten, Preparatory (Prep), Transition, Pre-primary, or Reception (referred to as "Foundation" in the Australian curriculum).

The Australian school system is organized around "Years," or Grades; Year 1 (Grade 1) is the first year of formal schooling and Year 12 (Grade 12) is the final year of secondary education. Some states include Grade 7 in primary schools so the number of years of secondary education may cover either Grades 7–12 or Grades 8–12. Following a decision of the Council of Australian Governments in July 2009, there is national agreement on a mandatory requirement for young people to complete Grade 10 and then participate full-time in education, training, or employment until age 17.[6]

Language/Reading Curriculum in the Fourth Grade

The teaching of reading is largely located within the English curriculum. However, prior to the endorsement of the *Australian Curriculum: English* in 2011 (which covers Foundation to Grade 10), Australia has had no national curriculum for reading instruction for Grade 4. During that time, curriculum frameworks and syllabuses for the disciplines of English, mathematics, science, and history were developed by state and territorial authorities. As such, commonalities and differences of emphasis and balance in the teaching of reading are evident in different jurisdictions and reflect local contexts. Particularly, significant differences exist in structure, content, and, to a lesser extent, in the expectations for reading in the curriculum at particular year levels. The current diversity of structures will diminish as the *Australian Curriculum: English* is progressively implemented in all states and territories.

While reading is considered a key aspect of literacy development in primary school, the reading curriculum is generally located within the English curriculum. In recent years, the current reading curriculum in Grade 4 has been influenced by a range of national initiatives, which are indicative of progress towards increased national consistency in curriculum.

The first of these initiatives was the collaborative curriculum project that commenced in 1989. This work resulted in the publication of Statements and Profiles in eight curriculum areas in 1993. These documents were not adopted nationally, but were used in variety of ways by the states and territories, ranging from full adoption as the state or territory curriculum to inclusion in a local curriculum framework.

In 1994, the language modes of speaking and listening, reading and viewing, and writing were the first focus of organization in *English—A curriculum profile for Australian schools,* which emphasized the importance of reading in the curriculum.[7] Outcome statements were presented in eight levels of achievement, across the eleven years of schooling, from Foundation to Grade 10. These levels were not tied to specific grade levels, generally. However, the expectation for students in Grade 4 was that they would have achieved the following at Level 3: interpret and discuss some relationships between ideas, information, and events in written texts with familiar content and a small range of unfamiliar words and linguistic structures and features, and visual texts designed for general viewing. At Level 4, students should be able to justify their own interpretation of ideas, information, events, and texts containing

some unfamiliar concepts and topics, and which introduce relatively complex linguistic structures and features.

In 2003, in response to a perceived lack of consistency in curriculum nationally, all Ministers agreed to a collaborative initiative of state, territorial, and federal education authorities, which led to the development of a set of *Statements of Learning for English.*[8] All jurisdictions agreed to incorporate these statements into their own curriculum documents, which included an outline of common curriculum outcomes.

The *Statements of Learning for English* were developed and presented for specific junctures—the end of Grades 3, 5, 7, and 9—and presented in three strands—Reading and Viewing, Writing, Speaking and Listening. At the time of the PIRLS 2011 assessment, the curricula taught in states and territories incorporated these nationally consistent statements. The Reading and Viewing statement for Grade 3 provide a general indication of student achievement at the commencement of Grade 4:

> When students read and view texts, they identify the main topic or key information, some directly-stated supporting information, and the order of events. They can draw inferences from directly stated descriptions and actions (e.g., infer a character's feeling) and talk about how people, characters and events could have been portrayed differently (e.g., more fairly). They relate their interpretations to their own experiences.

Different syllabi and curriculum frameworks at the local level provide further insights into reading at Grade 4. All states and territories have indicated that the following four reading processes received major emphasis by the end of Grade 4: focusing on and retrieving explicitly stated information; making straightforward inferences; interpreting and integrating ideas and information; and examining and evaluating content, language, and textual elements. Most states indicated that the reading curriculum placed major emphasis on the following purposes for reading: to improve reading, for literary experience, to acquire information, and for enjoyment.

The reading curriculum in place in 2011 has been available in official publications, through Ministry notes and directives, and instructional or pedagogic guides, but not through mandated textbooks. The *Australian Curriculum* is an online curriculum, and some of the current state and territory

curricula also are available online. The percentage of total instructional time to be devoted to reading instruction at Grade 4 is prescribed in only one state. The implementation of reading curriculum is evaluated in a variety of ways, such as research programs, school self-evaluation, and national or regional assessments, but not by visits of inspectors or supervisors.

Two examples of state curricula for Grades 3 and 4 illustrate the commonality and difference between states and territories. The Level 3 standard in the *Victorian Essential Learning Standards* states:[9]

> At Level 3, students read and respond to an increasing range of imaginative and informative texts with some unfamiliar ideas and information, vocabulary and textual features. They interpret the main ideas and purpose of texts. They make inferences from imaginative text about plot and setting and about characters' qualities, motives, and actions. They infer meaning from material presented in informative texts. They identify how language is used to represent information, characters, people, places, and events in different ways, including identification of some simple symbolic meanings and stereotypes. They use several strategies to locate, select and record key information from texts.

A different framing is seen in the content overview for Later Stage 2 in New South Wales' 2007 *English K–6 Syllabus*.[10] Reading encourages both "learning to read" and "learning about reading." When learning to read, students are provided with opportunities to do the following:

♦   Read and view a variety complex literacy and factual texts including Australian Literature or stories and information from other cultures or times for sustained periods;

♦   Select a text for a specific purpose (e.g., to research a topic or make something); and

♦   Justify inferences made about a text read or viewed (e.g., "The main character is selfish because…").

A range of skills and strategies is also specified in the New South Wales syllabus, such as using skimming of text to find keywords in order to make brief notes for relevant information.

When learning about reading, at Later Stage 2, a variety of aspects of reading relating to context and text, and language structures and features are listed:

♦ Drawing students' attention to the purpose and organization of factual and literary texts being read in class; and

♦ Drawing students' attention to features of written texts (e.g., cohesive links, reported and quoted speech).

Reading Instruction in the Primary Grades

Although only one educational jurisdiction specifies the percentage of instructional time for reading, literacy is given significant priority in school timetabling in all Australian primary schools. The daily allocation of an extended and uninterrupted block of time for literacy teaching is widespread. Daily literacy sessions use a scaffolded approach, which follows a prescribed sequence: preview; print walk; shared reading; guided reading; writing, including modeled and guided writing; and plenary.[11]

Significant attention has been given to the teaching of literacy, specifically reading, in the early years of schooling in recent years, both at the policy level and in research studies. A major national Australian research study, *In Teachers' Hands: Effective Literacy Practices in the Early Years of Schooling*, identified the following strategies used by the most effective teachers: a highly structured approach to phonics teaching, provided clear explanations of word level structures, and provided careful scaffolding, including guided practice in a variety of contexts.[12] These teaching practices have been promoted as ones leading to improved literacy outcomes for children in the early years of school.

Two recent initiatives are indicative of the current emphasis on comprehension in the middle primary years. The first provides an example from one educational region, and the second is a state-wide initiative.

In the state of Victoria, comprehension receives considerable attention in one large-scale education reform across a single education region.[13] The literacy intervention used in this systemic reform was designed to teach readers at any age to comprehend text efficiently as they encounter more complex texts. The intervention identified comprehending actions or strategies and, over time, this work significantly improved literacy achievement in the particular education region in which the reform strategy was based. This work reflects other initiatives focused on the teaching of reading in upper primary classrooms.

In the state of New South Wales, the Focus on Reading 3–6 program was introduced in 2009 as part of the National Partnerships for Literacy and Numeracy initiative.[14] The program is designed to support teachers in understanding and deliberately teaching reading strategies that will allow their students to read the range of texts they are required to comprehend. The program emphasizes high-level meta-cognitive comprehension strategies, as well as the importance of vocabulary knowledge and fluent text reading. An innovative professional learning model underpins the program and engages teachers in the research evidence and includes the following: intensive, purpose-driven learning; between-session tasks to translate new learning into classroom action; and systematic reflection on classroom practices.

Instructional Materials

In Australia, no textbooks are mandated and schools select their own resources and materials for reading programs. Many resources are provided by education departments and curriculum authorities, often with online access. Schools also use a wide range of books, journals, websites, CD-ROMs, and graded reading programs. Annotated work samples and assessment activities are available in many jurisdictions to support consistency of teacher judgments against curriculum standards.

Teacher professional associations, such as the Australian Literacy Educators' Association, publish a wide range of practical resources and many schools have institutional memberships. Education Services Australia (ESA) is a national, not-for-profit company owned by all Australian education ministers. One ESA service available to all Australian schools is the provision of print materials and digital resources, such as interactive multimedia that combine still and moving images, text, audio, and animation. Commercial publishers also offer a wide range of resources for literacy teaching.

Use of Technology

Technology is widely used in literacy programs and computers are highly used in Australian schools. Data collected in the 2008 National Assessment Program on ICT Literacy indicate that computer use at home and school has increased since 2005—from 14 to 21 percent.[15] In 2008, 54 percent of Grade 6 students used a computer at home almost every day, compared with 43 percent in 2005.

State education departments are introducing many forms of technology to schools, including notebook computers, high-speed wireless-based networks, interactive whiteboards, digital media projectors, and cameras. This technology

is used in many ways in reading programs, such as making electronic books available to students and for whole class or group reading activities.

Role of Reading Specialists

In Australia, primary school teachers are mostly generalists and the literacy program is the responsibility of the classroom teachers. Professional learning teams at particular grade levels create opportunities for new teachers to work with experienced practitioners over time. In recent years, literacy coaches have played a role in some jurisdictions.

In 2009, the Department of Education and Children's Services in South Australia employed fourteen Literacy Partnership Coaches as part of the Australian government's National Partnerships: Literacy and Numeracy Program.[16] The coaches work alongside classroom teachers in identified schools to implement effective, evidence-based literacy or numeracy practices.

During 2011, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development in the state of Victoria appointed literacy, numeracy, and science coaches to some schools. In March 2010, the Department had launched the *Coaching Teachers in Effective Instruction* initiative to provide support for teachers in a range of areas, such as responding to specific differential learning needs of students in their classrooms.[17]

Second-language Instruction

The language diversity that is characteristic of Australia means that the teaching of English as a second or additional language is essential to meeting the needs of recent immigrants and of students who speak languages other than English at home. Provisions are made in all states and territories for second-language learners, including specialist teaching in schools and intensive language centers for new arrivals. There has recently been recognition of the needs of students who may speak Aboriginal English at home, and the need to make provisions for teaching English as a Second Dialect. The term English as a Second Language is increasingly being replaced by the term English as an Additional Language, taking account of the multi-lingual capabilities of some students.

Students with Reading Difficulties

Diagnostic Testing

The importance of early intervention in supporting students with learning difficulties is now widely acknowledged in Australia. An increasing reliance on data to support learning has broadened the range of data that schools and

teachers collect, in addition to the ways in which data are used to monitor achievement, diagnose learning difficulties, and improve classroom instruction. A wide range of diagnostic assessment instruments is used in the later years of primary school, including the *Progressive Assessment Tests in Reading (PAT-R).*[18]

An example of one such diagnostic assessment can be seen in New South Wales' *Best Start Literacy Assessment,* which is linked to the state's *English K–6 Syllabus.*[19] As a common early literacy assessment, it assists teachers in gathering consistent, accurate, and reliable information about student knowledge, skills, and understanding. The assessment covers seven critical aspects of early literacy development: reading texts, phonics, phonemic awareness, concepts about print, comprehension, aspects of speaking, and aspects of writing. Teachers use a marking guide to assess student responses and then make judgments about performance on each aspect, placing students on the *Best Start Early Literacy Continuum.*

Instruction for Children with Reading Difficulties

In the middle primary years, many approaches are adopted by Australian schools to support students experiencing reading difficulties, primarily in-class or individually. In some cases, students identified in the early grades as needing continuing support may receive one-on-one instruction through the Reading Recovery program. For students not previously identified, intervention and support also are required at Grade 4. To provide this support, some schools build on the model of three tiers of instruction: the first tier is excellent classroom teaching; the second tier involves specific support in class, or in a small group; and the third tier may require expert help from beyond the school, such as support from a speech therapist.

Reading difficulties in Grades 3 or 4 often relate to problems with comprehension and strategies. Schools use many professional and commercial resources, as well as guidance, to provide bridges to improved reading comprehension. One example is the Making Up Lost Time In Literacy (MULTILIT) initiative. The initiative's Tutorial Centre and Clinic and outreach programs translate research into more effective ways of teaching low-progress students experiencing difficulties in learning literacy skills.[20]

The links between teacher skills and knowledge also are acknowledged as significant factors in supporting low-achieving students, and some recent research has been noted in the Australian context. Reading Recovery®, developed by Professor Marie Clay at the University of Auckland in the 1970s and 1980s,

TIMSS & PIRLS
International Study Center
Lynch School of Education, Boston College

has been implemented in many Australian schools for children making limited progress in reading after one year at school.

Teachers and Teacher Education

Teacher Education Specific to Reading

The teaching of reading is included in the four-year bachelor's degrees commonly available for primary school teachers. Similarities exist across Australian universities, such as in the practical component of the courses.[21] However, institutions also show considerable variation in the priority given to the teaching of reading within overall programs and in course content. For example, in 2004, the total share of credit points devoted to the teaching of reading in compulsory units, in 34 institutions, ranged from less than 2 percent to more than 14 percent.

Requirements for Ongoing Professional Development in Reading for Teachers

Australian primary school teachers have no specific obligation to undertake ongoing professional development specific to teaching reading. However, requirements exist regarding the nature and amount of professional learning that teachers must undertake in order to maintain registration with state or territorial authorities.

Teachers have many opportunities for ongoing professional learning about teaching reading. One avenue is through post-graduate university courses that include units on reading or related areas, such as children's literature. State education authorities provide many opportunities for professional learning about the teaching of reading, such as in projects of the *National Partnerships: Literacy and Numeracy Program,* cited above. Teacher professional associations provide quality professional learning related to reading at conferences and other events. One such program was designed to provide teachers with powerful research and accessible ideas about reading comprehension, while supporting them in designing, monitoring, and implementing the outcomes of their professional learning in their own classrooms.[22]

Monitoring Student Progress in Reading

National Assessments

The first state-based assessment in Australia was the New South Wales Basic Skills Test, introduced in 1989, before which no compulsory high-stakes assessment had been used. By 1997, all state and territory education systems

were using a range of testing processes in primary schools. Also in 1997, federal, state, and territorial education ministers agreed to the National Literacy and Numeracy Plan that included two elements relating to statewide monitoring of student progress in literacy: the development of agreed benchmarks for Grades 3, 5, 7, and 9 to measure all children's achievement; and the measurement of students' progress against these benchmarks using rigorous state-based assessment procedures.[23] For several years, results from state-based assessments were standardized using statistical processes to provide a national perspective on student achievement.

A significant development in 2008 was the commencement of the National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) in Australian schools. Every year since, all students in Grades 3, 5, 7, and 9 have been assessed on the same days with a national literacy test in the domains of Reading, Writing, Language Conventions (spelling, grammar, and punctuation), and Numeracy. The Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs endorses these assessments and the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority has managed the development the delivery of tests for NAPLAN since 2010.

A national report for NAPLAN is published yearly by the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development, and Youth Affairs. A summary report for parents shows results at each year level and domain by state, territory, and nationally. The full National Report includes detailed results by gender, indigenous status, language background (other than English), parental occupation, parental education, and geolocation (metropolitan, provincial, remote, and very remote) at each year level and for each domain of the test. Further NAPLAN information is made available through the *My School* website, such as comparisons of student performance in literacy and numeracy with those of students in other schools, most importantly those in schools that serve similar students.[24]

Individual Student Progress in Reading

Schools regularly report to parents on student progress, using the reporting frameworks or standards developed by state and territory curriculum authorities. Teachers make judgments relative to state standards, and schools often make provision for teachers to engage in training to achieve consistency. Judgments are based on teacher observations and assessments of classroom work over time. Some schools use a system of portfolios, in which samples of

student work and assessment tasks in learning areas are collected at regular intervals as evidence of development over the course of a school year or longer. Since 2006, all Australian schools have been required to use an A-E grading to report achievement, with A indicating very high achievement and C indicating satisfactory achievement.

Resources such as the *First Steps Reading Map of Development* are used in many Australian schools to monitor development in reading.[25] *First Steps* maps six phases of reading development, from a role-play phase to an accomplished phase. By Grade 4, many students have achieved the accomplished phase, but teachers find *First Steps* a useful resource in providing many teaching and assessment strategies, including standardized tests, teacher-made tests, quizzes, questions in class, performance assessments, projects, observations, and student work samples.

Digital technology has expanded the range of tools for gathering data to monitor development, and extensive amounts of information are available to education systems. An interesting example of how this information is made accessible to schools is the *School Measurement, Assessment and Reporting Toolkit,* which facilitates the gathering, monitoring, analysis, and reporting of data in New South Wales public schools.[26]

Impact and Use of PIRLS

Australia did not participate in PIRLS 2001 or PIRLS 2006, so it is not yet possible to report on how PIRLS may contribute to improvements in educational quality in relation to reading literacy. The provision of international comparative achievement data about reading literacy at Grade 4 is likely to generate high levels of interest. The focus on Grade 4 will draw attention to this significant stage of schooling. Reading literacy is viewed as a critical aspect of the curriculum at all levels of education, and much attention has been given to ways of improving achievement for all Australian children. As discussed, the National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) provides data on the achievement of all Australian students at Grades 3, 5, 7, and 9 on an annual basis, enabling comparisons between states and territories each year as well as change over time. PIRLS not only provides information about achievement at Grade 4, but also for the first time has provided Australian educators with reliable internationally comparative data about the reading achievement of students in primary school.

In the context of the progressive implementation of the *Australian Curriculum*, the PIRLS data will provide insights into the achievement and learning needs of Australian students; from now on, it will be possible to use these insights to improve educational opportunities at a national level.

Suggested Readings

Freebody, P. (2007). Literacy education in school. Research perspectives from the past, for the future. *Australia Education Review Number 52*. Camberwell: Australian Council for Educational Research.

Munro, J. (2011). The 'high reliability literacy teaching procedures' to building students' literacy knowledge. In D, Hopkins, J. Munro, & W. Craig. (Eds.), *Powerful learning. A strategy for systemic educational improvement*. Camberwell: Australian Council for Educational Research.

References

1 Department of Immigration and Citizenship. (2008). *The people of Australia statistics from the 2006 census of population and housing*. Commonwealth of Australia: Author.

2 Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DEETYA). (1998*). Commonwealth literacy policies for Australian schools*. (Australian Schooling Monograph Series No.1/1998). Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.

3 Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs. (2008). *Melbourne declaration on educational goals for young Australians*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.

4 Council of Australian Governments. (2008). *National partnership agreement on literacy and numeracy*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.

5 Santiago, P., Donaldson, G., Herman, J., & Shewbridge, C. (2011). *OECD reviews of evaluation and assessment in education: Australia*. Paris: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

6 Council of Australian Governments. (2009). *National partnership on youth attainment and transitions*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.

7 Curriculum Corporation. (1994). *English–A curriculum profile for Australian schools: A joint project of the states, territories, and the Commonwealth of Australia*. Carlton: Author.

8 Curriculum Corporation. (2005). *Statements of learning for English*. Carlton: Author.

9 Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority. (2009). *Victorian essential learning standards: English*. Melbourne: Author.

10 Board of Studies New South Wales. (2007). *English K–6 syllabus*. NSW: Board of Studies.

11 Hill, P. & Crévola, C. (1998). Characteristics of an effective literacy strategy. *Unicorn, 24*, 74–85.

12 Louden, W., Rohl, M., Barratt Pugh, C., Brown, C., Cairney, T, Elderfield, J., House, H., Meiers, M., Rivalland, J., & Rowe, K. (2005). *In teachers' hands: Effective literacy practices in the early years of schooling*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.

13 Hopkins, D., Munro, J., & Craig, W. (2011). *Powerful learning. A strategy for systemic educational improvement*.

TIMSS & PIRLS
International Study Center
Lynch School of Education, Boston College

Camberwell: Australian Council for Educational Research.

14 Rowles, L. & McInnis, K. (2010). A reading revolution in classrooms: Focus on reading 3–6. *Literacy Learning: The Middle Years, Vol. 18,* No. 2.

15 Curriculum Corporation. (2010). *National assessment program. ICT literacy years 6 and 10 report 2008*. Canberra: Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs. Retrieved from http://www.mceecdya.edu.au/verve/_resources/NAP-ICTL_report_2008.pdf

16 Thelning, K., Phillips, B., Lyon, K., & McDonald, J. (2010). Literacy partnership coaches: An initiative of the South Australian department of education and children's services. *Literacy Learning: The Middle Years, Vol. 18*, No. 2.

17 Gill, J., Kostow, N., & Stone, S. (2010). Coaching teachers in effective instruction: A victorian perspective. *Literacy Learning: The Middle Years, Vol. 18,* No. 2.

18 Australian Council for Educational Research. (2008). *Progressive assessment tests in reading (PAT-R)* (4th ed.). Camberwell: Author.

19 Department of Education and Communities, NSW. (2009). *Best start literacy assessment.* Sydney: Author.

20 MULTILIT© Making Up Lost Time in Literacy. (n.d.). Sydney: Macquarie University. Retrieved from http://www.multilit.com/

21 Commonwealth of Australia. (2005). *Teaching reading: Report and recommendations. National inquiry into the teaching of literacy*. Canberra: Author. Retrieved from http://www.dest.gov.au/nitl/documents/report_recommendations.pdf

22 Kelly, M. & Topfer, C. (Eds.). (2011). *Reading comprehension. Taking the learning deeper*. Australian Literacy Educators' Association.

23 Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DEETYA). (1998). *Commonwealth literacy policies for Australian schools.* Australian Schooling Monograph Series No.1/1998. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.

24 Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority. (2010). *My school website*. Retrieved from http://www.myschool.edu.au/

25 Annandale, K., Bindon, R., Handley, K., Johnston, A., Lockett, L., & Lynch, P. (2004). *First steps reading map of development: Addressing literacy challenges* (2nd ed.). Melbourne: Reed International Books Australia.

26 Smith, M. (2005). Getting SMART with data in schools: Lessons from NSW. In *Using data to support learning: Conference proceedings* (pp. 38–457). Melbourne: ACER. Retrieved from http://www.acer.edu.au/documents/RC2005_MaxSmith.pdf

Austria[a]

Christina Wallner-Paschon
Birgit Suchań

*Federal Institute for Educational Research, Innovation &
Development of the Austrian School System (BIFIE)*

Language and Literacy

Austria's official language is German, with Slovene, Croatian, and Hungarian as official languages in some districts with mixed languages in the provinces Carinthia and Burgenland.[b] German is also the language of instruction, except in districts with mixed languages. In these districts, primary school lessons are bilingual (German and either Slovene, Croatian, or Hungarian must be used equally in instruction).[1] At the lower secondary level, some general secondary schools have Slovene as a compulsory subject and there is one Slovene secondary academic school in the country.

In Austria, reading literacy is a fundamental component of primary and general education. The Education Ministry's Foster Reading! (*Lesen fördern!*) initiative aims to enhance all students' reading motivation and reading skills, effectively support weak readers, and develop a comprehensive reading culture in schools with support from teaching staff. The initiative builds on developmental processes taking place in classrooms and schools, whereby schools institute individual and needs-oriented measures to promote reading, taking into account girls' and boys' different motivations, reading habits, as well as the needs of students whose first language is not German. This initiative is supported by in-service teacher training programs, materials and brochures for parents (distributed during school registration), and materials for teachers, along with school projects. The initiative includes obligatory implementation of a group screening for reading in the third and fifth grades, using the *Salzburger Lese-Screening* diagnostic tool that measures basal reading skills to identify potential reading weaknesses (for more details, see the section on Diagnostic Testing, below).[2]

Today, family literacy is considered as the fundamental key to young people's reading skills, and international studies such as PIRLS have shown the

---

a   Portions of this chapter are based on Austria's chapter in the PIRLS 2006 Encyclopedia, written by the Federal Ministry for Education, Arts, and Culture, as well as on the TIMSS 2007 Encyclopedia, written by the Federal Ministry for Education, Arts, and Culture and the Austrian National Research Center.

b   Apart from Slovenian, Croatian, and Hungarian, minorities include Czech, Slovak, and Roma.

central importance of reading socialization in the family.[3] In December 2010, the PISA results again confirmed the lack of reading skills of young Austrian people, highlighting the systemic problem that, in Austria, reading skills and educational opportunities for children are closely linked to the socio-economic status of their families. The Austrian Book Club (for details on this organization, see the section on Reading Instruction, below) has focused on family literacy projects in the past, and thus has been able to launch a Family Literacy Initiative with the help of its network of voluntaries and contacts with families in Austria. Austria currently has several other family literacy activities, though in general these are single projects and not networked, and therefore probably have neither lasting nor systematic impact. Many reading promotion projects and campaigns are implemented with a high degree of commitment, but have the same problem: these projects tend to encourage already motivated children, and they do not consider or support children with reading problems. In 2011, the Ministry for Education began preliminary research on family literacy and also held a round-table with experts in the field of family literacy.

Another measure to improve reading achievement is a coordination center for reading, created to support primary school teachers and schools and offer nationwide programs. As a consequence of the PISA 2003 results, the Education Ministry founded the competence and advisory center *Koordinationsstelle: Lesen* to address issues related to reading. The center is staffed by a group of delegates from all nine Austrian provinces, nominated by University Colleges of Teacher Education.

An important educational initiative in Austria is IMST. The initiative was previously called Innovations in Mathematics, Science, and Technology, but since German recently has become part of the project it has been renamed *Innovationen Machen Schulen Top* (Innovations to Make Top Schools). Originally, IMST was established as an immediate reaction to the TIMSS 1995 results for upper secondary schools and given the task of analyzing these results. Today's goal is establishing and embedding a culture of innovation in Austrian schools to improve teaching in mathematics, natural science, computer science, engineering, and German. IMST provides subject-related, organizational and financial support for network projects as well as for thematic teacher projects. One of the thematic projects is "Writing and Reading," a cooperation between the Austrian Educational Competence Center for German (AECC German) and the University Colleges of Teacher Education Carinthia (*Pädagogische Hochschulen Kärnten*).[4]

Finally, it is worth mentioning that, since the 2003–04 school year, Austria has required a modern foreign language course in all primary schools beginning in Grade 1.

Overview of the Education System

Austria is a federal parliamentary republic consisting of nine provinces (*Bundesländer*), each of which has its own provincial government. Responsibility for legislation and its implementation is divided between the federation (*Bund*) and the provinces.

The Austrian education system is hierarchically organized, highly centralized, and selective at a very early stage. The Federal Ministry for Education, Arts, and Culture is responsible for primary and secondary education as well as for the University Colleges of Teacher Education (*Pädagogische Hochschulen*). Its supervisory responsibilities include all areas of school management, organization of school instruction in public and private schools, and remuneration and retirement of teachers employed by the Federal Ministry. However, the Federal Ministry for Science and Research is responsible for universities, including Universities of Applied Sciences (*Fachhochschulen*).

The provinces have legislative responsibility for kindergarten and for providing public-sector compulsory education. They support local communities in establishing and maintaining these schools via school construction funds, which they administer themselves. Each of the nine provinces has a complement of provincial school inspectors, assisted by district school inspectors for compulsory schools and subject inspectors for upper secondary schools.

Preprimary education is available to children up to six years of age (*crèches*, kindergartens, and private child-caregivers). Since 2010, one year of kindergarten at age 5 has been compulsory for all children. This is the last year before they start attending primary school.

Starting with primary education in *Grundschule* or *Volksschule* at age 6, education is compulsory for nine years. *Grundschule* or *Volksschule* encompasses Grades 1–4 (ages 6–10).[c] Parents may ask for earlier admission to school if the child's sixth birthday falls before March 1 in the following calendar year, provided that they are mature enough for schooling and have the required social competence for attending school. Six-year-old children considered insufficiently mature to go to school must attend pre-school for one year before beginning primary school.

---

c   Normally, children attend *Grundschule/Volksschule* from Grades 1–4. However, there are a few school locations where *Volksschule* also includes upper-primary Grades 5–8.

At the lower secondary level, students and their parents can apply for entry to either a general secondary school (*Hauptschule*), a lower level academic secondary school (*Allgemein bildende höhere Schule—Unterstufe*), or New Secondary School (*Neue Mittelschule*). All these school types include Grades 5–8 and cater to children ages 10–14. The New Secondary School started as a school project in 2008 by combining the elements of academic secondary school and general secondary school to provide a joint school for all ten- to fourteen-year olds. A central feature is the broad implementation of a new learning culture based on individualization and inner differentiation.[5] Students are taught the lower level academic secondary school curriculum by teachers of both school types (general and academic secondary school). At the end of 2011, the government decided that all general secondary schools will be converted into New Secondary Schools by 2016. Ten percent of the academic secondary schools may, on a voluntary basis, also change into New Secondary Schools.

Students with special educational needs are taught either in special schools or in inclusive settings at primary and lower secondary (general and academic) schools.[6] Special schools consist of Primary Level I (2 years), Primary Level II (2 years), and Secondary Level (4 years).

Beginning at age 14, students can choose among a variety of different upper secondary schools, including between the following:

1. Pre-vocational school, which lasts only one year (final year of compulsory schooling, Grade 9); and

2. Technical/vocational school, which lasts from one up to four years.

After completing Grade 9, students also may start apprenticeship training by attending a part-time vocational school. In addition, students can receive a matriculation certificate (*Reifeprüfungszeugnis*) allowing access to higher (tertiary) education from several school types:

3. Upper level of academic secondary school (4 years, Grades 9–12);

4. Higher vocational and technical college (5 years, Grades 9–13); and

5. Schools for kindergarten school teachers and educators (5 years, Grades 9–13).

Curricula at the upper secondary level depend on the type of school.

Higher education starts at age 18 or 19. Many institutions, including public and private universities, offer tertiary education programs in a range of subjects and specialties.

Language/Reading Curriculum in the Fourth Grade

Reading Policy

The national curriculum and a legislative decree on reading instruction reflect the current concept of reading literacy as a necessary means of communication and continuing education, and as a basis of lifelong learning.[7] The basis of literacy education is to work on textual and contextual exercises connected to reading and writing and to learn basic literary theory. Reading development is understood to encompass acquiring and using reading skills and also, in a wider sense, the ability to use reading as an important means of individual, cultural, and personal development. Engaging with a variety of texts enables students to appreciate national culture and to develop moral, aesthetic, and social values.

Introduction to reading starts with compulsory schooling at age six. Students learn the letters of the alphabet usually by May or June in the first year of primary school, though different primers introduce the letters in varying sequence. According to the curriculum, children have until the end of the second year of primary school to learn the whole alphabet. In most classes, reading and writing are developed simultaneously, though some primers concentrate on reading first and begin the writing process later. This is also true for teaching block letters and script.

Summary of National Curriculum

An obligatory national curriculum comprises general instructions for teaching methods and specific instructions for subject content. Within the framework of the national curriculum, teachers are free to choose methods of reading instruction and technology use, but a balanced approach that connects learning to read and write is recommended. Students should achieve competence in reading skills according to their abilities. Teachers should use differentiated instruction based on individual student differences, including initial ranges of abilities prior to entering compulsory school, linguistic competence, motivation, interest in learning, learning ability, and social background. Special consideration is given to children whose first language is not German. The combined instructional time for German, reading, and writing is approximately seven hours per week.

Methods used for developing reading and writing literacy should differ based on the creativity, thinking, experience, and independence of the students in the class. Teachers in Austrian schools may choose either the whole-language or phonics method to teach students reading. The most frequent

recommendations for motivating children to read include using a variety of texts, letting children choose texts themselves, and using new media. In any case, texts should be interesting and adapted to the development of the reader.

The national curriculum objectives in reading to be reached by the end of Grade 4 include the following:

♦ Reading aloud and/or silently at a skilled level;

♦ Developing an awareness of text, both fiction and nonfiction, through the process of reading, analysis, and explanation;

♦ Reading aloud fluently and accurately in a speed and intonation close to real speech;

♦ Demonstrating knowledge of various forms of literary work, such as folk poetry, tales, stories, instructional and popular works, articles suitable for children, and children's literature; and

♦ Using books and libraries, including familiarity with the content and form of books, periodicals, newspapers, and their place and arrangement in the library.

Reading Instruction in the Primary Grades

Based on proposals drafted by curricular task forces, the Federal Ministry for Education, Arts, and Culture establishes a curricular framework through a consultation process, which includes district and provincial educational bodies and teacher associations. The schools have some measure of freedom to adapt the curriculum to local needs. The curriculum provides a joint guiding framework that lays out the general overarching aims. The curriculum itself states that teachers have pedagogical and didactical responsibility to freely select methods. Teachers also have some freedom in selecting teaching materials.

When planning reading instruction, it is essential to address the individual needs and reading skills of each child, while also taking into account the long-term goals that students should achieve (e.g., reading in order to gather information or for entertainment). Children's individual reading strengths form the basis of an ongoing process aimed at increasing their reading competencies. In addition to various kinds of reading exercises, individualized reading promotion programs offer specific exercises to build sensory, motor, language, movement, and social skills.

Teachers should appraise each student's individual reading preferences and interests, and in this way, encourage students' reading abilities and self-

confidence as readers. The goal is to develop children's skills and thus enable them step-by-step to feel responsible for their own learning without supervision. For this to happen, children must acquire strategies (patterns). Using various techniques (e.g., how to acquire and store information), students learn strategies to read texts (e.g., underlining key words). Exhibit 1 lists various learning strategies within three distinct process domains: cognitive, metacognitive, and resource management.[8]

Exhibit 1: Learning Strategies

Cognitive	Metacognitive	Resource Management
Repeating	Planning	Optimizing Their Learning Environment
Elaborating	Checking/Monitoring	
Organizing	Steering Their Own Learning Process	Cooperating and Organizing Support

Guidelines for first lessons in reading promote the practice of a mixed-methods, analytical-synthetic approach to instruction. Elements of the whole-language method (e.g., presenting whole words and short texts from the beginning to motivate children according to context) are used along with phonics to teach children to analyze the sound value of letters and syllables and to synthesize them as words.

Instructional Materials and Use of Technology

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

Basic materials used for reading development come from a wide range of reading books offering samples of literature from different genres for children. Teachers appreciate the variety of materials offered by *Österreichischer Buchklub der Jugend* (Austrian Book Club for Young People), a registered non-profit organization engaged in media, reading pedagogy, and social and cultural issues

for more than 55 years. The main objectives of the *Buchklub* are to foster interest in and enjoyment of reading, and to promote access to and use of books and multimedia. The ministry often recommends particular media and teaching aids developed by the *Buchklub* to schools and teachers. Some books are provided in sets accompanied by materials such as worksheets, folding alphabet letters, and sheets for practicing writing. For initial reading, there are spelling books and simple readers. There also are new kinds of multi-media materials (e.g., CD-ROMs) and other ways of using information communication technology (ICT) to support reading development.

The Austrian Red Cross also offers educational magazines for schools, including magazines for different age groups containing a wide variety of topics and teaching materials.

School and class libraries seek to meet the needs of students. Schools are encouraged to cooperate with public libraries and with organizations like *Österreichischer Buchklub* and *KinderLiteraturHaus* (an initiative of the *Buchklub* aimed at bringing together young readers with children's book authors and illustrators) or with publishing houses on various projects and reading campaigns. Teachers also can conduct lessons within the school library.

Role of Reading Specialists and Second-language Instruction

Because it is essential to detect difficulties early in the reading process, Austria recently has placed particular importance on introducing an effective remedial system to detect students' reading deficiencies as soon as possible. To ensure that students get a good start at school, the federal government sponsors language support courses at municipal and local nursery schools.

Since, 1992, the curriculum has allowed for up to twelve hours of support courses for German as a second language. However, as of the 2001–02 school year, the responsibility for these courses was shifted from the federal to the provincial level. This, in turn, changed the financial possibilities and minimized the practical realization of these courses.

Since the 2006–07 school year, primary school children requiring language support (including immigrant children) can receive up to eleven hours of small-group instruction per week. However, practical application varies from school to school and is not always feasible. The number of teachers has been increased to accelerate integration of these students into primary schools and to address the shortage of additional language support experts.

Students with Reading Difficulties

Diagnostic Testing

Reading instruction should focus on the early detection of possible reading disabilities, such as dyslexia, and students who are slower in developing reading skills. The *Salzburger Lese-Screening* 1–4 is a diagnostic tool that measures students' basal reading skills, enabling teachers to analyze students' abilities.[9] Results from this screening process are available within a short time period, thus allowing remedial programs to be implemented efficiently, individually, and more effectively. However, experience has shown that the actual implementation modalities vary; therefore, the results of the reading screening process may be informative at the class level only.

There is an effort to train primary school teachers to identify reading deficits or problems by listening to students read aloud and transcribing their reading according to the Wedel-Wolff method.[10] An audio-visual training program, Reading Means Learning (*Lesen können heißt lernen können*), is available to all teachers but is not compulsory. If necessary, educational and psychological counselors or schools' special teachers and psychologists investigate a student's needs and provide an individualized remedial program. Such a program requires intensive cooperation with the student's teacher and family. Some schools provide dyslexic students with reading instruction in a separate working group. In other schools, teachers work with dyslexic students within the regular classroom as well as outside of regular class instruction. Some teachers develop (sometimes in cooperation with psychological experts) an individualized development program for students with reading difficulties, especially for slowly developing readers.

To determine their phonological awareness, students often are administered standardized reading tests at the end of the first school year or the beginning of the second to enable an exact diagnosis of reading difficulties. Tutors with special training assist students with reading deficiencies in additional or integrated lessons. The amount of instruction varies from province to province, and there are differences even within provinces.

Instruction for Children with Reading Difficulties

In compulsory education, students with special educational needs are taught according to the regular education curricula, provided they are generally capable of attaining the instructional objectives. In all other cases, they study a curriculum of a special school geared to their disability. There are special

curricula for general special schools (for performance-impaired students or students with learning difficulties), as well as for special schools for children who are blind or deaf, or who have severe disabilities.

The Austrian strategic program promoting reading competencies of students with learning disabilities is based on the principle that the reading process needs to be embedded in the entire concept of instruction (i.e., networked learning). The promotion of reading should be planned as an integrated part of weekly instruction. It is also important that teachers take into account the children's individual needs, abilities, and interests.

While the curriculum may vary depending on the particular learning disability, there are common reading instruction objectives and curriculum requirements for students with special educational needs. These include the following:

♦   Making students aware of the necessity to read in everyday life;

♦   Recognizing how language-related activities are affected by the interdependent link between speaking, reading, and writing;

♦   Promoting reading as a significant means of obtaining information as well as its other functions (e.g., entertainment or gaining an understanding of oneself and others);

♦   Recognizing the significance of media; and

♦   Integrating reading education into other subjects taught.

Students with special education needs may be educated either in special schools or in inclusive settings in primary and lower-secondary schools. Parents have the right to choose the kind of schooling they prefer for their child. Special curricula and/or adapted mainstream curricula are applied in response to students' individual needs. During the 2002–03 school year, more than 50 percent of all students with special education needs attended integrated classes.

Teachers and Teacher Education

Admission to a teacher education program requires a general higher education entrance qualification obtained through the upper secondary school leaving examination (matriculation certificate)—the same as for university admission. Primary school teachers and general secondary school teachers are educated at University Colleges of Teacher Education (*Pädagogische Hochschulen*). Since

TIMSS & PIRLS
International Study Center
Lynch School of Education, Boston College

2007–08, this six-semester (3-year), higher education program has concluded with a bachelor degree in education.

Course content consists of general humanities subjects, the German language, mathematics, music, arts, physical education, and pedagogical and psychological subjects. In addition to completing their education, teachers for primary and general secondary schools complete a supervised practicum in each of the six semesters. They observe and practice teaching under the supervision of experienced teachers and attend training at seminars as an essential part of their education. If students receive two successively negative reports, they are not allowed to continue their education. Upon successful completion of a bachelor's thesis and the final state examination, teachers obtain a qualification certificate.

Primary school teachers are general-purpose teachers who usually teach almost all subjects of the primary school curriculum. Training is connected to students' class work, and professional skills are organized according to four main domains:

♦ Disciplines taught at primary school;

♦ Situations of learning;

♦ Behavior of the class and the diversity of students; and

♦ Exercise of educational responsibility and professional ethics.

Teacher Education Specific to Reading

There are no specific reading teachers, since reading is embedded in the teaching of German language. Even though the German language is a disciplinary domain with specific content, it is approached from the following perspective:

♦ Problems of learning to read (steps and methods);

♦ Analysis of textbooks;

♦ Connection between reading and writing; and

♦ Evaluation of reading competencies.

Requirements for Ongoing Professional Development in Reading for Teachers

Professional development primarily is offered at University Colleges of Teacher Education. Primary and general secondary school teachers must attend 15 hours per year of professional development activities. No national statute regulates the courses they must complete; teachers may choose on their own from a variety

of courses in different fields such as music, physical education, media, science, or school management.

Professional development addresses topics that are not or only partially covered in education studies, and range from short one-day courses to courses over several semesters and include lectures about children's literature and courses on reading disabilities and remediation. Reading specialists offer courses as part of this in-service training. Interested teachers may attend a specific program and qualify as a reading expert for primary schools. Since 2002, the in-service training literacy program has focused on: diagnostic tools, remedial reading concepts, local literacy programs, gender-specific literacy concepts, and the promotion of a broadly based reading culture at schools.

Monitoring Student Progress in Reading

In Austria, no formal external testing occurs during compulsory education that has consequences for individual students; only teachers assess student performance. Teacher-generated assessment is based on classroom participation as well as on the results of oral, written, practical, and graphical work. Primary school students take written examinations (school tests) in German and mathematics in Grade 4. In lower secondary schools, students are required to pass classroom exams in German, mathematics, and the first foreign language (most commonly English). As a rule, progression to the next educational level depends on achievement in all subjects. Students receive reports at the end of each term and at the end of the academic year.

In 2009, the Austrian government mandated educational standards based on the core curriculum for "German, reading, writing" and mathematics in primary school and German, mathematics, and English in secondary school. For these subjects, the Austrian Educational Standards determine the basic competencies students normally should have acquired by the end of Grade 4 (primary school) and by the end of Grade 8 (secondary school). The standards aim to strengthen teacher output-orientation regarding planning lessons as well as conducting the lessons themselves. Furthermore, the standards provide a benchmark for student competencies with regard to diagnostic and individual support. The Educational Standards are required to be fully assessed throughout the nation in a three-year cycle. This mandated regular assessment is intended to foster the development of quality within individual schools and to enable review of the efficiency of the education system (system monitoring). Therefore, teachers and schools receive external feedback about testing results. Specialists

support the schools by interpreting the results and devising specific strategies for each school. Although the Standards are objectives for teachers and are therefore incorporated when teaching and grading the students, the results of the Educational Standards Assessments must not influence student grades.

At the eighth grade, the first nationwide Educational Standards Assessment in mathematics took place in 2012 (English will follow in 2013, and German in 2014). At the fourth grade, the Educational Standards in mathematics will be assessed for the first time in 2013, followed by "German, reading, writing" in 2014. Baseline tests were conducted in 2009 (secondary schools) and 2010 (primary schools) with a random sample of schools in order to attain data about the actual state of the acquired competences at the beginning of the process.

Impact and Use of PIRLS

Austria's experience with large-scale assessments is relatively limited and began at irregular intervals with three IEA international studies of educational achievement:

1. The Computers in Education Study (1987–1993);

2. The Language Education Study (1993–1996); and

3. The Third International Mathematics and Science Study (1993–1997).

Austria's participation in the OECD-conducted Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) in 2000 was the beginning of regular participation not only in the OECD-study PISA but also in IEA studies. In order to complement the PISA-data obtained at the end of compulsory schooling with data from the beginning of schooling, Austria's federal government decided to participate in PIRLS and TIMSS as well. Thus, Austria joined the IEA-conducted studies PIRLS 2006 and TIMSS 2007 as well as PIRLS and TIMSS 2011.

PIRLS data are highlighted in public debates (in plenums, committees, press releases, presentations, speeches, and panel discussions), and in practical work for developing concrete programs (e.g., teacher training in the Coordination Center for Reading (*Koordinationsstelle: Lesen*)). The PIRLS results that attract the most frequent attention relate to the association between socioeconomic status and student reading performance, the reading achievement of immigrant students, early reading socialization within the family and (connected with this) within preschool education, and reading socialization within school. Another area of particular interest is how other countries identify students with low or

high levels of reading proficiency and then meet the instrumental needs of these two different groups.

As mentioned, the Coordination Center for Reading in the ministry was established to coordinate a network of University Colleges of Teacher Education throughout Austria, thereby bringing together individuals with expertise in pre-service and in-service teacher education with teachers and others with expertise in the area of school supervision. However, one essential purpose of the center is to disseminate the PIRLS results among primary school teachers. The center has been working closely with the Austrian national study center for PIRLS to achieve this aim. The PIRLS results have also had relevance within the ministry, with respect to identifying topics relevant to the reading-related professional development for teachers offered by pedagogical colleges. PIRLS has raised crucial arguments for the debate about educational standards in Austria. These large cross-national studies bring a new quality to discussions on education because they are free from ideology and because they provide empirical, objective information. The studies definitely have made education a prominent political issue and have drawn attention to areas of concern.

In addition to PIRLS and PISA, Austria also participated in TALIS 2008 (Teaching and Learning International Survey). Each of these studies has highlighted weaknesses in Austria's education system, and the data have made evident the need for reforms, some of which have already been implemented. The New Secondary School, a compulsory year of kindergarten for all five-year-olds, the Educational Standards, and the standardized school leaving examination (*Standardisierte Reifeprüfung)* are among the encouraging changes to date.

Suggested Readings

Federal Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture. (2008). *Educational opportunities in Austria* (33rd ed.). Vienna: Author. Retrieved from http://www.bmukk.gv.at/medienpool/9043/bw_engl.pdf

European Commission. (2010). *National system overviews on education systems in Europe and ongoing reforms.* Retrieved from http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/eurybase/national_summary_sheets/047_AT_EN.pdf

Suchan, B., Wallner-Paschon, C., & Rieß, C. (2012). The impact of PIRLS in Austria. In K. Schwippert & J. Lenkeit (Eds.), *Progress in reading literacy in national and international context. The impact of PIRLS 2006 in 12 countries.* Münster: Waxmann.

References

1 European Commission. (2010). *National system overviews on education systems in Europe and ongoing reforms.* Retrieved from http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/eurybase/national_summary_sheets/047_AT_EN.pdf

2 Bundesministerium für Bildung, Wissenschaft und Kultur, Abteilung I/6 (Ed.). (2005). *Austrian education news 42.* Vienna: Author. Retrieved from http://www.bmukk.gv.at/medienpool/12741/aen42.pdf

3 Wallner-Paschon, C., & Schneider, P. (2009). Lesesozialisation im elternhaus [Reading socialization at home]. In B. Suchań, C. Wallner-Paschon & C. Schreiner (Eds.), *PIRLS 2006. Die Lesekompetenz am ende der volksschule. Österreichischer Expertenbericht* (pp. 128–146). Graz: Leykam.

4 Bundesministerium für Unterricht und Kultur, Abteilung I/6 (Ed.). (2010). *Austrian education news 61.* Vienna: Author. Retrieved from http://www.bmukk.gv.at/medienpool/19219/aen_10_01_61.pdf

5 Federal Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture. (2008). *Educational opportunities in Austria* (33rd ed.). Vienna: Author. Retrieved from http://www.bmukk.gv.at/medienpool/9043/bw_engl.pdf

6 European Commission. (2010). *National system overviews on education systems in Europe and ongoing reforms.* Retrieved from http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/eurybase/national_summary_sheets/047_AT_EN.pdf

7 *Lehrplan der Volksschule* [Curriculum for primary school]. BGBl. Nr. 134/1963 in der Fassung BGBl. II Nr. 402/2010 vom 9. Dezember 2010. Retrieved from http://www.bmukk.gv.at/medienpool/14055/lp_vs_gesamt.pdf

8 *Grundschule 7/8.* (2006). Braunschweig: Westermann, (p. 50).

9 Mayringer, H., & Wimmer, H. (2003). SLS 1–4 *Salzburger lese-screening für die klassenstufen 1–4* (1. ed.) [Salzburger reading-screening for grades 1–4]. Göttingen: Hogrefe Verlag.

10 Wedel-Wolff v., A. (2006). *Üben im Leseunterricht der Grundschule* [Practise in the course of reading instruction at primary school]. Braunschweig: Westermann.

Azerbaijan

Emin Meherremov

Department of Monitoring and Assessment
Ministry of Education

Language and Literacy

According to the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the official language of the country is Azerbaijani, and according to the 2009 Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan on Education, the Azerbaijani language is the language of instruction.[1] In general, instruction in educational institutions also is provided in other languages, based on national education standards, depending on the wishes of citizens and institutions' founders, with compulsory teaching in Azerbaijani language, literature, history, and geography.[2] At present, instruction at general educational institutions of the Azerbaijani Republic is in Azerbaijani, Russian, and Georgian.[3] In primary school, children of minorities have the opportunity to learn the Talish, Avarian, Lezgian, Hebrew, Sakhur, Khinalig, and Udin languages as separate subjects along with the Azerbaijani language.

Overview of the Education System

The education system in the Republic of Azerbaijan operates in accordance with numerous laws and legislative acts: the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan; the 2009 Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan on Education; respective educational decrees, orders, and decisions; Ministry of Education regulations; other normative legal acts relating to education; and international agreements.[4] The constitution guarantees every citizen the right to education and the government guarantees free obligatory primary and secondary education.[5, 6] The government oversees the education system, which is secular, while the President and Cabinet Ministers determine education strategy, supervise implementation of the Law on Education and relevant legislative acts, and define regulations for establishing, restructuring, and closing higher education institutions.[7, 8] The cabinet also can establish, restructure, and close vocational institutions as well as approve qualifications, educational regulations, and rules for these institutions. In addition, the cabinet makes certain proposals on budget development and defines national standards for educational funding, scholarship regulations, and salary payment.

The Ministry of Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan is the central executive body that implements and regulates government education policy, and manages the educational process. The ministry cooperates with central and local executive bodies, local authorities, international and non-governmental organizations, other individuals, and legal entities.[9] The ministry centrally oversees education, but works jointly with relevant departments in managing the following:

♦ Organizing mental health services and social or pedagogical care;

♦ Studying and disseminating advanced pedagogical practice and achievements in pedagogical and psychological sciences;

♦ Identifying and developing talented students;

♦ Promoting innovative methods for teachers, heads of school, and educational staff; and

♦ Strengthening the educational and material foundation of schools and education institutions.

Educational institutions in the Republic of Azerbaijan are classified as state, municipal, or private, according to property type.[10] The education system encompasses all educational institutions and includes the following:

♦ Entities engaged in educational activities and training;

♦ Scientific-research institutes developing educational activities;

♦ Sports and health complexes;

♦ Information centers, libraries, campuses, camps, hostels, and cultural-educational institutions and organizations; and

♦ Non-governmental organizations, associations, societies, councils, and other entities acting in the education field.[11]

The educational system is based on national and universal values. The basic principles of public policy in the educational sphere are the following: humanism; democracy; equality; nationalism and cosmopolitism; quality; rationality; continuity, unity, and consistency; liberalization; and integration.[12]

The Law on Education was first established in 1992, and the new Law on Education was adopted in 2009. The new law takes into consideration the social and political changes occurring in the country and the educational reforms that the ministry has implemented and continues to put into practice. The law generally conforms to the principles of the Bologna process (e.g., a three-cycle

higher education system) and applies relevant modifications and improvements to all legislative acts, regulations, and rules. According to the updated Education Law, general primary and secondary education is compulsory and provided free of charge in state educational institutions.[13]

The 2009 Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan on Education establishes scientific and pedagogical councils as higher governance bodies in public educational institutions.[14] Exhibit 1 presents the stages and levels of education dictated by the Law on Education.

Exhibit 1: The Stages and Levels of Education

Stage	Description
Preprimary	Preprimary Education—This stage is for children from birth to age 5 or 6 and is not compulsory. It is provided in nurseries (children under age 3), kindergartens (children ages 3–5 or 6), and nursery-kindergartens.
General Education	Primary Education (Grades 1–4)—This level is for students ages 6–10 and is compulsory.
	General Secondary Education (Lower secondary education, Grades 5–9)—This level is for students ages 10–15 and is compulsory. At the end of Grade 9, students take final assessments to receive appropriate documentation to continue to the next educational level.
	Complete Secondary Education (Upper secondary education, Grades 10 and 11)—This level is for students up to the age of 17 and is compulsory. Completion of this stage results in the Certificate of Complete Secondary Education.
Initial Vocational Education	Initial Vocational Education—The duration of programs is two years for Grade 11 graduates and four years for Grade 9 graduates. Students who have completed secondary education can also enroll in two-year initial vocational education programs leading to a diploma.
Secondary Vocational Education	Secondary Vocational Education— Admission to this stage requires passing the examination administered by the State Commission on Student Admission. This stage is provided by colleges and higher educational institutions, and results in a bachelor's degree. Students admitted into secondary vocational schools following general secondary education institutions receive complete secondary education.
Higher Education (including universities, academies, institutes, colleges, and conservatories)– Admission to higher education is based on the results of the national admission test administered by the State Commission on Student Admission.	Baccalaureate—Graduates of the Baccalaureate level have completed higher education and receive a bachelor's degree, the highest degree of professional qualification. The duration of programs leading to the bachelor's degree is normally four years.
	Master's—At the postgraduate level, the duration of master's degree programs is two years.
	Doctorate—The duration of programs leading to the degree of Doctor of Philosophy or Doctor of Science (introduced by the 2009 Education Law) is three to four years. In the previous system, the duration of programs leading to the degree of Candidate of Science was three years; the degree of Doctor of Science required at least an additional three years of study and supervised research.[15]

Language/Reading Curriculum in the Fourth Grade

Reading Policy

The fourth-grade students assessed in PIRLS 2011 were the last students who studied according to the curriculum approved in June 2002, which was based on educational standards approved by the Cabinet of Ministers.[16, 17]

According to the curriculum in place for students tested in PIRLS 2011, students were expected to know the following with regard to language and literature:

♦ The features of stories, tales, poems, fables, proverbs, riddles, and essays, including figurative and scientific and popular texts; and tongue-twisters;

♦ Titles of works by some foreign writers;

♦ The rules of simple text analysis;

♦ Names and principles of parts of speech, and relationships between different parts of speech;

♦ Word tenses and their use;

♦ Characters in composition, and differences between dictation and exposition; and

♦ The concept of a compound sentence.

Additionally, students must be able to do the following with regard to reading:

♦ Read an unknown text with whole words aloud, correctly, and expressively at a rate of 85–95 words per minute, or silently at a rate of 110–120 words per minute;

♦ Retell a text, both in detailed and summarized form;

♦ Retell a text from a different perspective;

♦ Determine the plot of a text;

♦ Compare characters in a text;

♦ Make predictions based on the beginning of a text;

♦ Continue the sequence of main events in a text; and

♦ Identify descriptive language, differentiate shades of meaning, and define words denoting homonyms, metaphors, and those particular to a character.

Mother tongue instruction in primary education aims to improve students' oral and written speech, reading, and writing. Broadly, the focus of mother tongue instruction includes the following: teaching writing techniques; instilling reading skills in students, including accuracy, speed, and awareness; enriching students' vocabularies and providing practical lexical information and skills; and supporting students in acquiring knowledge through fiction and reference books. Mother tongue instruction also seeks to increase students' love for books and reading, as well as enhance students' reading culture.

The mother tongue curriculum covers literacy education (reading and writing techniques, and handwriting), reading (classroom and home reading), and Azerbaijani language (phonetics, vocabulary, grammar, and writing rules). Mother tongue instruction incorporates fundamental didactic principles, incorporating visual methods, relevancy, tradition, and perspectives, taking account of student individuality. At the primary education level, content areas in the mother tongue curriculum systematically provide detailed descriptions of the knowledge and skills that students should acquire at this level. Content areas comply with mother tongue curriculum objectives related to listening comprehension and speaking, reading, writing, and language rules.

Reading and speech improvement is a component of the mother tongue curriculum (5 hours per week, or 170 hours per year) that teaches students to understand and express opinions about story content, sometimes orally. In Grades 1–3, this component also focuses on improving student motivation to read, reading at home, and advancing acquisition of literature theory.

A new curriculum was introduced in the 2008–09 academic year but was not implemented in the fourth grade until the 2011–12 academic year, so did not pertain to the PIRLS students tested. This curriculum is substantially different from the previous curriculum; for example, reading is now integrated into the language and literature curriculum.[18]

Reading Instruction in the Primary Grades

In primary schools, there are no specialized reading teachers. The classroom teacher usually teaches all subjects except music, sports, and other specialized subjects. Under the 2002 curriculum, students received mother tongue instruction for two 45-minute instructional periods per week in Grades 2 and 3, and for three periods per week in Grade 4. In Grades 1 and 3, eight 45-minute

instructional periods per week were devoted to language and literature, while in Grade 2 there were nine.[19]

Instructional Materials

The Ministry of Education provides instructional materials free of charge for all government schools, and students in every class and educational stage receive free textbooks. The ministry also prepares a list of recommended instructional literature for general education institutions. In primary school, students mainly use textbooks that include children's stories and poems followed by various questions to assess students' understanding and perception of the texts. In Grades 1–4, the textbook series currently in use mainly consists of alphabet books, practice books, and workbooks.

Use of Technology

Although computer technology is not emphasized in reading instruction, its use depends on teacher preference or educational staff initiatives. Any activity aimed at increasing computerization of the teaching process is encouraged at the government level.

Role of Reading Specialists

There are no reading specialists to assist students who have difficulty reading. Regular classroom teachers use different materials with students at different reading levels, especially with children who have reading disabilities.

Second-language Instruction

In Grades 1–4, the mother tongues of national minorities are taught in areas with high percentages of that language group. At secondary schools (both public and private), there are four languages of instruction: Azerbaijani, Russian, English and Georgian.

Students with Reading Difficulties

According to the curriculum in place for students assessed in PIRLS 2011, assistance for students having difficulty developing reading skills has been determined on an individual basis. Most frequently, assistance has entailed the teacher conducting diagnostic testing to determine a student's reading difficulties and then developing an individual plan for the student.

Teachers and Teacher Education

Teacher Education Specific to Reading

Graduates of secondary and vocational schools or colleges must have relevant diplomas of completion (or Certificates of Secondary Education) to apply to tertiary teacher education programs. Admission to these programs is based on central examinations administered by the State Student Admission Commission of the Republic of Azerbaijan. The ministry also approves a list of bachelor's degree specialties (programs) in higher education.[20]

At the pre-service level, at least 40 percent of teacher education program content covers subjects related to psychology and pedagogy. Practical training in general secondary schools also is provided as a component (at least 18%) of the program.[21]

The State Education Standard Structure defines the study program for specialties at the bachelor's level with minimum mandatory requirements for the content and level of bachelor's degree preparation.[22] In 2009, the Cabinet Ministers added education as a specialty to the list of bachelor's degree programs.[23] Generally, bachelor's degree programs for primary school teachers last four years, with curricula allocating 198 total weeks of study.[24] These curricula include 465 hours for general subjects, 660 hours for subjects related to general professional training, 1,875 hours for speciality subjects, and 18 weeks of teaching practice.[25]

After completing a teacher education program in mother tongue instruction, pre-service terachers are expected to be able to do the following:

♦ Analyze sentences and texts from phonetic, lexical, and grammatical (morphological and syntactical) perspectives;

♦ Critically assess one's own and others' speech (both written and oral), and identify positive features and faults;

♦ Work with different information sources and effectively use them in instruction, acquire new information independently, and make generalizations and deductions; and

♦ Express lesson objectives clearly, communicate with students, derive appropriate questions to improve students' critical approach to language, and advance opportunities to improve speech.

After completing mother tongue teaching methodology instruction, pre-service teachers are expected to be able to do the following:

♦ Analyze alphabet, reading, and Azerbaijani language textbooks independently to define instructional approaches to simplify student learning;

♦ Use current didactic materials creatively to simplify comprehension and engage students in lessons;

♦ Apply a modern perspective to traditional instructional methods, integrating novelty and obsolescence; and

♦ Use new learning technology creatively.

After completing children's literature instruction, pre-service teachers are expected to be able to do the following:

♦ Define and differentiate between literary characteristics, such as epithets, methaphors, and metonymies;

♦ Describe the instructional importance and value of works written in different historical periods;

♦ Understand modern literary prose and feel the spirit of modernism in literary works;

♦ Understand elements of poetry, and evaluate the essence of rhythm, rhyme, and humor;

♦ Gain detailed knowledge of children's literature for use in instruction; and

♦ Skillfully choose texts appropriate for primary school students.

After completing a bachelor's degree program in primary or secondary education, prospective teachers obtain diplomas of pedagogical education from their respective higher education institutions. The State Final Graduate Attestation Committee confers this professional qualification with approval from the Ministry of Education of the Republic Azerbaijan. Graduates can apply for admission to post-graduate studies based on their results on entrance examinations set by the State Student Admission Commission of the Republic of Azerbaijan and corresponding to their area of study at the bachelor's level. In 2010, the Cabinet Ministers approved the content and organization of a master's degree in education as well as procedures for conferring the degree.[26]

Currently, in-service teacher education in Azerbaijan is carried out in four stages: teacher professional development in their field of practical activity (2 months); training and development of teachers in research activities; re-training for those with a specialization in non-teaching professions; and short-term pedagogical education programs (1–2 weeks) to enhance degrees and levels of education.

According to Cabinet of Ministers' Decree 102, the "conception and strategy of continuous education and teacher training" specifies that, every five years, teachers should participate in 120 hours of professional development via three modules.[27] Module I (30 hours, 5 credit points each) is general professional development in educational foundations, including new skills development, pedagogical psychology and sociology, judicial fundamentals of education, and new pedagogical thinking. Module II (60 hours, 10 credit points each) is professional development in a specialty field for subject-related education, including the development of new skills in methodology, didactics, implementing new curricula, and using ICT. Module III (30 hours, 5 credit points each) is professional development on innovations and new trends in education, including new skills development, and innovative pedagogical techniques and teaching methods.[28]

Monitoring Student Progress in Reading

The framework of the 2003 education reform implemented a new assessment system; the Ministry of Education administered final assessments in Grades 9 and 11 in comprehensive schools and determines the day, time, subjects, and the numbers of questions for final examinations in each subject every year.[29] Furthermore, beginning in the 2005–06 school year, final examinations in comprehensive schools for complete secondary education were experimentally centralized. Since the 2008–09 school year, all students in the final grade of complete secondary education (Grade 11) take centralized final examinations and, since the 2009–10 school year, all students in the final grade of general secondary education (Grade 9) also take centralized examinations in mother tongue and mathematics. In the 2011–12 school year, the centralized examinations for Grades 9 and 11 were administered by the State Students Admission Commission. Students of both grades were examined in mother tongue and mathematics.

Student achievement is graded on a scale of 1–5 and recorded in general secondary school registers. Semiannual and annual grades are based on daily grades. From the 2012–13 school year, the new assessment rules used in primary education since 2008 will be applied in general secondary education (Grades 5–9). The new school-based assessment is composed of a diagnostic component (initial), formative components (tracking of progress and failure), summative components (small, large, and final), and curricular components used by education governing bodies to confirm that student achievement conforms to curriculum standards.[30]

Teachers mainly conduct diagnostic assessments to provide individualized instruction, define teaching strategies, and, when necessary, collect information about students' knowledge and skills. Teachers collect this information on student knowledge and skills at the beginning of the school year, when beginning new units and topics, or when students have transferred from other schools or classes. The results of these assessments are recorded in official documents: [31] formative assessment results are recorded in the formative assessment register and students' record books; [32] and summative assessment results are recorded in the class register. Teachers perform small summative assessments upon completing units and topics in class, and consider these results when calculating semiannual grades.[33]

Primary school students are retained at the same grades in exceptional cases, such as long-term illness. Secondary-school students in grades with no final assessments are promoted from class to class based on positive annual grades (satisfactory, good, and excellent).[34] Students with failing annual grades in one to three subjects are assigned remedial work over summer vacation. Students with failing annual grades in four or more subjects who do not successfully complete their summer remedial work are retained at the same grade level.[35]

References

1 The Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan on Education, Article 7: Language of Instruction (2009).

2 Ibid.

3 Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Article 21: Official Language (2009). Retrieved from http://www.azerbaijan.az/portal/General/Constitution/doc/constitution_e.pdf

4 Ibid., Article 2: Legislation of the Republic of Azerbaijan on Education.

5 Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan (1995).

6 Ibid., Article 42: Right of Education.

7   Ibid.

8   Ibid., Article 18: Religion and States.

9   Ministry of Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan. (n.d.). *Regulations of the ministry of education of the Azerbaijan Republic: Article I, general provisions.* Baku: Author. Retrieved from http://www.edu.gov.az/view.php?lang=en&menu=43&id=1571

10 The Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan on Education: Article 14, Educational Institutions (2009).

11 Ibid., Article 8, Structure of Education System.

12 Ibid., Article 3, The Main Principles of State Policy in the Field of Education.

13 Ibid., Article 5, State Guarantees of the Right to Education.

14 Ibid., Article 30, Management of Educational Institutions.

15 Ibid., Articles 17–23.

16 Ministry of Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan. (2002). *Ümumtəhsil məktəblərinin IV sinif Proqramları* [Grade IV programs of general education schools]. Baku: Author.

17 Decree No. 72 of the Cabinet of Ministers of Azerbaijan Republic, "*Azərbaycan Respublikasında ümumi orta təhsilin dövlət standartlarının təsdiq edilməsi haqqında*" [On the Approval of the State Standards forGeneralSecondary Education] (1999).

18 Ministry of Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan. (2008). *Ümumtəhsil mərtəblərinin I–IV–sinifləri üçün fənn kurrikulumaları. "Təhsil,"* [Subject curricula for I–IV grades of general education schools. "Təhsil,"]. Baku: Author.

19 Ministry of Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan. (2002). *Ümumtəhsil məktəblərinin 1–4 sinif Proqramları* [Programs of 1–4 grades of general education schools]. Baku: Author.

20 Decree No. 8 of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Azerbaijan Republic, On the Approval of the Lists of Bachelor's Degree Specialties (Programs) of Higher Education (2009). Retrieved from http://www.edu.gov.az/view.php?lang=en&menu=113&id=1949

21 Baku In-Service Teacher Training and Re-training Institute. (n.d.). Retrieved from http://bpkiyi.edu.az/yeni/

22 Ministry of Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan. (2009). *State education standard structure clarifying minimum mandatory requirements for the content and level of bachelor degree preparation on specialty*. Retrieved from http://www.edu.gov.az/view.php?lang=en&menu=113&id=4189

23 Decree No. 8 of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Azerbaijan Republic, On the Approval of the Lists of Bachelor's Degree Specialties (Programs) of Higher Education (2009). Retrieved from http://www.edu.gov.az/view.php?lang=en&menu=113&id=1949

24 Decree No. 4 of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Azerbaijan Republic (1997).

25 Azərbaycan Respublikası Təhsil Nazirliyinin 01 sentyabr 2008–ci il tarixli 1024 nömrəli əmrinə əlavə *"Azərbaycan Respublikasında ali təhsilin bakalavr pilləsində ibtidai sinif müəllimlərinin hazırlığı üzrə çərçivə kurrikulumu"* [Addition to Ministry of Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan Order of 1024, "Framework curriculum of the training of primary school teachers on a bachelor's degree of higher education in the Republic of Azerbaijan"] (2008, September 1).

26 Decision No. 88, Content and Organization of Education for Master's Degrees and Procedures for Granting Master's Degrees (2010) (approved).

Baku: Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Retrieved from http://www.edu.gov.az/view.php?lang=en&menu=112&id=2546

27 Decree No. 102 of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan (2007, June).

28 Order No. 1668, *Ümumi təhsil müəssisələrinin müəllimləri üçün ixtisasartırma təhsilinin kurikulum çərçivəsi* [Curriculum framework for the professional education of teachers of general education, approved by order No. 1668] (2010) (approved). Baku: Ministry of Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Retrieved from http://www.edu.gov.az/upload/file/kurikulum-cercivesi-17.12.10.pdf

29 Decree No. 736, Article 1.9, The rules for Assessment and Final State Attestation of Students of General Education Schools and Initial Vocational Schools (2011)

(approved). Baku: Ministry of Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

30 Decree No. 9, Article 1.7, Assessment Concepts for the General Education System of the Azerbaijan Republic (2009) (approved). Baku: Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

31 Ibid., Article 2.1.

32 Ibid., Article 2.2.

33 Ibid., Article 2.3.

34 Ibid., Article 1.10.

35 Ibid., Article 3.1.

TIMSS & PIRLS
International Study Center
Lynch School of Education, Boston College

Belgium, French Community

PIRLS 2011

Geneviève Hindryckx
Annette Lafontaine
Liège University

Language and Literacy

Belgium is a federated country with three official languages: French, Dutch, and German. The language of instruction in Belgium varies according to the language of the region. Some Belgian municipalities situated along the boundary between two linguistic regions have a special status protecting their linguistic minorities as well as their right to teach both languages in different schools. In the Brussels–Capital Region, for example, a child's language of instruction may be either French or Dutch, depending on the choice of the head of the family. The French Community of Belgium, which is the focus of this chapter, uses French as the language of instruction. In addition to the official languages of Belgium, immigrants speak various languages in the home, including Italian, Arabic, Spanish, and Turkish.

Currently, the following initiatives promote reading in the French Community of Belgium:

♦ Reading Gives You Wings—A project that promotes the installation of reading areas in child care centers;

♦ Read Us a Story—A program in which senior citizens read stories to children in preprimary school;

♦ Opening My Daily Newspaper—A project that provides each interested class in Grades 5 and 6 two daily newspapers from the French-speaking press throughout the school year;

♦ The Bernard Versele award winning-books, and the Farniente award—Juried competitions for children ages 3–12, and, for those aged 13–16, respectively;

♦ Reading Makes You Happy—One of several catalogues that lists high quality books;

♦ The Books for Younger Readers Fair—A book fair for children, teenagers, and their parents;

- The Reading Passion—A range of activities, including meetings with authors or illustrators, debates, reading shows by well-known actors, or literary games, that promote reading for the public at large;

- The Committee for Permanent Monitoring of Adult Literacy—An organization that has been promoting and coordinating literacy policies since 2005; and

- The Bibliobus—A service that delivers books from public libraries to people and schools.

Overview of the Education System

In 1989, the Education Department was transferred from the federal government to the French, Flemish, and German Communities.[1] The federal authorities still are responsible for deciding the extent of compulsory education, minimum conditions for obtaining a diploma, and teachers' pensions.

The French Community (*La Communauté Française*) subsidizes four types of schools: public schools organized by the French Community, public schools organized by the local authorities (i.e., provinces or municipalities), denominational schools (mainly Catholic), and non-denominational private schools. Each school's organizing body may decide its own teaching methods and determine its own curriculum, though the curriculum must concur with the *Standards of Competencies* (*Socles de Compétences*) published by the French Community.[2]

A decree in the French Community describes the promotion of successful primary education.[3] Every preprimary and primary school must implement a curriculum based on cycles to enable each child to go through education at his or her own pace, avoiding grade repetition if possible. The introduction of Cycle 5–8 (the cycle from the last grade of preschool to Grade 2) has been expected to create a better transition between preschool education and primary school levels. After primary school, students move to secondary schools where the first two years (Grades 7–8) are followed by two tracks, general and vocational. Children who have temporary or permanent special needs attend both mainstream and special schools.

Schooling is compulsory for children ages 6–18 in the French Community. Only part-time education is required from the age of 15.

PIRLS 2011 ENCYCLOPEDIA
90   BELGIUM, FRENCH COMMUNITY

IEA

TIMSS & PIRLS
International Study Center
Lynch School of Education, Boston College

Language/Reading Curriculum in the Fourth Grade

Reading Policy

In 1997, a crucial educational decree, the *Décret Missions* introduced important curriculum reform for all schools and all grades and defined the *Standards of Competencies*.[4] The standards delineate the basic competencies students should acquire by the end of the first eight grades of compulsory education. Approved unanimously by the democratic parties of the French Community Parliament, these standards constitute the basic contract between school and society.

Learning to read is one of the priorities of primary education, and the major objectives of the *Standards of Competencies* emphasize reading. Reading instruction, therefore, formally begins at age 6, although some aspects of language use are introduced in preschool education. French lessons focus on reading comprehension, writing, and communicating, and the standards stipulate that topics be relevant to students and have some meaning for them.

Summary of National Curriculum

The *Standards of Competencies* define the basis of reading instruction for every school. In addition, each type of school has unique study programs that provide methodological instructions and suggestions for classroom activities, according to its organizing body.

According to the standards, reading is defined as "building some meaning as a receptor of a written message (tale, short story, novel, play, poem, fable, song, letter, article, directions, various instructions...)." [5] Meaning, in turn, is determined by the interaction between the following:

♦ Message, and particularly the message features (dominant purpose, structure);

♦ Reader, and particularly the reader's previous knowledge (including linguistic, literary, artistic and historical) and his or her emotional dispositions; and

♦ Context, and particularly the situational characteristics in which the message is being read.

Activities linked with reading lessons are mainly developed as part of French (as mother tongue) lessons. However, the goal of some lessons is to develop cross-curricular competencies. The cross-curricular competencies that belong to the reading domain concern information processing (a necessary skill

in a range of subjects). The following competencies are built into the context of educational activities linked with the various learning domains:

♦ Rereading the same document to strengthen comprehension;

♦ Analyzing texts to find main ideas, linking them together, and understanding their relative importance;

♦ Analyzing texts to draw up hypotheses, and extracting explicit and implicit meaning; and

♦ Synthesizing texts to summarize main ideas.

The *Standards of Competencies* include seven reading-specific competencies, with sub-competencies defining the standards more precisely for each grade level. Due to this structure, focus on the same competency may differ by grade level. The seven specific competencies are as follows:

♦ Directing one's reading according to context—This competency is organized into six sub-competencies, each relating to the work required to prepare and manage reading activity, including the following: selecting a document according to one's reading project; anticipating a document's content by considering internal and external indicators; understanding the author's intentions; adapting one's strategy according to the reading project, to the document, and to the time available; and defining an appropriate reading speed.

♦ Meaning building—This competency is organized into eleven sub-competencies that refer to the processes readers implement in order to understand text and react appropriately. Among these sub-competencies, which outline strategies needed to develop an "expert" reading approach, are the following: extracting explicit information, inferring implicit meaning, and checking hypotheses.

♦ Determining the organization of a text—This competency focuses on the text structure (e.g., narrative, descriptive, and dialogue) and the global organization of the text (e.g., layout, sections, and textual organizers). Its nine sub-competencies focus on selecting the strategies that are most appropriate to the type of text concerned.

♦ Detecting the cohesion factors between sentences and groups of sentences throughout a text—This competency focuses on skills needed to increase reading fluidity, text comprehension, and the relationships between different text components. Its four sub-competencies include

identifying factors of sentence articulation, chronological marks, anaphora, and pronouns.

♦ Taking grammatical units into account—This competency is divided into two sub-competencies, one related to punctuation and grammatical units (organization and syntactic structure), and the other related to the recognition of noun and verb grammatical indicators (e.g., gender, singular or plural, and verb tenses). These sub-competencies are of major importance in the reading process because the reader must be able to detect the influence of the syntactic organization and grammatical links in the text.

♦ Processing lexical units—This competency consists of four sub-competencies related to strategies needed to clarify the meaning of a word, including the following: suggesting hypotheses or using the context, using a dictionary, identifying synonyms and antonyms, and identifying different word components (e.g., root, prefix, and suffix).

♦ Detecting interactions between verbal and nonverbal elements—This competency encourages the use of nonverbal elements to clarify reading (e.g., illustration, scheme, typography, and keys).

While the definition of each reading competency is relatively specific, the divisions between the various competencies are only theoretical because they must be processed together in different learning activities. The teaching methods recommended in the *Standards of Competencies* and other curricular documents focus strongly on the integration of the various components through activities that are intrinsically interesting for the learner.

At the end of the first phase of primary education (Grade 2), most sub-competencies have been initiated and are being developed during reading lessons. At the end of the second phase of primary education (Grade 6), most sub-competencies are assessed for the purpose of certification (Basic Studies Certificate, *Certificat d'études de base*). This assesses mastery of the skills introduced in the first phase, as well as the enrichment that has occurred in the second phase. At the end of primary education, children should have mastered the skills that help them become autonomous readers and should be able to adopt efficient reading strategies when confronted with various reading situations.

Beyond these specific competencies, motivation in reading is also emphasized.

Reading Instruction in the Primary Grades

Instructional Materials

The *Standards of Competencies* do not include compulsory teaching methods or supports for teaching reading literacy. Teachers are allowed to select their own textbooks, and typically use materials from a variety of sources, including exercises and texts from different books, newsletters, reviews, and documents provided by the school system.

An official 2006 directive emphasizes the use of school textbooks, school software, and other educational tools in classrooms.[6] The use of these materials is intended to support students throughout their learning and to help teachers in the planning and implementation of their teaching activities. This directive is part of the *Contract for School* (*Contrat pour l'école*), which aims for better-resourced teachers, better-structured teaching methods, and a higher-quality, more efficient, and equitable school system.[7]

The government of the French Community of Belgium grants schools financial aid specifically for school textbook and software purchases. These funds are to purchase textbooks as well as reference books (e.g., dictionaries and grammar books) that have received approval based on ethical criteria (i.e., respect for equality and nondiscrimination principles), as well as educational criteria (i.e., conformity with the *Standards of Competencies* and other decree requests).

Use of Technology

Thanks to the Cyberclasses project of the Walloon Region, all schools are equipped with modern computers. Computer technology, however, is not emphasized in the process of teaching reading—this depends on personal preference or educational staff initiatives. Computer technology is used most often in the context of looking for information and documentation or, sometimes, in activities aimed at increasing speed, lexical and syntactic knowledge, or comprehension of texts. An example of the latter is the use of the software programs Elmo and Elsa, which are tailored to suit individual needs over a school year to support student reading progress.

Role of Reading Specialists

Reading specialists play a minor role in reading education in schools. Some specialized researchers in education develop, usually in close cooperation with primary school teachers, and disseminate tools aimed at helping teachers with reading instruction.

TIMSS & PIRLS
International Study Center
Lynch School of Education, Boston College

However, despite this practice, the global climate of books and reading was recently found to be less favorable in the French Community of Belgium than in other countries.[8] A university team therefore has initiated a study aimed at fostering more collaboration between primary education classrooms and public libraries. These researchers have provided some suggestions for collaboration among teachers of Grades 1–6.[9] One of these recommendations—a school-library partnership—is expected to motivate teachers to take their students to the school or public library more frequently.

Second-language Instruction

A series of adaptation lessons in language instruction is available for students whose native or daily language is not French and who do not know French well enough to successfully participate in class activities. These lessons are provided at least three periods per week, with the goals of teaching students French and integrating them into the school system.

Some schools provide students who have recently arrived from foreign countries with specific help to ensure that they receive educational opportunities equal to those of other students. These newcomers have access to "bridge classrooms" for one year to help them adapt to the Belgian cultural and school system.[10]

Students with Reading Difficulties

Diagnostic Testing

There is no systematic testing of students to diagnose reading difficulties. Teachers conduct front-line diagnostics that must be confirmed through specialized testing by a psychologist or a speech therapist. Since the 2011–12 school year, one person in each school is required to be trained in the area of dyslexia.

Instruction for Children with Reading Difficulties

Students with reading difficulties often receive support in their class as a result of formative assessments and the differentiated education system. In most cases, this support consists of repeating activities (i.e., same material, process, and instructions). Once difficulties are detected, remedial teaching procedures can be implemented inside or outside the classroom. In some instances, students may also benefit from a supplementary school year. Some schools that enroll high numbers of children with disadvantaged family backgrounds have

additional projects related to reading, and receive supplementary funding for those projects.[11]

The special education system serves children and teenagers who require adapted education because of specific educational needs or lower learning abilities. The system is organized according to the following criteria: students who may be slightly or severely mentally challenged; or students who have behavior or personality disorders, physical disabilities, illnesses (e.g., are convalescing), vision problems, hearing problems, or instrumental problems (e.g., language or speech development problems). Similar to the regular educational system, the special education system works to achieve the objectives outlined by the *Standards of Competencies*. Depending on the acquired competencies, students may obtain the Basic Studies Certificate (*Certificat d'études de base*) and other educational certifications.

Teachers and Teacher Education

Teacher Education Specific to Reading

In teacher education, no specific education is dedicated to teaching reading per se. Reading is part of the regular curriculum and is integrated into French language didactics. Following graduation from a teacher education program, teachers at the primary education level teach all subjects.

Requirements for Ongoing Professional Development in Reading for Teachers

A recent decree has reformed the professional education of teachers by making professional development compulsory.[12] The decree also created the Professional Training Institute (*Institut de la Formation en cours de carrière*), an organization meant to implement and organize professional development for teachers from the various educational systems in the French Community.

Currently, professional development "projects" are structured in the following three levels:[13]

♦ Micro Level (School Project)—Professional development related to the teacher's school, such as learning about student needs, parent expectations, or school social and cultural background;

♦ Meso Level (Educational and Pedagogical Project)—Professional development related to the objectives or philosophy of the school's organizing authority; and

♦ Macro Level (Curriculum Project)—Professional development related to implementing learning competencies, with the goal of reaching levels defined in the *Standards of Competencies.*

In-service professional development comprises two forms: compulsory and voluntary. Compulsory professional development consists of six half-days per school year, of which two days must be devoted to macro education. Voluntary professional development may not exceed ten half-days per school year, if taking place during teaching time.

There are no specific requirements for professional development in reading. Teachers may choose from a variety of different courses where reading instruction is covered to some extent.

Monitoring Student Progress in Reading

In 2006, the Parliament adopted a decree to organize and coordinate the previous system of external non-certifying assessments into a three-year cycle. In the first year, the assessments concern reading mastery and written production for all students Grades 2 and 5. Mathematics is assessed in the second year, followed by science in the third year. The team that oversees these assessments includes the President of the Monitoring Commission, teachers from different educational bodies, inspectors, and university researchers. The assessment results are used to evaluate students' achievement, prepare pedagogical recommendations and activities for teachers, feed in-service professional development, and help pedagogical counselors.

Since 2008, the Basic Studies Certificate has been awarded at the end of primary education based on an external certifying assessment, which is compulsory in every school type.[14] This examination assesses the mastery of the competencies expected at the end of primary education in French language, mathematics, science, history, and geography. In some cases, students can obtain their Basic Studies Certificate through the board of examiners at their school.

Various methods of assessment are used in primary education. To successfully enable students to develop according to their own pace, teachers should ideally focus on formative assessment and differentiated education to account for students' different abilities. The results of teacher-prepared examinations can then supplement observations and notations from formative assessments.

To assist teachers, the Commission of the Assessment Instruments Related to the Standards of Competencies (*Commission des Outils d'Évaluation Relatifs*

aux Socles de Compétences) circulates examples of assessments among all the schools organized and subsidized by the French Community. These instruments have been developed to align with the *Standards of Competencies* and are easily available to teachers on the education website of the French Community.[15] Prior to distribution, the assessments are tested in various classrooms. The French Community also provides grants for research projects in the area of reading. For example, recently funded research projects have focused on designing tools to diagnose learning difficulties in reading in addition to developing remediation strategies.[16, 17]

Students and their parents are regularly informed about student results, school progress, learning behavior, and personal development through written school reports.

Impact and Use of PIRLS

Reading competencies and difficulties are a constant concern in the French Community. This concern is sustained by external national and international evaluation data. Since 1994, a national non-certifying evaluation plan has aimed at diagnosing student competencies in reading, mathematics, history, geography, and science. Didactic proposals are created every year based on the diagnostic assessment results to address any difficulties that have been detected.

International evaluations such as PIRLS and PISA have helped put the French Community reading literacy achievement into perspective. Poor results and low rankings alone could lead the education community to unproductive discouragement. Fortunately, beyond results and rankings, these studies provide useful data for formulating explanations regarding rather poor results. Specifically, the data highlight particularities of the French Belgian school system, including the following: classroom processes, time allocation in French language lessons, reading activities, evaluation strategies, teacher education (both initial and in-service), and attention provided to children with difficulties. Secondary analyses have contributed to thinking about and developing suggestions for improvement, inspired by results in better performing countries.[18, 19] In addition, themes for teacher professional development and pedagogical adviser education also have been drawn from international studies results and analyses.

In short, PIRLS results represent an important contribution to a global movement of thinking and action towards improved reading competencies for French Community students.

References

1 3e Révision de la Constitution Belge, Loi spéciale du 8 août 1988 (1988).

2 Ministère de la Communauté française, Administration générale de l'Enseignement et de la Recherche scientifique. (1999). *Socles de compétences* [Standards of competencies]. Bruxelles: Author.

3 Gouvernement de la Communauté française. (1995, March). *Décret relatif à la promotion d'une école de la réussite dans l'enseignement fondamental* [Decree on the promotion of school success in primary education]. Bruxelles: Author.

4 Gouvernement de la Communauté française. (1997, July 24). *Décret définissant les missions prioritaires de l'enseignement fondamental et de l'enseignement secondaire et organisant les structures propres à les atteindre* [Decree defining the objectives of basic education and secondary education and organizing the structures to achieve]. Bruxelles: Author.

5 Ministère de la Communauté française–Administration générale de l'Enseignement et de la Recherche scientifique. (1999). *Socles de compétences* [Standards of competencies] (p. 11). Bruxelles: Author.

6 La Ministre-Présidente de la Communauté française, en charge de l'Enseignement obligatoire et de promotion sociale. (2006, May 23). *Circulaire N°1474–Manuels scolaires, logiciels scolaires et autres outils pédagogiques: Agrément indicatif de conformité, budgets spécifiques et mesures applicables dans l'enseignement primaire ordinaire et spécialisé dès 2006* [Circular No. 1474–Textbooks, educational software and other teaching tools: Approval code compliance, budgets and specific measures applicable in primary mainstream and special schools since 2006]. Bruxelles: Author.

7 Le Bureau exécutif de la Ligue de l'Enseignement et de l'Education permanente. (2005, June 27). *Contrat pour l'école* [Contract for school]. Bruxelles: Author. Retrieved from http://www.ligue-enseignement.be/default.asp?V_DOC_ID=1102

8 Baye, A., Lafontaine, D., & Vanhulle, S. (2003). *Lire ou ne pas lire, etat de la question* [To read or not to read, that is the question]. *Les Cahiers du CLPCF*, 4.

9 Communauté française de Belgique. (2003). *Ma classe, la bibliothèque, notre contrat-lecture. Moi les livres, je les picore, je les dévore, je les explore*. [My class, the library, our reading contract. My books, I peck at them, I devour them, I explore them]. Bruxelles: Author.

10 Gouvernement de la Communauté française. (2011). *Décret visant à l'insertion des élèves primo-arrivants dans l'enseignement organisé ou subventionné par la Communauté française* [Decree to the inclusion of newly arrived pupils in education organized or subsidized by the French Community] (14/06/2001, mis à jour le 23/02/2011). Bruxelles: Author.

11 Gouvernement de la Communauté française. (1998). *Décret du 30 juin 1998 visant à assurer à tous les élèves des chances égales d'émancipation sociale, notamment par la mise en œuvre de discriminations positives* [Decree of June 30, 1998 to ensure all students equal opportunity for social emancipation]. Bruxelles: Author.

12 Gouvernement de la Communauté française. (2002, July 11). *Décret relatif à la formation en cours de carrière des membres du personnel des établissements d'enseignement fondamental ordinaire* [Decree on the training of career staff of regular primary schools]. Bruxelles: Author.

13 La Ministre-Présidente de la Communauté française, en charge de l'Enseignement obligatoire et de

promotion sociale. (2003). *Circulaire N° 146 du 10 avril 2003. Formation en cours de carrière: Enseignement fondamental ordinaire, Année scolaire 2003/2004* [Career training: Basic regular teaching. School year 2003/2004]. Bruxelles: Author.

14 Gouvernement de la Communauté française. (2006, June 2). *Décret relatif à l'évaluation externe des acquis des élèves de l'enseignement obligatoire et au certificat d'études de base au terme de l'enseignement primaire* [Decree on the external evaluation of student achievement in compulsory education and basic education certificate at the end of primary education]. Bruxelles: Author.

15 Communauté française de Belgique, Ministère de l'Education. (n.d.). Retrieved from http://www.enseignement.be

16 Deum, M., Gabelica, C., Lafontaine, A., & Nyssen, M.C. (2007). *Outil pour le diagnostic et la remédiation des difficultés d'acquisition de la lecture en 1re et 2e années primaires* [Tool for the diagnosis and remediation of difficulties learning to read in 1st and 2nd grades]. Bruxelles: Ministère de l'éducation, Service général du pilotage du système éducatif.

17 Schillings, P. & Lafontaine, A. (2009). *Outil pour le diagnostic et la remédiation des difficultés en lecture en 3e et 4e années primaires* [Tool for the diagnosis and remediation of difficulties learning to read in 3rd and 4th grades]. Bruxelles: Ministère de l'éducation, Service général du pilotage du système éducatif.

18 Lafontaine, A. (2011). *PIRLS 2006: Progress in reading literacy study. Note de synthèse* [Progress in reading literacy study. Executive summary]. Liège: Unité d'analyse des Systèmes et des Pratiques d'enseignement de l'Université.

19 Lafontaine, A. & Hindryckx, G. (2011). *PIRLS 2011: Progress in reading literacy study*. Liège: Unité d'analyse des Systèmes et des Pratiques d'enseignement de l'Université.

Botswana

Chawangwa Mudongo
Kgalemang Ntsabane
Kgosi Motshabi
Botswana Examinations Council[a]

Language and Literacy

Botswana is a multiethnic, multilingual, and multicultural nation with its people speaking about 26 Bantu and Khoesan languages, and two additional Indo-European languages.[1,2] Setswana is the national language and English is the official language in Botswana, though other languages are spoken. English is the medium of instruction in government schools beginning at Grade 2 through the tertiary level, while instruction in English begins in pre-school in private English-medium schools. Although students are only taught in Setswana in first grade, Setswana is taught as a compulsory subject for citizens of Botswana throughout the primary and secondary school system.

The policy espoused in the National Vision states that, "No Motswana (citizen of Botswana) will be disadvantaged in the education system as a result of a mother tongue that differs from the two official languages."[3] However, concern has been raised about the apparent low academic performance of students, especially those in the western parts of the country where languages other than Setswana are spoken. Their languages are not taught in schools and they must begin learning in Setswana at an early age.[4]

The Botswana National Literacy Program defines adult literacy as being able to comprehend written communications and conduct computations that are part of daily life.[5] According to a survey conducted in 2003, the literacy rate in Botswana was 81 percent.

The people of Botswana are encouraged to have a strong reading culture. The national curriculum directs all efforts to promote reading, and syllabuses articulate the types and levels of reading skills to be acquired, which are assessed at all levels of examination. The government publishes a free newspaper—*The Daily News*—in English and Setswana and releases it daily, except on weekends, in most parts of the country. Botswana also has a number of private newspapers.

A number of libraries in major towns and villages provide diverse reading materials to the local population, such as periodicals, magazines, reference books, and novels. The School Library Project aims to cultivate a culture of reading among school-going children by encouraging schools to develop resource rooms. In an endeavor to develop and realize this objective, the National Development Plan (NDP) 8 commits the government to develop school facilities by adding libraries.[6] In addition, the government of Botswana has partnered with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation in a project called *Sesigo* to develop local libraries. *Sesigo* is a non-profit organization whose main aim is to disseminate information and knowledge throughout the country by refurbishing local libraries and reading rooms, making them complete with Internet access (where possible) and free training.[7]

Every year the country commemorates International Reading Literacy Day, a mobilization campaign coordinated by the Department of Out-of-School Education to promote reading and writing for out-of-school learners. Learners are awarded certificates in the presence of invited dignitaries. The department uses this day to inform the public of available programs as well as to fulfill the mandate of the United Nations Literacy Decade, whose objective is to provide access to literacy in relevant and meaningful ways.

In recent years, there has been a rapid growth of institutions catering to children below school-age, mainly provided by private individuals and organizations. Research has indicated that the performance of children who had access to early education is better than those who did not have access.[8] In 2008–09, the government introduced and began implementing the Early Childhood Care and Education Policy in all urban and district councils in the country. The policy aims to stimulate greater responsibility for providing preprimary education in order to improve the quality of education offered at this level. The preprimary framework focuses on language development and early literacy, with the government providing an enabling environment by supplying trained teachers and offering effective supervision. However, access to early childhood education still needs serious advocacy. Very few people are currently using the program; the sector is predominately privately owned and too costly.[9]

The Breakthrough to Literacy project is a first-language literacy course for the first year of school. The project's method is based on using language experiences in students' daily lives to teach reading and writing in Setswana. Teachers facilitate the learning and development of such skills as questioning,

creating, and discovering the student's surrounding world. Students are taught to read through construction of syllables, words, and sentences.

Overview of the Education System

At the primary level, Botswana's education system is the joint responsibility of two ministries—the Ministry of Education and Skills Development (MoESD) and the Ministry of Local Government. The Ministry of Local Government is responsible for the infrastructure of primary schools, administering nine main local authorities called districts, which are subdivided into 28 sub-districts. MoESD oversees curriculum and staffing at all levels of schooling and solely administers secondary and tertiary education. This joint system is meant to decentralize services and provide effective supervision.

The government is the main source of educational funding, which has steadily increased over the past few years. According to the 2007–08 national budget, MoESD was allocated 28 percent of the ministerial recurrent budget and 8 percent of the development budget, while in 2011–12 the ministry was allocated 31 percent of national budget—the largest single share.[10, 11]

Botswana has a national curriculum administered by the Department of Curriculum Development and Evaluation (CDE) within MoESD. Curriculum goals are derived from the ministry's education policy. Department officers are responsible for forming committees and task forces comprised of teachers, education officers, university and college lecturers, and other stakeholders to develop teaching syllabuses for each subject in the curriculum and to prescribe the books used to teach these syllabuses for each subject.[12]

Preprimary education in the country has traditionally been provided by private individuals and organizations registered with MoESD. Most offer both social and academic elements, though frequently without a standardized or set curriculum. However, the government has established a unit of preprimary education within the Department of Primary Education, with the intention of linking preprimary education to formal schooling. Recommendation 9(c) of the Revised National Policy on Education of 1994 states that a "preprimary Education unit should be established as soon as possible in the Department of Primary Education with the functions of registering all pre-primary education units, establishing standards of facilities and the quality of the program and supervising preprimary education." [13]

Botswana provides a ten-year basic education which is not statutorily compulsory, as no parent is taken to task for not sending their children to

school. Grades (standards) 1–10 form the basic education cycle. The structure of the education system includes seven years of primary education, followed by three years of junior secondary education and, finally, two years of senior secondary education. The seven years of primary education consist of four years lower primary (Grades 1–4) and three years upper primary (Grades 5–7). At the end of the seventh year students write the Primary School Leaving Examination in the following subjects: English, Setswana, Mathematics, Social Studies, Science, Agriculture, and Religious and Moral Education. This is a diagnostic examination and not consequential, thus students proceed to junior secondary even with lower grades. At the end of the three-year junior secondary level (Grade 10) the students write the Junior Certificate Examination for purposes of selection to senior secondary school. Senior secondary education marks the end of pre-tertiary education (Grade 12) with a consequential examination. Entry age is officially six years, though some children may start late due to various factors, such as the type of settlement in which they reside.

Most schools in Botswana are government owned and operated. Only about 8 percent of schools are private. For nearly nineteen years, education has been offered free in the government schools. As of 2005, parents contribute only 5 percent of the total expenditure for the secondary education of their children, while primary education remains free for citizens.

Private schools are owned and operated by individuals or organizations, but all are registered with MoESD. Fees paid by parents are the main source of funding in these schools. Most private primary schools design their own curricula, which are more advanced than the one offered in government schools. Some in private schools administer the Primary School Leaving Examination. Private secondary schools mostly offer an International General Certificate of Secondary Education.

Language/Reading Curriculum in the Fourth Grade

Reading Policy

Botswana actually has no policy prescription with regards to reading. Schools have the prerogative to tailor instructional material according to the needs of their learners. Reading is integrated with the language skills of speaking, listening, and writing. The Department of Curriculum Development and Evaluation (CDE) is responsible for all matters pertaining to the curriculum. Even though syllabuses are developed centrally and sent to schools, though teachers are part of the panel that develops these syllabuses. Upon completion

of seven years of primary education, students should have developed skills such as numeracy, literacy, and communication.

Summary of National Curriculum

The national curriculum at the primary level is divided into lower and upper primary. The lower primary curriculum focuses on Grades (standards) 1–4 and the upper primary deals with Grades 5–7. One of the subject aims for English at primary school is that, at the end of the program, students should have basic competence in listening, speaking, reading, and writing English.

English instruction is provided in ten periods (five hours) per week in Grades 2–4. Reading is integrated with speaking, listening, and writing, accounting for approximately 25 percent of English language skills (a significant amount of the language curriculum). The topics under the reading module consist of sight vocabulary, print styles and fonts, phonemes and graphemes, comprehension, and fluency. After four years of primary education, students are expected to read aloud or silently and show understanding of the text. Furthermore, they should read straightforward signs, notices, and labels accurately and with understanding. The syllabus places a great deal of emphasis on reading with fluency, accuracy, and understanding. Students are expected to read a range of material within a basic vocabulary of 1,000 words for information and for pleasure. The specific topics in the reading module dictate that students should understand information presented graphically, read with increasing confidence and understanding, and develop a personal culture of reading.[14]

The upper primary syllabus is meant for Grades 5–7, encompassing the language skills of listening, reading, speaking, and writing. In addition, a fifth module for grammar is added so students learn to understand the structure of English. Approximately 20 percent of the English language instruction at this level is devoted to reading. The topics covered in the reading module include instructions and directions, passages, reports and stories and drama. In upper primary school, students are expected to read independently for information and pleasure. Students are also expected to hone the reading skills of skimming and scanning to identify specific details and main points from news. They should be exposed to different types of literature, including poetry, drama, and prose, within a basic vocabulary level of 2,000 words. Students also are expected to read and understand a range of basic printed matter used in everyday communications and transactions.[15]

Reading Instruction in the Primary Grades

Instructional Materials

Instructional materials, including prescribed student textbooks, teacher's guides, and supplementary materials for each grade, are used to enrich and explain the curriculum. Textbooks developed by independent publishing companies are examined by a book review committee and then presented to the Department of Curriculum Development and Evaluation for evaluation. CDE recommends textbooks and provides primary schools with teacher's guides. Additionally, CDE has produced a booklet directing junior secondary school teachers in the development of instructional materials, including teaching and learning methodologies, guidance in gender sensitive content issues, and language use.

Local councils are responsible for procuring reading books from suppliers for schools in their areas. The prescribed list has a section of core readers that every student should have, and supplementary readers that are used to support the reading lessons. Due to a lack of infrastructural development in most public schools and a lack of libraries, most classrooms have reading corners serving some of the functions of the library.

Students are taught to read by obligatory reading aloud in class, completing assigned reading homework, and skimming and scanning text. Students in primary school read simplified texts provided by the government that contain bold print and numerous pictures. Children's encyclopedias also are widely available in schools. Schools order these texts from a prescribed list provided by the Department of Curriculum Development and Evaluation. CDE also publishes a monthly children's magazine titled *Moso*, containing short stories written by primary school students, and regularly sent to primary schools in the country.

Some schools also receive reading texts from good Samaritans, who have augmented the reading package for most schools. There is exposure to local newspapers, including the free government-owned *Daily News*, which is widely available even in the remotest settlements.

Students with Reading Difficulties

Diagnostic Testing

The provision of adequate arrangements for students with special needs in Botswana starts as early as preschool, when children's needs are assessed. Schools identify students with specials needs and then contact the Central Resource Center (CRC), an assessment center where specialists conduct assessments for

PIRLS 2011 ENCYCLOPEDIA
106 **BOTSWANA**

TIMSS & PIRLS
International Study Center
Lynch School of Education, Boston College

IEA

all levels. Schools make an appointment with CRC for students to be assessed. Schools are then provided with assessment reports that outline individual student's needs and how they should be addressed. Some students are then placed in special needs units, whereas others are placed in mainstream schools, both of which are required to secure the support and provision for that student.

Instruction for Children with Reading Difficulties

Provisions for students with reading difficulties are individually tailored according to each child's specified needs. Schools face a number of challenges in trying to meet the needs of students with learning difficulties. Some schools have senior teachers of learning difficulties, who are responsible for the daily needs of students with special needs and who provide remedial teaching. However, most schools do not have specialist teachers who are knowledgeable enough about students with special needs to make informed decisions about their identification. In addition, teacher attitudes towards students with special needs can pose challenges, due to their lack of knowledge in this area. Teachers may also find it difficult to provide students with individualized attention, due to large class sizes. Lastly, because CRC is the only assessment center available, it faces a shortage of resources to cater to the needs of the whole country. CRC's capacity experiences particular strain when schools identify students late, requiring the center to manage large volumes of requests, especially in periods immediately prior to examinations.

Teachers and Teacher Education

Teacher Education Specific to Reading

Since 2000, teachers are required to complete a three-year diploma course at a primary college of education to teach in a primary school. Formerly, the minimum qualification for primary school teachers was a two-year Primary Teachers Certificate (PTC). The last cohort of these teachers graduated in 1999. In order to improve the quality of teaching, teachers with a PTC are currently being upgraded in phases so that eventually, at a minimum, diploma holders will be teaching in these schools. To date, 1,961 teachers have graduated from this program and have been upgraded to diploma level.

Requirements for Ongoing Professional Development in Reading for Teachers

The Department of Teacher Training and Evaluation organizes in-service workshops for teachers through its network of education centers. Teachers with a PTC work towards a diploma via distance learning. In addition, seminars and

workshops are held in order to upgrade teachers' skills and keep them informed of the latest innovations.

The new curriculum is demanding for teachers. Therefore, MoESD has instituted a subject specialization project, under the premise that the quality of education will improve when language teachers only teach the subjects in which they have expertise. In 2003, the National Development Plan 9 clearly specified that there will be a focus on specialization at primary schools where 90 percent of the teaching force is local.[16] As of 2008, subject specialization has been successfully piloted in the Phikwe area.[17]

Monitoring Student Progress in Reading

Reading is assessed through topic and monthly school-based tests. The Standard Four Attainment Test is a national examination and has a section that focuses on reading in which students are asked to read a passage and answer related questions. The test is scored in the schools and the results are sent to the region for analysis. The test provides teachers diagnostic information for pinpointing areas of strength and weakness in basic literacy, for remediation purposes in fifth grade.

Regions use the Standard Four Attainment Test results differently. Generally, the test provides vital information for selecting which students are promoted to fifth grade, in conjunction with parental input, although regulations limit the number of students allowed to repeat fourth grade to only 12.5 percent, based on assessed progression.[18] However, if a student's results are low, parents make agreements with the schools on whether the student proceeds to Grade 5 or not. Therefore, Botswana does not classify the attainment test as a consequential examination per se.

Suggested Readings

Botswana Review. (2007). *Botswana Review* (26th ed.). Gaborone: Author.

Botswana Review. (2010). *Botswana Review* (31st ed.). Gaborone: Author.

Republic of Botswana. (2005). *Central statistics office bulletin*. Gaborone: Government Printer.

Republic of Botswana. (2006). *10th biennial report 2005–2006*. Gaborone: Ministry of Education.

Central Statistics Office. (2010). Retrieved from http://www.cso.gov.bw

References

1   Batibo, H. M., Mathangwane, J. T., & Tsonope, J. (2002). *The third language teaching in Botswana*. Gaborone: Associated Printers.

2   Mooko, T. (2006). Counteracting the threat of language death: The case of minority languages in Botswana. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural development, 27*(2), 109–125.

3   Presidential Task Force. (1997). *Vision 2016: Towards prosperity for all*. Gaborone: Presidential Task Force.

4   Hayes, J. (2006). *For the benefit of all: Mother tongue education for Southern African minorities*. Gaborone: The Working Group of Indigenous Minorities.

5   Republic of Botswana. (1979). *The eradication of illiteracy in Botswana: A national initiative consultation document*. Gaborone: Department of Non Formal Education.

6   Republic of Botswana. (1994). *National development plan 8 (1997–2003)*. Gaborone: Government Printer.

7   Sesigo Botswana e-Public Libraries. (2010). Retrieved from http://www.sesigo.org.bw

8   Botswana Examinations Council (2007). *Standard four assessment report*. Gaborone: Author.

9   Republic of Botswana. (2006). *National commission for UNESCO* (8th ed.). Gaborone: Ministry of Education.

10   Republic of Botswana. (2007). *Budget speech*. Gaborone: Government Printer.

11   Republic of Botswana. (2011). *Budget speech*. Gaborone: Government Printer.

12   Ministry of Trade and Industry. (2011). *Botswana review of commerece and industry*. Gaborone: B&T Directories, LTD.

13   Republic of Botswana. (1994). *Revised national policy on education*. Gaborone, Botswana: Government Printer.

14   Republic of Botswana. (2002). *Lower primary syllabus*. Gaborone: Ministry of Education.

15   Republic of Botswana. (2005). *Upper primary syllabus*. Gaborone: Ministry of Education.

16   Republic of Botswana. (2003). *National development plan 9*. Gaborone: Government Printer.

17   Bennell, P. & Molwane, M. (2008). *A teacher supply and demand for Botswana primary and secondary school*. Gaborone: Ministry of Education.

18   Republic of Botswana. (1994). *Revised national policy on education*. Gaborone: Government Printer.

Bulgaria

Marina Mavrodieva

Center for Control and Assessment of the Quality in School Education

Tatyana Angelova

Sofia University

Language and Literacy

In Bulgaria, the national language is Bulgarian, a South Slavonic language that is spoken throughout the country. Bulgarian is the official language of administration, public relations and services, and instruction in schools. Other languages used in the country are Turkish and Romany, and ethnic minorities such as Jews and Armenians use their mother tongues. In upper secondary school, intensive foreign language instruction includes instruction of multiple subjects in the foreign language.

Bulgaria is a country rich in literary history dating back to the ninth century. The old Slavonic script created by Cyril and Methodius was first accepted and developed in Bulgaria. Since the foundation of the first Bulgarian state more than 1,300 years ago, learning and enlightenment have been constant characteristics of the Bulgarian people. The first schools in Bulgaria were established in the years 866 (the Preslav School) and 888 (the Ochrid School). The first Bulgarian newspaper was published in the mid-1800s. In 2010, there were 359 newspapers with a combined circulation of about 350,000. In addition, 695 journals with a combined circulation of 32,099 and 4614 books were published. Bulgaria also has 47 public libraries with more than 34,500,000 volumes and 220,000 registered users.[1]

Overview of the Education System

The Bulgarian education system is centralized. The Ministry of Education, Youth, and Science is a specialized body of the Council of Ministers charged with determining and implementing a unified government policy in the field of education and science. The main functions of the ministry are to:

♦ Exercise control over all types of schools and kindergartens in the country;

- Participate in forming the national strategy for the development of education;

- Approve educational documentation;

- Manage the introduction of innovations and the supply of textbooks and manuals;

- Organize publishing activities in the field of education;

- Define unified state education standards;

- Establish, transform, and, when necessary, close state and municipal schools;

- Approve the establishment of private schools and kindergartens; and

- Appoint the heads of the inspectorates of education.

Each of Bulgaria's 28 administrative regions has an Inspectorate of Education, a specialized regional body of the ministry that administers the education system regionally. Inspectorates plan, coordinate, and monitor the functioning of each region's schools and kindergartens.

In every municipality there are educational departments that implement local education policy. Municipal departments are the supporting and managing bodies for preschool education, but have only a supporting role in primary through upper secondary education.

Structure of the Education System

Schooling in Bulgaria begins at age 7 with primary education and is compulsory through the age of 16. Children may begin at age 6 with parental approval, if they are seen to be ready for school. The school year begins in September and ends in June, and consists of 31–36 weeks, depending on the level and grade. The structure of the education system in Bulgaria has four stages:

- Kindergarten (ISCED Level 0)—This level is for children ages 3–6 or 7. Prior to 2010, only one year of preprimary education was compulsory preparation for primary school. However, following a change in the Public Education Act in 2010, the last two years of preprimary education are now compulsory. These "preparatory classes" may be organized both in the kindergartens and in the schools.

♦   Basic Education—This level is comprised of primary education and lower secondary education:

- ◆ Primary Education (ISCED Level 1)—This first stage is for children ages 6 or 7–10 or 11 and includes Grades 1–4.

- ◆ Lower Secondary Education (ISCED Level 2)—This second stage includes Grades 5–8. After completing Grade 7, students can apply to attend specialized upper secondary schools or profiled classes in general schools.

♦   Upper Secondary Education (ISCED Level 3)—This level includes Grades 9–12.

♦   Post-secondary education—This level is offered at universities and colleges. A bachelor's degree is four years, with an additional year for a master's degree. A doctoral degree is three years beyond a master's.

In the 2010–11 school year, the number of schools in Bulgaria totaled 2,676; of these, 2,175 were general, 448 were vocational, and 53 were colleges and universities. Depending on the funding, schools are administrated by the government, the municipality, or privately, though most are municipal. Almost all vocational schools are administered by the government. There are 110 private schools: 68 general, 26 vocational, and 16 colleges and universities.[2]

Language/Reading Curriculum in the Fourth Grade

Reading Policy

The official Bulgarian policy on reading literacy requires all students to be able to read by the end of Grade 1. However, many children have begun learning at home or in preparatory classes and can read when they start school.

The Bulgarian State Education Content Standards[3] are applied in all education programs and textbooks in Bulgarian. In addition, the Bulgarian Language curriculum has adapted the following key factors from the Conceptual Framework of the Council of Europe: contemporary language education, language behavior, successful communication and the rules regulating it, and the sociocultural context of communication.[4] These concepts are operationalized and used to describe the outcomes of teaching the Bulgarian language.

Great emphasis is placed on the development of positive attitudes toward school and motivation for studying in kindergarten and preprimary education. However, according to the national strategic programs for development of school education, the Bulgarian school system is oriented towards memorization

and reproduction, rather than stimulation of thought and independence, formation of practical skills, and personality development. Significant changes should be made in order to create conditions for developing practical skills and critical thinking among students. The program requires changes in the Bulgarian State Education Content Standards and also emphasizes the need for inclusion of information and communication technologies and development of outside-the-classroom and extra-curricular activities, especially in the early grades.[5] The standards are currently being elaborated to synchronize Bulgarian and European standards in education.

Summary of National Curriculum

Reading is part of language instruction at the primary grades. The Bulgarian State Education Content Standards contain a syllabus for Bulgarian language and literature. This is an interdisciplinary cultural-education domain that includes reading instruction and reading skills, and is comprised of four components: sociocultural competence, language competence, speaking, and writing.

The current reading curriculum is a major part of the standards for Grades 1–4. Bulgarian language and literature receive six and a half hours of classroom instruction per week: two hours for Bulgarian language, three hours for literature, and 90 minutes for communication skills (writing and speaking). Beyond classroom instruction, Bulgarian legislation recommends an additional 30 minutes per week of home reading, although there is no regulation or institution monitoring the frequency or the length of time students read outside of normal classes.[6]

The grade-to-grade structure that covers reading instruction in primary school is for Grades 2–4. Reading instruction starts in Grade 2 when students master reading techniques. The main purpose of language instruction in Grade 1 is to develop the following basic literacy skills:[7]

♦ Learning letters and connecting them to sounds;

♦ Learning to read letters, syllables, words, and sentences;

♦ Writing parts of letters and whole letters; and

♦ Writing syllables, words, and sentences.

According to the Bulgarian State Education Content Standards, at the end of Grade 4, students should have mastered the following language, sociocultural, and communicative competencies:[8]

♦ Reading with adequate intonation and comprehension of meaning;

- ♦ Finding synonyms and antonyms;

- ♦ Explaining, asking questions, and replying analytically;

- ♦ Using different word-order patterns;

- ♦ Speaking logically and critically;

- ♦ Respecting the speech of others;

- ♦ Analyzing and comparing literary texts; and

- ♦ Planning and creating self-generated written texts.

Reading Instruction in the Primary Grades

Instructional Materials

New textbooks and corresponding supplements are chosen when the curriculum is changed, which is approximately every ten years. Before new instructional materials are introduced, teachers from all over the country review textbooks, workbooks, resources, and materials for each grade from a list provided by the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Science. Teachers rank the textbooks suggested by the ministry and provide feedback regarding their preferences. Based on this feedback, the ministry mandates a set of materials to be used throughout the country. Textbooks and corresponding supplements for Grades 1–4 are distributed to schools and made available free of charge.

The materials used in Grade 1 include an alphabet book, a reader, and workbooks. At Grades 2–3, students use a Bulgarian language textbook, a reader, and workbooks. Materials for Grade 4 include the Bulgarian language textbook, a literature textbook, and workbooks. There also are various handbooks and reference books that can be chosen for home reading and studying.

Use of Technology

An Internet connection is available in every Bulgarian school and most schools have multimedia equipment. ICT has been successfully introduced in nearly all Bulgarian schools as part of compulsory instruction in Grades 1–4. The use of modern technologies is still not a popular supplemental tool in reading instruction in primary grades.

Role of Reading Specialists

The primary school classroom teacher is responsible for reading instruction. Experts in Bulgarian language and literature or primary education are present in every Inspectorate of Education as well as in the Ministry of Education, Youth,

and Science. These experts act as advisors and play an organizational role in reading instruction.

Second-language Instruction

A special instruction program in Bulgarian language is offered for immigrant students in Grades 1–4. However, no special instruction program in Bulgarian language exists for non-immigrant Bulgarian children whose mother tongue is not Bulgarian. Additional classes are available to help students learn formal communication, extend their vocabulary, learn syntax structures, and improve their handwriting, speaking, and writing. Language minority students also can study their mother tongue at public schools as part of elective instruction.

One of the main goals outlined in the *Program for Development of Education, Science, and Youth Policies in Bulgaria (2009–2013)* is to grant equal access to education to all children. External assessment results have asserted that additional actions should be taken for children whose mother tongue is not Bulgarian. In addition to pedagogical assistance, these children must be placed in an integrative environment that does not allow for discrimination relative to any linguistic, ethnic, cultural, or other characteristic. Lastly, these children should be educated in a kindergarten where they can communicate in Bulgarian on a daily basis.[9]

Students with Reading Difficulties

A national program integrates children with special education needs into mainstream education. Most students with special education needs are in classrooms with other students but follow an individualized program.

Very few schools have specialists in reading disabilities (e.g., speech therapists, psychologists). Usually, preprimary or primary teachers are responsible for identifying students with reading difficulties. Once identified, these students receive support such as individual instruction from the teacher, small-group instruction, or various kinds of art therapy. If they fail to make progress while receiving such support, then they are advised to visit a specialist. If students have symptoms of a disability, they are taught individually by pedagogical, psychological, and medical specialists. In addition, speech therapy and resource centers assist children with disabilities enrolled in the mainstream schools.

Teachers and Teacher Education

Teacher Education Specific to Reading

Students of teacher education can pursue a bachelor's, master's, or doctoral degree at several universities. Teaching in primary school requires at least a four-year bachelor's degree in primary pedagogy. In their program of study, students must conduct guided observations, deliver observed lessons in schools, and complete pre-graduation practice. After successfully completing special theoretical and practical state examinations, teachers receive a diploma which serves as a teaching certificate of professional qualification.

Teaching in secondary school requires at least a four-year bachelor's degree in a subject specialty, in addition to a teaching certificate for professional qualification. Graduates or students who have completed their second year at university in any relevant specialty may obtain a teaching certificate after successfully passing examinations in pedagogy, psychology, and methodology, in addition to the theoretical and practical state examinations.

Requirements for Ongoing Professional Development in Reading for Teachers

In Bulgaria, several universities have departments for professional development and enhancing teacher qualifications. These departments offer qualification courses and conduct qualification degree examinations for teachers. Teachers receive professional development primarily through periodic updates of pedagogical knowledge, new instructional methods, and the use of ICT in education. Teachers may then take examinations to acquire professional qualification degrees which lead to salary increases.

The new system of career development of teachers introduces five in-service ranks that teachers can earn: junior teacher, teacher, senior teacher, chief teacher, and teacher-methodologist.[10]

Monitoring Student Progress in Reading

One of the main goals of the *Program for Development of Education, Science, and Youth Policies in Bulgaria (2009–2013)* is the development of a modern, effective, and objective evaluation system of the quality of education, which includes systems for classroom (internal) and national (external) evaluation. National evaluation examinations and end-of-secondary-school examinations are conducted using standardized tests developed by experts from the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Science and the Center for Control and Assessment of the Quality of School Education.

National Evaluation

Beginning in the 2006–07 school year, a national assessment was introduced at the fourth grade using standardized tests in four subjects (Bulgarian language and literature, mathematics, man and society, and man and nature). In the following years, national assessment was extended to include successive grades, so that by the 2009–10 school year, the national assessment was conducted at each of Grades 4–7. Since the 2003–04 school year, a national assessment at the eighth grade has been offered for students with intensive instruction in a foreign language (English, German, French, Spanish, Italian, and Russian).

In the 2007–08 school year, the state *Matura*, or national end-of-secondary-school examinations were reinstated after more than 40 years. Students must pass two examinations to receive a secondary education diploma. Bulgarian language and literature is compulsory, as is the second examination in one of the following subjects, chosen by the student: mathematics, geography, physics, chemistry, biology, history, philosophy, or foreign language. Students may take as many additional examinations as they wish from the listed subjects. Many universities and colleges allow examination results to be substituted for entrance examinations.

In the 2010–11 school year, following a change in legislation, national assessments were conducted in Grades 4, 7, 8, and 12 (the latter being the end-of-secondary-school examinations). As a result, admission examinations for specialized upper-secondary schools at the end of Grade 7 are now included as non-compulsory portions of the external evaluations of Bulgarian language, literature, and mathematics.

Classroom Evaluation of Students

Teachers conduct student evaluations using oral and written examinations as well as non-standardized tests. Teachers grade student achievement on a scale ranging from 2–6 points: 6 is excellent, 5 is very good, 4 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 2 is poor.

With the financial support of the European Social Fund, the Center for Control and Assessment of the Quality in School Education has developed standards for classroom assessment for every grade and every subject to increase the quality of the classroom evaluation of students. These standards will be published as a manual for teacher use.

Impact and Use of PIRLS

Over 64 publications, including articles, workshops, and media commentary, have discussed Bulgarian participation in PIRLS. Research activities connected with the achievement of Bulgarian students in PIRLS 2006 have been presented at a variety of conferences[11, 12, 13] and were incorporated into the International Project European Core Curriculum for Mainstream Second Language Learning (EUCIM).[14]

The Center for Control and Assessment of the Quality in School Education, together with Sofia University, has administered qualification workshops and trainings for scorers and for item writers, using the released materials from PIRLS 2001 and PIRLS 2006.

Suggested Readings

Angelova, T. (2005). Changing Bulgarian language learning in Bulgarian secondary schools. In M. Pandis, A. Ward, & S. R. Mathews (Eds.), *Reading, writing, and thinking. Proceedings of 13th European conference on reading. International Reading Association.*

Eurydice. (2006). *The education system in Bulgaria.* Retrieved from http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/eurybase/eurybase_full_reports/BG_EN.pdf

References

1   National Institute of Statistics. (2010). Retrieved from http://www.nsi.bg/

2   Ibid.

3   Ministry of Education, Youth and Science. (2011). *Bulgarian state education content standards.* Retrieved from http://mon.bg/top_menu/general/doi/

4   Council of Europe. (2001). *The common European framework of reference for languages: Learning, teaching, assessment.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

5   Ministry of Education, Youth and Science. (2009). *Program for development of education, science and youth policies in Bulgaria (2009–2013).* Retrieved from http://mon.bg/left_menu/strategies/

6   Ministry of Education and Science. (2000). *Ordinance № 2 of May 2000 on the curriculum.* Retrieved from http://mon.bg/top_menu/general/doi/

7   Ministry of Education, Youth and Science. (2011). *Bulgarian state education content standards.* Retrieved from http://mon.bg/top_menu/general/doi/

8   Ibid.

9   Ministry of Education, Youth and Science. (2009). *Program for eevelopment of education, science and youth policies in Bulgaria (2009–2013).* Retrieved from http://mon.bg/left_menu/strategies/

10 Ibid.

11 Angelova, T. (2008, November). *Assessment in Bulgarian education, PIRLS 2006 and achieving of validity. Problems and solutions.* Paper presented at the meeting of AEA-Europe Conference, Hissar, Bulgaria. Retrieved from http://www.aea-europe.net/userfiles/Hissar_present_T_Angelova_proofread.pdf

12 Angelova, T. (2010, September). *Functions of micro-text and paragraph*

(with examples in Bulgarian)–Aspects in teaching of writing. Poster session presented at the 12th International Conference of the EARLI Special Interest Group on Writing, Heidelberg, Germany. Retrieved from http://sig-writing. publication-archive.com/public?fn=enter &repository=1&article=516

13 Angelova, T. (2011, February) *Toward building of student's text corpus in Bulgarian.* Poster session presented at the ALL Symposium 2011: Authenticating Language Learning: Web Collaboration Meets Pedagogic Corpor, Tübingen, Germany. Retrieved from http://u-002-segsv001.uni-tuebingen.de/symposium/

14 International Project European Core Curriculum for Mainstream Second Language Learning. (n.d.). Retrieved from http://www.eucim-te.eu

Canada

Maria Chuy[a]

Council of Ministers of Education, Canada

Language and Literacy

English and French are the two official languages of instruction in Canada, with the majority of students receiving first-language instruction in English. For Canadian students attending schools in which English is the medium of instruction, French is taught as a second language; the reverse is the case for schools in which French is the medium of instruction. In order to ensure that these students have the opportunity to learn both of Canada's official languages, French immersion programs are offered in the public education systems throughout Canada. In these programs, students who do not speak French as their first language receive some or all of their instruction and perform their schoolwork in French. Similar English language programs are available for students who have not had previous education in English.

Canada has a rich cultural diversity that includes numerous Aboriginal populations. To support Aboriginal cultures and eliminate the gap in literacy achievement, several bilingual programs are offered for First Nation languages in combination with English, French, or both. Of these Aboriginal language programs, Cree and Inuktitut are among the most notable.[1]

Being a multilingual and multicultural country, Canada has a significant and increasing immigrant population. In some large urban areas, school boards have identified more than 75 different home languages and dialects among students. A number of second-language programs are available in American Sign Language, Arabic, German, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Mandarin, Punjabi, Spanish, Ukrainian, and other languages.

Two components of Canada's education systems receive support from the federal government's official-language policy and funding programs: minority-language education and second-language education. These national federally funded programs provide youth with opportunities for exchange and summer study to enhance their language skills.[2]

Canada's provincial and territorial governments recognize that strong literacy skills are the foundation for success in school and in life. Literacy is, therefore, a priority in Canadian public schools at all grade levels and in all

---

a   With contributions from provincial departments and ministries responsible for education in Canada.

subject areas. The country's educational strategy centers on improving teaching, learning, and achievement, a commitment that underscores the importance of literacy in the 21st century and the need to extend the traditional concept of literacy to encompass media and information literacies.

Overview of the Education System

The 13 education systems in Canada are under provincial or territorial responsibility. There is no integrated national system or national curriculum. In the 13 jurisdictions[b] (ten provinces and three territories), departments or ministries of education develop their own curriculum and have the authority to develop and administer provincial or territorial assessments. Education services are delivered locally through boards of education, public schools, and independent schools, while the ministry of each jurisdiction provides leadership, develops policy and legislation, oversees system governance, sets curriculum learning standards, and builds accountability frameworks in partnership with school boards.[3]

The age range for compulsory education in Canada varies across provinces, spanning from 5–19. In the provinces where children begin school during the calendar year of their fifth birthday, parents have the option to defer their child's enrollment until the next school year. There also are provinces permitting parents to home-school their children.

Preprimary education is not mandatory in most Canadian provinces, but several early childhood programs are available prior to Grade 1 in public or private schools, or in other private institutions. For example, British Columbia and Ontario have successfully implemented new full-day Kindergarten programs.[4]

Educational levels are differently grouped and named from one province or territory government to another. Generally, there are two school levels: primary (elementary) and secondary. Outside of Québec, primary level can range from Kindergarten to Grade 8 (depending on province), and secondary level can range from Grades 7–12 (depending on province). In Québec, primary level can range from Kindergarten to Grade 6, and secondary level consists of five years of study divided into two "cycles"—the first comprising Grades 7 and 8, and the second, Grades 9–11. The mandated number of school days per year varies by jurisdiction, ranging from 180–200 days.

---

b   In this chapter, the term "jurisdictions" refers to both provinces and territories.

TIMSS & PIRLS
International Study Center
Lynch School of Education, Boston College

Language/Reading Curricula in the Fourth Grade

Reading Policy

Although most Canadian jurisdictions do not have an official reading policy, literacy is emphasized across all subject areas. Overall, reading is presented as part of the English or French Language Arts curricula; some jurisdictions present reading as a separate component of the curriculum (e.g., Ontario[5] and Manitoba-French[6]), whereas others fully integrate reading throughout the curriculum. In addition to reading, Language Arts curricula usually include several interrelated elements, such as writing, listening, speaking, viewing, and representing. The curricula outline expected student outcomes (e.g., knowledge, skills, and attitudes) for the end of each school level.

As an important tool for communication and the development of thinking, reading is at the heart of Canadian education. Reading enables students to understand cultures within Canada and around the world, and contributes to the construction of students' identities and worldviews. Some jurisdictions connect reading to the cross-curricular competencies that focus on using information and communication technology (ICT), as well as critical thinking.[7] To help students become better readers, education practices in Canada reflect the belief that reading must be practiced, purposeful, modeled, and supported.

Summary of Provincial or Territorial Curricula

Jurisdictions introduced new English or French language arts curricula between 1997 and 2006 (with subsequent revisions in 2010–12 in most jurisdictions). These programs generally prescribe goals and objectives, as well as assessment standards and methods. The Atlantic provinces (New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland and Labrador) also specify instructional processes and prescribe educational materials.[8, 9] In jurisdictions in which standards are not prescribed, teachers are supported through curriculum documents that include suggestions and recommendations on instruction, assessment, teaching units, supporting resources, textbooks, and established best practices.

Most provincial or territorial language arts programs place a strong emphasis on reading improvement, literary experience, information acquisition, and reading for enjoyment. These programs also focus on the reading processes emphasized in PIRLS. Some curricula incorporate analytical, critical, and meta-cognitive thinking skills, and the exploration of multiple perspectives (e.g., see

Ontario curriculum[10]), or language cues and pragmatic, textual, syntactic, and other conventions (e.g., see Manitoba curriculum[11]).

All language arts curricula challenge students to engage in meaningful involvement with contemporary and traditional texts in a variety of forms (i.e., oral, print, and other media). The curricula expect students to make sense of information, gather information from everyday material, reflect, pose questions, discover connections, justify critical assessments, discover literature, construct cultural references, and communicate what they have learned. Overall, the common aim is to enable each student to understand and appreciate language, and to use it confidently and competently in a variety of situations for learning, communication, and personal satisfaction.

To develop reading competence, teachers are encouraged to employ a number of strategies to ensure that students are successful.[12, 13, 14] Some examples of frequently used practices are as follows:

♦ Stressing the connection between different Language Arts components (i.e., reading, writing, listening, speaking, viewing, and representing);

♦ Providing scaffolded support to help students learn new literacy strategies and skills by modeling, guiding, thinking aloud, and supporting students as they practice reading;

♦ Monitoring independent student achievement;

♦ Differentiating instruction for individuals and small groups of students;

♦ Explicitly teaching and modeling the use of higher-level thinking skills that enable students to understand, appreciate, and evaluate what they read;

♦ Encouraging students to reflect on and talk about the strategies that help them construct meaning in reading (meta-cognition); and

♦ Using meaningful and interesting texts on topics that matter to students.

Some jurisdictions, such as Saskatchewan, Manitoba, New Brunswick-French, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland and Labrador, prescribe the percentage of total instructional time to be devoted to language and reading instruction. This percentage varies by jurisdiction, within a range of 20–37 percent. Others, such as British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario, and Québec, have chosen not to prescribe any exact percentage of instructional time, but offer suggestions on the number of hours or average percentage of time allocated to addressing the learning outcomes within the language arts.

Reading Instruction in the Primary Grades

Instructional Materials

Most jurisdictions make their curriculum content available in the following forms:

♦ Official publication outlining the curriculum;

♦ Ministry notes and directives;

♦ Compulsory and recommended textbooks;

♦ Instructional and pedagogical guides; and

♦ Specifically developed or recommended instructional activities.

In the jurisdictions that do not assign specific textbooks, classroom resources generally must be evaluated to ensure that eligibility criteria are met, including consistency with curriculum policy, social considerations (e.g., Canadian orientation and products), the teacher's resource guide, and age appropriateness.

In addition to the materials mentioned above, some jurisdictions also provide the following:

♦ Achievement indicators;

♦ Graphics and visual organizers to support teachers in using the curriculum documents;

♦ A summary of key concepts and how they progressively build throughout the grades (e.g., materials provided by British Columbia[15]);

♦ The assessment framework for provincial exams (e.g., framework proposed by New Brunswick for French-speaking schools[16]); and

♦ Regular professional development sessions, which provide direction to teachers and opportunities for professional learning (e.g., the Active Young Readers Initiative launched in Nova Scotia in 2000[17]).

Use of Technology

All ministries or departments of education recognize that information technology is essential for 21st century students and that it potentially can transform the ways a student communicates, collaborates, and learns. Therefore, technology is widely used in primary classrooms in Canada—in 2006, all Canadian schools had computers (about one computer for every five students) and 98 percent of schools had an Internet connection.[18] Teachers are

encouraged to embrace a variety of educational technologies in their classrooms, such as using video and audio tools, digital tablets, interactive whiteboards (e.g., SMART Boards[TM]), and a variety of software to help students develop critical-thinking skills to support reading and writing instruction.

Role of Reading Specialists

The role of a reading specialist may include participating as a member of the learning team, supporting the teacher, developing student programs, instructing students, or administering assessments. Some Canadian schools, however, may not have a designated reading specialist, in which case students who have reading difficulties may benefit from other specialized programs and services.

Second-language Instruction

Canada is a country with a broad immigration policy with more than 200 reported ethnic origins.[19] Because the population of students who speak English as a second, third, or even fourth language continues to grow, it is important to meet the needs of these students. Depending on the jurisdiction, schools may offer English- or French-as-a-second language services. These services are delivered in a number of ways, including (but not limited to) separate instruction to students, support services within a mainstream classroom, and specialist support for classroom teachers. In addition to these services, some jurisdictions provide official guides for teaching second-language students (e.g., the implementation guides for English as a second language in Alberta[20, 21]) or perform an annual assessment of student progress (e.g., policy and guidelines in British Columbia[22]).

Students with Reading Difficulties

Diagnostic Testing

A variety of methods are used to identify students with reading difficulties—teacher observations, informal assessments (e.g., paper-and-pencil tests, inventories, questionnaires, reading records, and surveys), progressive assessment (administered in multiple, complementary steps), and systematic documentation processes. Teacher assessments may include the following: concepts about print assessments, surveys of reading attitudes or strategies, or assessments of a student's ability to read sight words and passages orally. Diagnostic processes can be performed in a progressive manner, from pre-referral activities (e.g., teacher observation) to referral to the school-based team (e.g., consultation on possible classroom strategies and services) and extended

assessments (e.g., psycho-educational, behavioral, speech and language, orientation, and mobility assessments). In order to facilitate the diagnostic and intervention processes, some jurisdictions provide teachers with screening and/or intervention tools (e.g., an Internet-based tool implemented in Ontario,[23] the Early Development Instrument (EDI),[24] or the Early Years Evaluation (EYE) assessment tool implemented in New Brunswick[25]). Provincial manuals and guidelines usually explain diagnostic testing.[26, 27]

Instruction for Children with Reading Difficulties

Canada is committed to equal opportunity and fairness to students, making every reasonable effort to enable students with special needs to demonstrate learning. Depending on the school and jurisdiction, students with reading disabilities either can be integrated into regular classrooms (most common), organized into small groups that receive special assistance from a teacher, or, in rare cases, segregated in special-needs classrooms.

Students with reading difficulties generally receive support through a variety of means: remedial, corrective, or skill-building instruction; specific learning strategies; alternative reading materials; adapted curriculum; tutors; and assistive technology (e.g., optical character-recognition systems, or screen readers). A range of accommodations for these students also is available: using spell checkers, organizers, or colored paper; allowing additional time; providing alternative seating; dividing a test into parts; providing a test in large print or Braille; or using scribes.

Individualized education plans in literacy are implemented as needed in most jurisdictions.[28, 29]

Teachers and Teacher Education

Elementary school teachers generally complete four years of post-secondary education to receive a bachelor's degree in education from an accredited university. At least one supervised field practicum is required in any teacher education program, although duration of the practicum varies among jurisdictions, ranging from 40 days to six months. Some jurisdictions also require the following:

♦ A qualifying examination (i.e., Québec and New Brunswick-French);

♦ Completion of a probationary teaching period lasting from six months to two years (i.e., British Columbia, Alberta, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland and Labrador); or

♦ Completion of a mentoring or induction program—This program may provide another full year of professional support, including orientation, mentoring, and professional development in areas such as literacy, classroom management, and effective communication.

Although there are no requirements specific to teaching reading, basic language arts curriculum courses are generally offered to teacher-education students, with several instructional courses taken by those specializing in language arts.

Requirements for Ongoing Professional Development in Reading for Teachers
Opportunities for ongoing professional development can include university programs, special training programs offered by the department or ministry of education or teachers' colleges, educational conferences, research projects, on-line learning communities, and large-scale assessment development sessions or scoring teams. In addition to these opportunities, some jurisdictions, such as Québec, create special centers that offer professional support to new teachers (e.g., centers of excellence developed by English-speaking school boards in Québec[30]). Most jurisdictions do not regulate the number of professional development hours but some, such as Nova Scotia, do, requiring teachers to complete 100 hours of professional development every five years.[31]

Monitoring Student Progress in Reading

Canadian classroom teachers use a variety of approaches to monitor student progress, including ongoing classroom assessments as well as jurisdictional and national assessments.

National Assessments
The Pan-Canadian Assessment Program (PCAP) is the most recent commitment from the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC) to inform Canadians about student achievement in reading, mathematics, and science. Every three years, PCAP assesses student performance at Grade 8 (Secondary Two in Québec). The next assessment will take place in 2013, with reading as a minor subject.[32]

Jurisdictional Assessments
The type of jurisdiction-level tests and the grades at which they are administered differ by jurisdiction. In general, each jurisdiction has a number of curriculum-based assessment programs that evaluate student reading ability at different

points in primary or secondary school. For example, Alberta requires students to take a provincial examination in language arts in Grades 3, 6, and 9, with a further diploma examination in Grade 12. Québec has an examination in language arts at the end of elementary and secondary school. Ontario assesses students in reading and writing in Grades 3 and 6, and, starting in Grade 10, students take the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT). Jurisdiction-level examination scores are used, to varying extents, as components of students' final class grades or graduation requirements. In general, following the administration of a provincial or territorial assessment, detailed reports at the district, school, class, and individual student levels are generated and sent back to schools and teachers to help them identify their students' strengths and areas requiring improvement.[33, 34, 35]

Classroom Assessments

Teachers generally use a variety of informal reading assessment strategies, including teacher observations, portfolios, and classroom-based tests, for formative and summative purposes. Student progress usually is documented through report cards, which indicate a student's performance in relation to the jurisdiction's curriculum and include information on attitudes, work habits, effort, and social responsibility. In some schools and school boards, teachers also may use a variety of standardized tests to assess reading achievement, such as the Canadian Achievement Test (CAT),[36] the Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test,[37] the Test of Early Reading Ability (TERA),[38] and others. Student progress is communicated to parents by means of report cards, parent-teacher conferences, and e-mails, or through regular informal communications.[39]

Impact and Use of PIRLS

Some Canadian jurisdictions have participated in PIRLS since 2001. The first two provinces to join this initiative were Ontario and Québec. The next were British Columbia, Alberta, and Nova Scotia, which began taking part in 2006. Other provinces (Saskatchewan, Manitoba, New Brunswick-French, and Newfoundland and Labrador) joined PIRLS during its last administration in 2011, and three provinces (Alberta, Ontario, and Québec) also participated as benchmarking jurisdictions.[40] PIRLS scores provide an external measure of reading literacy in addition to the national and jurisdictional assessments, and allow for cross-jurisdictional as well as international comparisons. Active involvement in PIRLS enables ministries of education to identify and understand

the strengths and weaknesses of Canadian students in the international context, and to compare the standards of their own provincial or territorial assessments and curricula. For example, the province of British Columbia formally links results from PIRLS to their Grade 4 jurisdictional reading assessment.[41] The high achievement of Canadian students confirms the relevance of literacy policies and practices in Canada; however, further improvement is necessary to support students with reading difficulties and to reduce the gender gap.

Suggested Readings

Council of Ministers of Education, Canada. (2008). *The development of education. Reports for Canada*. Toronto: Author. Retrieved from http://www.cmec. ca/Publications/Lists/Publications/ Attachments/122/ICE2008-reports-canada.en.pdf

References

1   Ball, J. (2011). Language development in Canadian Aboriginal children. In *Encyclopedia of language and literacy development*. London: University of Western Ontario. Retrieved from http://literacyencyclopedia.ca/index. php?fa=section.show&sectionId=21

2   Council of Ministers of Education, Canada. (2012). *Education in Canada: An overview*. Retrieved from http://www. cmec.ca/299/Education-in-Canada-An-Overview/index.html

3   Ibid.

4   Ministry of Education, Ontario. (2011). *Full-day kindergarten*. Retrieved from http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/kindergarten/ index.html

5   Ministry of Education, Ontario. (2006). *The Ontario curriculum grades 1–8 (revised): Language*. Toronto: Author. Retrieved from http://www.edu.gov. on.ca/eng/curriculum/elementary/ language18currb.pdf

6   Education et Formation Professionnelle, Manitoba. (1997). *Français langue première 1re–4e années–Programme d'études–Document de mise en œuvre* [French first language 1st–4th year–Curriculum–Document implementation]. Winnipeg: Author. Retrieved from http://www.edu.gov. mb.ca/m12/frpub/ped/fl1/1re-4e/docs/ doccomplet.pdf

7   Ministère de l'Education, Québec. (2009). *Programme de formation de l'école québécoise–Progression des apprentissages au primaire* [Training program for Québec schools–Progression of learning in primary]. Retrieved from http://www. mels.gouv.qc.ca/progression/

8   Department of Education, New Brunswick. (1998). *Atlantic Canada– English language arts curriculum– Elementary 4–6*. Fredericton: Author. Retrieved from http://www.gnb.ca/0000/ publications/curric/englangarts4-6.pdf

9   Ministère de l'Education et du Développement de la Petite Enfance, Nouveau Brunswick. (2011). *Programme d'études: Français M–8* [Curriculum: French M-8]. Fredericton: Author. Retrieved from http://www.gnb. ca/0000/publications/servped/Francais_ primaire_M_8_version_2011.pdf

10 Ministry of Education, Ontario. (2006). *The Ontario curriculum grades 1–8 (revised): Language*. Toronto: Author. Retrieved from http://www.edu.gov. on.ca/eng/curriculum/elementary/ language18currb.pdf

11 Manitoba Education. (1999). *English language arts curriculum: Kindergarten to grade 8*. Retrieved from http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/cur/ela/docs/outcomes/index.html

12 Alberta Education. (2012). *AISI research & lessons learned*. Retrieved from http://education.alberta.ca/admin/aisi/researchers/lessonslearned.aspx

13 Ministry of Education, Ontario. (2004). *Early reading strategy: The report of the expert panel on early reading in Ontario, 2003*. Toronto: Author. Retrieved from http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/reports/reading/reading.pdf

14 Ministry of Education, Ontario. (2004). *Literacy for learning: The report of the expert panel on literacy in grades 4 to 6 in Ontario, 2004*. Toronto: Author. Retrieved from http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/reports/literacy/panel/literacy.pdf

15 Ministry of Education, British Columbia. (2006). *English language arts–Grade 4. Integrated resource package 2006*. Vancouver: Author. Retrieved from http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/irp/pdfs/english_language_arts/2006ela_k7_4.pdf

16 Ministère de l'Education, Nouveau-Brunswick. (2009). *Cadre d'évaluation–Français 4–Lecture* [Evaluation framework–French 4–Reading]. Fredericton: Author. Retrieved from http://www.gnb.ca/0000/publications/evalf/Francais4eCadredevaluation-Lecture.pdf

17 Department of Education, Nova Scotia. (2000). *Active young readers initiative*. Retrieved from http://www.gov.ns.ca/news/details.asp?id=20000927019

18 Council of Ministers of Education, Canada. (2012). *Education in Canada: An overview*. Retrieved from http://www.cmec.ca/299/Education-in-Canada-An-Overview/index.html

19 Human Resources and Skills Development Canada. (2009). *Canadians in context–Immigration*. Retrieved from http://www4.hrsdc.gc.ca/.3ndic.1t.4r@-eng.jsp?iid=38

20 Alberta Education. (2007). *English as a second language–Kindergarten to grade 9–Guide to implementation*. Edmonton: Author. Retrieved from http://www.education.alberta.ca/media/507659/eslkto9gi.pdf

21 Alberta Education. (2009). *Working with young children who are learning English as a new language*. Edmonton: Author. Retrieved from http://education.alberta.ca/media/1093791/earlylearning.pdf

22 Ministry of Education, British Columbia. (2009). *English as a second language: Policy and guidelines*. Vancouver: Author. Retrieved from http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/esl/policy/guidelines.pdf

23 Ministry of Education, Ontario. (2003). *The web based teaching tool*. Retrieved from https://www.wbtt.ca/Home.aspx

24 Offord Center for Child Studies. (2010). *School readiness to learn (SRL) project. The early development instrument (EDI)*. Retrieved from http://www.offordcentre.com/readiness/EDI_viewonly.html

25 KSI Research International Inc. (2012). *Early years evaluations (EYE)*. Retrieved from http://earlyyearsevaluation.com/EN/index.php/en/about-us.html

26 Alberta Education. (2011). *Handbook for the identification and review of students with severe disabilities 2011/2012*. Edmonton: Author. Retrieved from http://education.alberta.ca/media/841679/hdbk_severedisabilities.pdf

27 Ministry of Education, British Columbia. (2011). *Special education services: A manual of policies, procedures and guidelines*. Retrieved from http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/specialed/ppandg.htm

28 Alberta Education. (2006). *Individualized program planning.* Edmonton: Author. Retrieved from http://education.alberta.ca/media/511715/ipp.pdf

29 Ministry of Education, Ontario. (2010). *An introduction to special education in Ontario.* Retrieved from http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/elemsec/speced/ontario.html

30 Commission scolaire English-Montréal. (2010). *Centre d'excellence pour le développement de l'orthophonie* [Center of excellence for the development of speech]. Retrieved from http://www.emsb.qc.ca/fr/services_fr/pages/centreorthophonie_fr.asp

31 Nova Scotia Government. (2011). *Governor in council education act regulations.* Retrieved from http://www.gov.ns.ca/just/regulations/regs/edgic.htm

32 Council of Ministers of Education, Canada. (2012). *Pan-Canadian assessment program (PCAP).* Retrieved from http://www.cmec.ca/240/Programs-and-Initiatives/Assessment/Pan-Canadian-Assessment-Program-(PCAP)/Overview/index.html

33 Alberta Education. (2011). *Information for parents about writing diploma examinations.* Edmonton: Author. Retrieved from http://education.alberta.ca/media/6571975/02%20info4parents%202011-12_signoff.pdf

34 Alberta Education. (2011). *Provincial testing.* Retrieved from http://education.alberta.ca/admin/testing.aspx

35 Ministère de l'Education et du Développement de la Petite Enfance, Nouveau Brunswick. (2010). *Résultats des examens. Districts scolaires francophones* [Test results. Francophone school districts]. Fredericton: Author. Retrieved from http://www.gnb.ca/0000/publications/evalf/Rapportpublic2010FR.pdf

36 Canadian Test Centre. (2008). *CAT-4.* Retrieved from http://www.canadiantestcentre.com/CAT4/CAT4.asp

37 Karlsen, B. & Gardner, E.F. (1995). *Stanford diagnostic reading test* (4th ed.). San Antonio: Harcourt Brace.

38 Reid, D.K., Hresko, W.P., & Hammil, D.D. (2001). *Test of early reading ability– Third edition (TERA-3).* Austin: ProEd.

39 Ministry of Education, British Columbia. (2009). *Reporting student progress: Policy and practice.* Vancouver: Author. Retrieved from http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/classroom_assessment/09_report_student_prog.pdf

40 Council of Ministers of Education. (2012). *Progress in international reading literacy study (PIRLS).* Retrieved from http://www.cmec.ca/134/Programs-and-Initiatives/Assessment/Progress-in-International-Reading-Literacy-Study-(PIRLS)/index.html

41 Ministry of Education, British Columbia. (2008). *Linking FSA 2008 grade 4 reading results to PIRLS 2006. Determining PIRLS school level performance based on school FSA scores.* Vancouver: Author. Retrieved from http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/assessment/08fsa_link_pirls.pdf

Chinese Taipei

Hwawei Ko
Ting-Ya Yu

Graduate Institute of Learning and Instruction, National Central University

Language and Literacy

Mandarin Chinese is the official language of Taiwan, as well as the language of instruction for most subjects at all school levels. Other local languages include Taiwanese, Hakka, and aboriginal languages. Students from first through sixth grade are required to study one local language spoken in Taiwan. From third grade on, English is obligatory as well. High schools offer additional, optional foreign language courses.[1]

As evidence of Taiwan's emphasis on literacy, one of the four primary policies listed by the Ministry of Education (MoE) is "to form literate citizens who can think independently and have self-esteem."[2] Several initiatives have been implemented to promote reading and literacy. For example, in 2000, MoE introduced the National Children's Reading Movement for young children to emphasize the importance of reading development and children's literature. The Focus 300 project has distributed additional funds to 300 primary and junior high schools in remote areas, for the purchase of books and related reading activities. In addition numerous volunteer groups are responsible for children's extracurricular reading at primary schools and in regional libraries. Story Mothers is one such group, comprised of volunteer mothers who prepare books and related reading activities for children such as storytelling, drama, and discussions.

Taiwan also has two extremely popular children's reading club websites where children can read, watch, discuss, and write about books. The Ministry of Education supports one of these—Open Book. The other, Children's Literary Museum, is funded by the Council for Cultural Affairs.[3, 4]

In 2005, the Taiwan Reading and Culture Foundation initiated the Philanthropic Library to provide books for group reading in schools.[5] In the same year, the Hsin-Yi Foundation introduced Bookstart activities for children up to three years old in the public libraries.[6] In 2011, MoE began promoting Bookstart activities for all first grade students.[7]

Overview of the Education System

The government of Taiwan has adopted a centralized educational administration system characterized by national standards for curriculum and assessment (i.e., senior high school and college entrance examinations). All schools in Taiwan adhere to the national curriculum standards, use approved textbooks, and prepare their students to pass college entrance examinations.

The current education system in Taiwan encompasses basic, intermediate, advanced, and returning education. Basic education includes kindergarten, primary school, and junior high school. Intermediate education includes senior high school and vocational education. Advanced education includes junior college, university, and graduate school. Returning education refers to schools for continuing education and supplementary schools. Special education is provided at all levels for students with physical and mental disabilities.

Since 1968, a nine-year compulsory education program for basic education (primary and junior high school) has been in place, with basic education divided into three levels: Level One (Grades 1–3); Level Two (Grades 4–6); and Level Three (Grades 7–9). Children begin Grade 1 when they turn six, and all children in Taiwan are required to complete these nine years of education.

Two types of institutions provide intermediate education above the junior high school level: senior high schools and senior vocational schools, both requiring three years to complete. Senior high school students take courses that prepare them for a college or university education. Senior vocational schools offer courses in areas such as agriculture, industry, business, marine products, nursing, home economics, drama, and art.

Advanced education includes junior college and university programs. Junior colleges fall into two categories: five-year junior colleges and two-year junior colleges, each having different admission requirements. Five-year junior colleges admit junior high school graduates and two-year junior colleges admit senior vocational high school graduates. University programs require four years of study; however, students have the flexibility to fulfill their requirements in three to six years. Specialized undergraduate programs such as dentistry or medicine require six to seven years of study, including a one-year internship period. Graduate programs leading to a master's or doctoral degree require one to four years and two to seven years, respectively. Students entering graduate school as part of on-the-job training may be granted an extension if they are unable to finish the required courses or complete their thesis or dissertation in time.

Returning education provides citizens with an alternative means of achieving their educational goals. Returning education is classified into three main categories: basic education, advanced study, and short-term supplementary education. A wide range of courses are offered as returning education, at different levels of difficulty. Courses include literacy education, cooking, pottery, flower arrangement, economics, Chinese or Western philosophy, and psychology; and the length of time required for a program varies according to the individual curriculum.

In addition to compulsory education, most of Taiwan's young children attend kindergarten and daycare, the majority of which are privately owned. In 2010, of the 183,901 children enrolled in preprimary institutions, nearly 61 percent were enrolled in private institutions.[8] To ensure that every child receives proper care and education, financial support for preprimary education is available from the government for five-year-old children. The stipend is 15,000 New Taiwan Dollars ($500 USD) per semester, per child.

Language/Reading Curriculum in the Fourth Grade

Reading Policy

A clear statement of the country's reading policy is included in the *General Guidelines of Grade 1–9 Curriculum*, published and implemented in 2003 and revised in 2011 by MoE.[9] The curriculum's section on language includes guidelines for Chinese (Mandarin), dialects, and English instruction. Because Chinese is the language of testing for PIRLS 2006 and 2011 in Taiwan, the following summary presents a description of the Chinese reading section.

Summary of National Curriculum

The Chinese reading curriculum contains general goals for students' academic attainment and requirements for the three levels of basic education, as well as guidelines for reading materials and instruction. For reading at primary grades, the goal is to cultivate students' abilities to use the Chinese language. Students are expected to listen, speak, read, and write effectively in order to think, comprehend, reason, coordinate, discuss, appreciate, and create. Moreover, students should be motivated to read extensively and to appreciate literature and Chinese culture. Also, students should learn to use the Internet and other tools to encourage independent learning.

Generally, students in Grades 4–6 are to learn strategies they will need to learn from reading. Goals for these students are the following:

- Be familiar with the orthographies, sounds, and meanings of new words, and use them flexibly, distinguishing between the writing styles of spoken and classical Chinese;

- Form a habit of reading extracurricular books;

- Regulate reading strategies to promote reading speed and efficiency;

- Understand the main ideas and structure of texts;

- Have a general understanding of grammar and rhetorical skills;

- Recognize basic stylistic features of texts;

- Master reading strategies for different kinds of texts;

- Understand the tones and feelings of texts;

- Search for information in the library to enhance self-learning;

- Use reference books to gain independent problem-solving abilities;

- Learn to compile, abstract, and organize information;

- Have a general understanding of different types of text, and be able to use words and structures appropriate to the contexts of these text types;

- Enjoy words and voices that communicate and express different things in different contexts;

- Discuss the content of readings, and share thoughts with others;

- Understand expressions of respect for people, things, and objects;

- Cultivate the spirit of group participation by engaging in reading activities that enhance interactions;

- Read classical and modern literature from China, Taiwan, and foreign sources;

- Connect reading materials to the real world;

- Apply knowledge of organizational structures (e.g., sequential, causal, contrast) to reading;

- Use computers and other technology to enhance language ability;

- Read attentively and be mindful of details;

- Read content thoroughly and develop thoughts broadly;

- Grasp the process of problem solving in texts; and

♦ Think critically about the content of texts.

Reading Instruction in the Primary Grades

The *General Guidelines of Grade 1–9 Curriculum* lists the following guidelines for effective practices for teachers:

♦ Reading is the center of language instruction; however, reading should be learned in conjunction with listening, speaking, composition, and writing.

♦ Student-centered instruction of comprehension strategies should be considered in order to cultivate independent reading abilities.

♦ Teaching a text should begin with an overall review, followed by a paragraph-by-paragraph analysis to understand the content in depth, and then a study of the format, rhetoric, structure, characteristic, and style of the text.

♦ Comprehension strategies for various structures of texts should be provided and should consider students' background knowledge.[10]

Generally, teachers of Chinese adhere closely to the textbooks and workbooks, feeling obligated to teach all content therein. In teaching Chinese, most teachers follow a set of procedures and all instructional activities comply with textbooks and workbooks. For example, in first grade, lessons always begin with a warm-up activity, mostly through choral reading or questioning, to review lessons and preview the new lesson. This is followed by a variety of activities to consolidate learning, and the lesson ends with desk work. In third grade and higher, teaching procedures are similar, although with more extended and integrated activities as the focus of the lessons. Activities such as brainstorming or dramatization are used to reinforce a lexical or linguistic focus for the lesson, or to elaborate on and enlighten the text.[11]

In fourth grade, approximately 60 percent of classroom time is focused on character instruction and practice.[12] A common practice of classroom instruction is for the teacher to specify the character by writing it on the blackboard and students to model the teacher's writing by tracing the character in the air.[13] Many teachers believe that without proper knowledge of Chinese characters, students cannot understand texts well. However, research indicates that from second grade on, students read by the unit of word, not by character.[14]

Instructional Materials

Since the government of Taiwan has adopted a national curriculum standard, schools have been required to follow regulations for selecting instructional materials for students. In general, publishers compile Chinese textbooks according to the guidelines in the *General Guidelines of Grade 1–9 Curriculum.* These textbooks are examined by a committee formed by MoE, and a list of approved texts is released. Schools then form a textbook selection committee comprised of teachers, administrators, parents, and subject specialists to choose appropriate texts for their students from this list. Many teachers also use library materials for extracurricular reading and student assignments.

Use of Technology

Almost all primary schools have computer laboratories or computers in the classrooms, and teachers are asked to integrate technology into different subjects. Students are required to take computer literacy classes and are often assigned tasks, which require them to collect information on the Internet.[15, 16]

Second-language Instruction

As mentioned above, students in third grade receive lessons in English as a second language. However, qualified English teachers are in great demand. The Ministry of Education provides subsidies to schools wishing to hire more qualified foreign teachers who speak English, especially in disadvantaged areas.

Students with Reading Difficulties

In Taiwan, the Special Education Law was first introduced in 1984 and revised in 1997. The law mandates that there must be schools offering special educational programs and medical doctors or therapists to provide diagnosis and treatment or rehabilitation. The law also recognizes learning disabilities as a category of special education, and ensures educational services for children and youths with these disabilities, including reading disabilities. The Special Education Unit, established by MoE, oversees policymaking and education program administration relative to the Special Education Law.

Diagnostic Testing

Regular classroom teachers or parents identify students suspected of having reading disabilities. After identification, children are evaluated by trained special education teachers in local school districts or by clinical psychologists at hospitals. Following diagnosis, a child is observed for one year to confirm

that "general instruction from regular education" cannot improve the child's reading. However, the major problem with the learning disabilities criteria in Taiwan is the lack of an operational definition of "general instruction from regular education." Even with a confirmed diagnosis, few effective evidence-based programs exist for students with learning or reading disabilities.[17]

Instruction for Children with Reading Difficulties

Students identified as having learning disabilities are eligible for various special education services, such as collaborative consultation or co-teaching in their regular classroom, and a special education resource room. In most cases, students remaining in regular classrooms are sent to resource classrooms periodically to reinforce the material being taught.

Teachers and Teacher Education

In 1994, the Teacher Education Act deregulated teacher education. This enabled all universities, as well as teacher colleges, to establish teacher education programs to produce K–12 teachers. According to a 2005 amendment to the Teacher Education Act, all teacher colleges were to transform into education universities and provide the same teacher education programs as regular universities.

In order to become a teacher, a college degree with up to 40 extra credits in a teacher education program is necessary. The 40-credit-hour program for primary school teacher education includes course requirements in each of the following areas: education foundations (e.g., educational psychology, philosophy, and sociology); general methods (e.g., principles of counseling, testing, and measurement); teaching methods (e.g., nature and social science); and basic subject content (e.g., children's literature, general mathematics, and science). Upon completion of the program, all primary school teachers are expected to be able to teach any subject when needed.

Following graduation, prospective teachers participate in a one-semester supervised practicum at a school, after which they must pass a national written qualification examination. Once qualified, new teachers are eligible to interview for employment. The Bureau of Education in each regional government is responsible for recruiting teachers for local schools. The bureau forms a committee comprised of college professors, school administrators, teachers, parents, and local government personnel to select teachers.

All graduates from teacher education programs, either from teacher colleges or universities, compete with each other for job openings in all schools.

In past years, the competition has been great, and large salaries and excellent benefits led to a high demand for teacher education programs.[18] However, due to a decrease in the national birth rate, more recently universities have been closing teacher education programs.

Requirements for Ongoing Professional Development in Reading for Teachers
Teachers are required to participate in in-service education for a certain number of credit hours each year, although this number varies across schools and districts. Each school arranges its own training program for its teachers; alternatively, teachers may attend seminars and workshops related to their own interests and needs. After each seminar or workshop, participants receive a statement of credits earned.

Following PIRLS 2006, more reading instruction-related workshops became available for primary school teachers. This is described in detail in the Impact and Use of PIRLS section, below.

Monitoring Student Progress in Reading

In Grades 1–9, student progress is evaluated twice in each grade, and parents are sent a report card at the end of each semester. Some schools have a school-wide examination for each subject at each grade level. But, the classroom teacher is responsible for evaluating his or her students.

After graduating from junior high school, students who wish to progress into intermediate or advanced education must take national or regional entrance examinations. There are two main national entrance examinations: one for entrance to senior high school or senior vocational school, and one for entrance to colleges or universities. Regional intermediate schools and private schools have their own entrance examinations. Recently, the Ministry of Education has launched the Taiwan Assessment of Student Achievement program (TASA) to assess the achievement of the education goals outlined in the *General Guidelines of Grade 1–9 Curriculum* TASA is a nationwide assessment planned for students in Grades 4, 6, 8, and 11. First administered in 2007, TASA has a planned three-year cycle. The subjects tested include Chinese, mathematics, science, social studies, and English. All participating students are required to complete questionnaires concerning their personal and family backgrounds. TASA will be used to create a database for the study of Chinese Taipei's students' progress and the education system in the future.

Impact and Use of PIRLS

Taiwan first participated in PIRLS in 2006. Following the release of the PIRLS 2006 results in 2007, a national report and a pamphlet summary of PIRLS 2006 were distributed among teachers and parents. A consensus was then reached that no true reading instruction was being provided in classrooms. As a result, the Ministry of Education and reading researchers have initiated projects to encourage university professors and primary school teachers to work together to develop reading strategy instruction, and have published the *Reading Comprehension Strategies Instructional Manual* for teachers' reference.[19]

The regional government has also sponsored many reading-related workshops for teachers, focusing on such topics as the international definitions and criteria of reading literacy. Some teachers have become aware that reading is more than decoding, and that students need more comprehension strategies to help them integrate and synthesize what they read. Some teachers have begun to model the question types used in PIRLS and to ask questions about multiple perspectives in their Chinese language class.

Meanwhile, MoE has realized that most Chinese language teachers who have been trained in Chinese are not familiar with reading instruction. The Ministry of Education has now initiated national reading centers, involving universities around Chinese Taipei, to develop reading instruction models and instruction materials to help teachers learn about teaching reading efficiently.

Suggested Readings

Ministry of Education. (2011). *2011 education in Taiwan*. Taipei City: Author.

References

1   Government Information Office. (2010). *The Republic of China yearbook 2010*. Taipei City: Author. Retrieved from http://www.gio.gov.tw/taiwan-website/5-gp/yearbook/

2   Ministry of Education. (2011). *2011 education in Taiwan*. Taipei City: Author.

3   Openbook. (n.d.). Retrieved from http://www.openbook.moe.edu.tw

4   Children's Literary Museum. (n.d.). Retrieved from http://children.cca.gov.tw/home.php

5   Taiwan Reading and Culture Foundation. (n.d.). Retrieved from http:// www.twnread.org.tw

6   Hisn-Yi Foundation. (n.d.). Retrieved from http://www.bookstart.org.tw

7   Ministry of Education. (2011). *2011 education in Taiwan*. Taipei City: Author.

8   Ministry of Education. (2011). *2011 education statistics*. Taipei City: Author.

9   Ministry of Education. (2011). *General guidelines of grade 1–9 curriculum of elementary and junior high school education*. Taipei City: Author.

10 Ibid.

11 Chern, C.L. (1999). Literacy instruction in Taiwan: Teachers' beliefs and their classroom practices. In C.Y. Mee & N.S. Moi (Eds.), *Language instructional issues in Asian classroom* (pp. 16–28). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

12 *PIRLS 2006: Taiwan national report* (in Chinese).

13 Chern, C.L. (1999). Literacy instruction in Taiwan: Teachers' beliefs and their classroom practices. In C.Y. Mee & N.S. Moi (Eds.), *Language instructional issues in Asian classroom* (pp. 16–28). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

14 Chen, M. & Ko, H. (2011). Exploring the eye movement patterns of Chinese children reading texts: A developmental perspective. *Journal of Research in Reading, 34*(2), 232–246.

15 Ministry of Education. (2005). *Information and internet education.* Taipei City: Author. Retrieved from http://english.moe.gov.tw/ct.asp?xItem= 256&ctNode=514&mp=1

16 Ministry of Education. (2008). 教育部 中小學資訊教育白皮書 [White paper on information and internet education]. Taipei City: Author.

17 Tzeng, S.-J. (2007). Learning disabilities in Taiwan: A case of cultural constraints on the education of students with disabilities. *Learning Disabilities Research and Practice, 22*(3), 170–175.

18 Fwu, B. & Wang, H. (2002). The social status of teachers in Taiwan. *Comparative Education, 36*(2), 211–224.

19 Ministry of Education. (2010). *Reading comprehension strategies instructional manual.* Taipei City: Author.

Colombia

PIRLS 2011

Isabel Fernandes
Martha Rocha
Gabriela Villamizar
Colombian Institute for the Evaluation of Education (ICFES)

Language and Literacy

The official language of Colombia is Spanish, though numerous additional languages and dialects are used by different ethnic groups living in certain regions of the country. These languages also are recognized as official in their respective territories and include the following: about 65 indigenous languages in twelve linguistic families, such as Arawak, Chibcha, Quechua, and Uitoto, among others; two creoles with different lexical bases; romance languages; and the national sign language used by the deaf community.

The Constitution of 1991 established that bilingual education would be provided in communities with their own linguistic traditions.[1] Thus, educational regulations allow individual schools to define their own curricula and study plans for Grades 1–11 of primary and secondary education, though schools are required to adhere to basic competency standards of guidelines set by the Ministry of National Education (MEN) for each subject.

Since 2011, MEN has begun implementing the *National Reading and Writing Plan*, which aims to "ensure that Colombians incorporate reading and writing into their daily lives, read and write more, read and write better, and enjoy it." [2] MEN also has begun to implement the *National Reading and Libraries Plan*, which aims to support the "development of a comprehensive national policy, consistent and sustainable development, and strengthening of public policies in the country." [3] In addition, District Councils for the Promotion of Reading have been created in numerous cities to provide advice to the district administration regarding policies, plans, and programs that promote reading.

Since 1988, the International Book Fair of Bogota has been a tradition that "has been responsible for publishing development and has been the engine of reading, promotion, and marketing of books in Colombia and in the markets of other Latin American countries." [4] In addition, initiatives such as the International Essay Contest, the Children and Youth Festival of Poetry, and the National Short Story Competition have been launched to promote reading and literacy.

In 2007, the annual National Short Story Competition began as a teaching strategy to promote creative writing among students, teachers, and school administrators in primary through higher education. All schools are invited to participate, and 30 students and five teachers are awarded with participation in the Hay Festival of literature, held annually in the city of Cartagena.

Overview of the Education System

The Constitution of 1991 decentralized social services, including education, based on the principle that such services are delivered more efficiently when they are close to their clients or beneficiaries. Responsibilities at the national, local, and school levels were thus defined within this framework. At the national level, MEN develops policies and educational strategies, establishes standards, allocates resources for service delivery, and carries out inspection and supervision of the sector. Local educational authorities in departments (states) and municipalities do the following: manage teaching and administrative staff in public schools; implement in-service training programs; provide materials, advice, and support to schools; and inspect and monitor the respective area of jurisdiction. Schools design and implement curricula and study plans, which are prepared in accordance with guidelines issued at the national level.

Education is provided by the government, or by private schools with government permission in urban or rural areas. Preprimary education comprises two preparatory years and one compulsory year. Basic education comprises nine grades, divided into two cycles: basic primary school (Grades 1–5), and basic secondary school (Grades 6–9).[5] Basic education is offered at 23,414 primary schools, 58 percent of which are public.[6] Middle secondary education (Grades 10–11) follows basic education and some schools also offer an additional two-year cycle for students to earn a Higher Normal School degree, which provides initial teacher training for those who plan to work at the preprimary and primary basic education levels. There are also several types of higher education, including technical, technological, university undergraduate programs, specializations, and master's and doctoral programs.

According to 2010 statistics, 5,084,966 children attended primary school in Colombia; of these, 4,437,235 (87%) students attended public schools.[7] Fourth grade enrollment was 941,139 students.[8]

Language/Reading Curriculum in the Fourth Grade

Colombia has no national curriculum for any of the subjects taught in compulsory education. Schools have the autonomy to define their curricula and study plans, as part of each school's Institutional Educational Project. However, schools are obligated to cover nine areas of basic and fundamental education, one of which is language, and at least 80 percent of each school's curriculum must correspond to the development of these key areas. The school defines the remaining 20 percent to meet specific educational needs related to its sociocultural and geographical environment.

While there is no national curriculum, MEN has defined basic competency standards in language, mathematics, natural and social sciences, citizenship skills, and English as a foreign language.[9] The standards are the official guidelines on which MEN bases periodic evaluation of the quality of education in Grades 3, 5, and 9. MEN and the secretaries of education disseminate these standards and provide consultation on how to incorporate the standards into schools' curricula as well as instruction.

MEN divides the standards into the following educational levels: Grades 1–3, Grades 4–5, Grades 6–7, Grades 8–9, and Grades 10–11. The standards provide learning goals in terms of skills, which refer to student articulation of knowledge and expertise. These goals guide the educational process to help ensure that students achieve the skill level necessary by the end of each educational cycle.

The basic standards for the area of language include five factors:

♦ Text production—Students use oral language in communication, though intonation and articulation, and produce written texts that respond to different communication needs, following a strategic process in their preparation;

♦ Text comprehension and interpretation—Students understand and interpret different types of texts, use search strategies, and organize and store information;

♦ Literature—Students develop reading hypotheses about the relationship between the various elements of a literary text and its context;

♦ Media and other symbolic systems—Students evaluate mass media and select information for use in creating new texts, as well as evaluate non-verbal codes used in authentic situations; and

- Communication ethics—Students do the following: understand and analyze the elements, roles, relationships, and rules of communication; use these to infer the intentions and expectations of communication exchanges; and develop more effective communication processes.

Some of these factors also articulate a specific knowledge goal as well as a knowledge purpose, which outlines the processes that students will use once they have acquired the necessary pedagogical tools.

Beyond these five factors, the basic competency standards also describe basic sub-processes which apply across factors and are related to student characteristics and school environment. These sub-processes serve as a guide for student language development.

Reading Instruction in the Primary Grades

Instructional Materials

The materials used for reading instruction include text and picture books, arts and sciences books, and instructional manuals. Teachers and principals select textbooks and other teaching materials that are consistent with the school's Institutional Educational Project. Local secretaries of education and MEN also provide resources (e.g, libraries, laboratories), usually in the context of specific policies and programs. Teachers also can use resource centers and libraries to view or purchase materials.

Secretaries of education and non-profit organizations sponsor the Internet portal *Colombia Aprende* (Colombia Learns)[10] and other educational websites that publish a wide range of materials to support teachers in developing educational activities. Furthermore, some regions of the country have invested in education programs and technologies such as computers with advanced technology, databases, electronic texts, and specialized software.

Use of Technology

The role of technology in teaching reading is not explicit in the government's plans for the use of information and communications technology (ICT). However, the *Ten-Year National Plan of Education* (2006–16) includes seven macro targets for the "technological renovation and use of ICT in education:"[11]

- Equipment and infrastructure;

- Evaluation and quality standards;

- Strengthening of reading and writing processes;

♦   Strengthening of learning processes through ICT;

♦   Pedagogical innovation and interaction of those involved in education;

♦   Strengthening of educational projects and monitoring mechanisms; and

♦   Initial and ongoing teacher training in the use of ICT.

Ten goals have been developed from these macro objectives, mostly for the first four years of the ten-year plan. Implementation over the following six years will allow for improved integration of ICT in student learning at all levels of education in Colombia.

Role of Reading Specialists

Language teachers in Colombia generally handle students with identified reading difficulties. Depending on the type of problem identified, students may be referred to speech therapy specialists or psychologists for professional support or treatment. The specialized care is paid for by parents or is provided through the public health services available in each region. As part of the *National Reading and Writing Plan*, reading specialists also have contributed to formulating guidelines to enrich the process of reading and writing.

Second-language Instruction

Article 21 of the General Education Law (1994) stipulates that one objective of compulsory education is "the acquisition of elements of conversation and reading in at least one foreign language." [12] As part of their Institutional Educational Project, schools have the autonomy to teach foreign languages as they see fit.

In Colombia, 1.4 percent of the population speaks a language other than Spanish (see Language and Literacy, above),[13] but not all of these languages have written codes. In these minority ethnic communities, basic education instruction is provided in the minority language while Spanish is taught as a second language. This allows schools to create integrated bilingual spaces while preserving the minority mother tongue within the school context. MEN and the secretaries of education provide teacher training in these languages.[14]

MEN also has set basic standards for English as a foreign language because English provides access to a global society. MEN also has stated that, by 2019, all fourth grade students must have attained at least the basic level in English, according to the standards identified in the Common European Framework.[15]

Students with Reading Difficulties

Instruction for Children with Reading Difficulties

The General Education Law outlines methods of providing education to population groups with certain characteristics, including those with physical, sensory, mental, cognitive, emotional disabilities, or exceptional intellectual abilities, and the formal education system must serve these students through inclusive education. Schools must provide comprehensive support, including specialized classrooms and teachers, to address the needs of these students.

Schools design specific strategies for assessing and treating students with learning difficulties, including problems related to reading and writing. Schools can apply for specialist care for these students, using therapies paid for by families.

Teachers and Teacher Education

Teacher Education Specific to Reading

There are three educational tracks that can be followed to become a basic primary school teacher in Colombia:

♦   Teachers may earn a Higher Normal School degree, which includes up to two years of study in middle secondary education. Higher Normal Schools are academic institutions that provide initial training for preprimary and primary basic education teachers. As of 2010, 27,489 students had obtained degrees in this way.[16]

♦   Teachers may graduate from an education degree program, which includes up to four or five years of study in a vocational or undergraduate program. Teachers who earn degrees in the Spanish language (or another language) most frequently teach language, especially in basic primary and secondary education. As of 2010, 86,718 students had earned undergraduate degrees as licensed teachers.[17]

♦   Teachers may graduate from any (i.e., non-education) undergraduate program, which includes up to four or five years of study at a college or university. However, to teach language in basic primary and secondary education, a graduate degree in education is required. As of 2010, 35,595 students had obtained graduate degrees in this way.[18] Similarly, experts, technicians or technologists (corresponding to a degree after three years of college), or classified staff with at least the fourth degree in the teaching ranks, and with experience or training in education, can teach in basic primary and secondary education.

PIRLS 2011 ENCYCLOPEDIA
148   COLOMBIA

TIMSS & PIRLS
International Study Center
Lynch School of Education, Boston College

IEA

In Colombia, continuous teacher professional development is the responsibility of higher education institutions that offer professional courses, continuing education, and further specialization endorsed by the General Law of Education. In departments and municipalities that are certified to administer educational services autonomously in their area of jurisdiction, Territorial Committees for Teacher Training provide training and professional development guidelines to improve educational quality.

In both the public and private sectors, higher education institutions are encouraged to offer professional development courses. In order to provide quality education, development, and professional growth, these institutions must ensure that courses are conducted by educators with the qualifications (i.e., training, experience, performance, skills, and attributes) "essential to guide everything relating to the admission, retention, promotion and retirement of teachers." [19]

Monitoring Student Progress in Reading

The Colombian Institute for the Evaluation of Education (ICFES) is responsible for assessing the quality of education in the country and periodically conducts examinations that evaluate students' skills in language, mathematics, natural sciences, and citizenship. Since 2002, language examinations evaluate reading comprehension levels of all students in Grades 5 and 9; as of 2012, students at Grade 3 also will be assessed. The design of these examinations is based on the provisions of the basic standards of competencies. In addition, questionnaires are used to obtain demographic information about family and school contexts in order to understand what factors are associated with students' examination performance. Assessment results are made available to the public on the ICFES website.[20] Additionally, ICFES produces reports with detailed analyses of differences between various reference groups (e.g., by gender, socioeconomic level, sector, rural vs. urban regions, and public vs. private), as well as the background factors that have the strongest relationship with achievement results.

Each school has the autonomy to define its own strategies for student evaluation and promotion, in accordance with MEN guidelines. Evaluations conducted in schools should aim to assess student progress, evaluate the school's educational processes, identify pedagogical tools to support students with learning disabilities, determine student promotion, and identify and develop

educational plans. Evaluation should identify student strengths and weaknesses, and should enable the school to design and implement remedial strategies to overcome the latter.

Generally, classroom assessments are guided by MEN Decree 1290 of 2009, which establishes the possibility of using different evaluation techniques in the classroom, and teachers apply various forms of assessment (e.g., oral or written tests, papers) at their discretion.[21, 22] MEN's current recommended strategy to assess student learning involves evaluation of group work, interacting with the environment, task completion, and providing explanations to classmates.

Report cards include the criteria for evaluation and promotion, a grading scale, the time period in which instruction took place, the student's grades, and follow-up actions to improve student performance. Parents are regularly invited to schools to receive these reports and to discuss student performance as well as strategies to maintain or improve the student's academic progress.

Impact and Use of PIRLS

Colombia participated in PIRLS 2001 and Colombia's students obtained a score of 422 points on the PIRLS scale, below the international average (500). The average age of the fourth grade students who took the 2001 assessment was 10.5 years.

Because of the country's experience with PIRLS 2001, reading plans were implemented to improve students' reading skills and teacher training programs were improved to strengthen the education provided in this field. Currently, some researchers are using the PIRLS assessment results to further explore teaching practices, use of materials, and learning strategies, which will provide further evidence with which to strengthen policies to improve educational quality in Colombia.

Suggested Readings

Ley 115 de Febrero 8 de 1994, Ministerio de Educación Nacional, Cámara de Representantes, Senado de la República (1994). Bogotá: Gobierno Nacional de la República de Colombia.

Ministerio de Educación Nacional. (2006). *Estándares básicos de competencias en lenguaje, matemáticas, ciencias y ciudadanas. Estándares básicos de competencias en lenguaje* (Primera edición). Bogotá: Ministerio de Educación Nacional.

Ministerio de Educación Nacional. (2006). *Formar en lenguas extranjeras: inglés ¡el reto!* Retrieved from http://www.colombiaaprende.edu.co/html/mediateca/1607/articles-115375_archivo.pdf

References

1 Constitución política de la República de Colombia [Constitution of the Republic of Colombia] (1991). Bogotá: Presidencia de la República. Retrieved from http://web.presidencia.gov.co/constitucion/index.pdf

2 Viana, M. (2011). *Síntesis plan nacional de lectura y escritura, versión preliminar* [National reading and writing synthesis, preliminary version]. Unpublished document. Bogotá, Colombia.

3 Ministerio de Cultura. (2009). *Plan nacional de lectura y bibliotecas. Colombia*. Bogotá: Author. Retrieved from http://www.cerlalc.org/redplanes/secciones/Planes/Colombia/PNLB_3erEncuentro_Redplanes_09Co.pdf

4 Promoción de Turismo, Inversión y Exportaciones. (n.d.). *Feria internacional del libro de Bogotá: Epicentro mundial de la lectura, historia de la feria* [International Book Fair of Bogotá: Global epicenter of reading, history of the show]. Retrieved from http://www.colombia.travel/es/turista-internacional/actividad/historia-y-tradicion/ferias-y-fiestas/mayo/feria-internacional-del-libro-de-bogota

5 Ministerio de Educación Nacional. (2009). *Organización del sistema educativo. Conceptos generales de la educacicón preescolar, básica y media* [Organization of education systems. General concepts of preschool, primary, and secondary education]. Bogotá: Author. Retrieved from http://www.mineducacion.gov.co/1621/articles-205294_archivo_pdf.pdf

6 Ministerio de Educación Nacional. (2010). *Statistics of the education sector*. Retrieved from http://menweb.mineducacion.gov.co/seguimiento/estadisticas/principal.php?seccion=1&id_categoria=2&consulta=ee_sector&nivel=1&dpto=&mun=&ins=&sede=

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

9 Ministerio de Educación Nacional. (2006). *Estándares básicos de competencias en lenguaje, matemáticas, ciencias y ciudadanas* [Basic standards of competence in language, mathematics, science and citizenship.] Bogotá: Author. Retrieved from http://www.mineducacion.gov.co/cvn/1665/articles-116042_archivo_pdf.pdf

10 Colombia Aprende. (n.d.). Retrieved from http://www.colombiaaprende.edu.co

11 Ministerio de Educación Nacional. (2006). *Plan decenal de educació*n. Bogotá: Author. Retrieved from http://www.plandecenal.edu.co/html/1726/articles-140247_archivo_1.pdf

12 Ley 115 de 1994 (1994). Bogotá: Congreso de la República. Retrieved from http://www.alcaldiabogota.gov.co/sisjur/normas/Norma1.jsp?i=292

13 Banco de la República. (2001). *Datos demográficos sobre etnias indígenas* [Demographic data on indigenous groups]. Retrieved from http://www.banrep.gov.co/blaavirtual/letra-l/lengua/clas3.html

14 Grupo de Investigación Pedagógica. Ministerio de Educación Nacional. (n.d.). *Lineamientos curriculares de la lengua Castellana. Áreas obligatorias y fundamentals* [Curriculum guidelines of the Spanish language. Core areas and fundamentals]. Bogotá: Author.

15 Ministerio de Educación Nacional. (2006). *Formar en lenguas extranjeras: inglés ¡el reto!* Bogotá: Author. Retrieved from http://www.colombiaaprende.edu.co/html/mediateca/1607/articles-115375_archivo.pdf

16 Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística. (2010). *Personal docente en básica primaria según último nivel*

educativo aprobado por el docente, según sexo, por secciones del país [Teachers in basic primary education according to the latest approved by the teacher, by gender, and by regions of the country]. Retreived from http://www.dane.gov.co/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=108&Itemid=58

17 Ibid.

18 Decreto 1278 de junio 19 de 2002, *"por la cual se expide el estatuto de profesionalización docente"* [Decree 1278 of June 19, 2002, on the professional status of teachers] (2002). Bogotá: Presidencia de la República. Retrieved from http://www.mineducacion.gov.co/1621/articles-86102_archivo_pdf.pdf

19 Ibid.

20 Instituto Colombiano para la Evaluación de la Educación. (2010). Retrieved from http://www.icfes.gov.co/saber59/

21 Decreto 1290 (2009). Bogotá: Ministerio de Educación Nacional. Retrieved from http://www.mineducacion.gov.co/1621/articles-187765_archivo_pdf_decreto_1290.pdf

22 Ministerio de Educación Nacional. (2009). *Fundamentaciones y orientaciones para la implementación del decreto 1290 de 2009*. Bogotá: Author. Retrieved from http://www.mineducacion.gov.co/1621/articles-213769_archivo_pdf_evaluacion.pdf

Croatia

Jasminka Buljan Culej

National Center for External Evaluation of Education

Language and Literacy

> The Croatian language and the Latin alphabet shall be in official use in the Republic of Croatia. In individual local units another language and the Cyrillic or some other alphabet may, along with the Croatian language and the Latin alphabet, be introduced into official use under conditions specified by law.[1]

The official language in the Republic of Croatia is Croatian. However, members of national minorities have the right to be educated in their mother tongue at all levels of education, from pre-school to post-secondary (national minority languages present in Croatian schools are Serbian, Hungarian, Italian, German, Austrian, Macedonian, Albanian, Czech, Slovene, Ukrainian, and Slovak). Since 2008, foreign languages are studied from first grade onward.

Croatian language and literature are divided into four components: Croatian language, literature, linguistic expression, and media culture. In the lower grades of primary education, the primary goal is to accomplish literacy tasks that enable students to manage everyday situations. Practical use of the Croatian language is emphasized, as opposed to learning linguistic terms on a theoretical level, to facilitate the acquisition of knowledge and skills, develop competence, and adopt values and attitudes related to the language. A further goal is to develop children's reading interests and literary skills, with a critical approach to various media and their contents.

The curriculum places emphasis on students with special needs by providing conditions for learning in accordance with their abilities. Continuing professional development of teachers provides the skills necessary for working with such pupils.

The Ministry of Science, Education and Sports is continuously conducting research and development projects related to student achievement in the areas of reading and writing. School and local libraries play a major role in the development of literary skills.

Overview of the Educational System

In the Republic of Croatia, the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports is responsible for administration of the education system. Specifically, the ministry oversees activities related to the following: preschool, primary, and secondary education in the country and promoting international cooperation of education abroad; curriculum; textbooks and educational standards; development of the education system; professional development and teacher education for nursery, primary, and secondary school teachers; student standards; inspection and professional and pedagogic oversight; establishment of educational institutions and monitoring their compliance with the law; securing financial and material conditions for work in education; qualifying children, youth, and adults for acquiring technical knowledge and skills, and activities of various associations in its domain. The ministry also performs additional activities related to the following: curriculum design for higher education domestically and abroad; securing financial and material conditions for work; pre-service education and professional development of teachers; accommodation, food service, and other issues related to the student standards; and inspection in higher education. Lastly, the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports provides the most financial support for the education sector, although other ministries and local governments also allocate funds for education.

The education system in the Republic of Croatia consists of the following levels: preschool education, primary education, secondary education, and higher education (see Exhibit 1).

Preschool education encompasses education and childcare for children ages six months to six years (school age). It is realized through educational, health, nutritional, and social care programs. Although preschool education is not compulsory, data indicate that 99.6 percent of children were enrolled in preschool education programs during the 2009–10 school year, both as part of regular nursery programs and pre-school programs in the year before primary school.[2]

Primary education lasts eight years (Grades 1–8) and is compulsory and free for all children between the ages of six and fifteen. Children must be six years old by the end of March to enroll in school the following September. Primary education consists of three segments: compulsory education, provided in regular primary schools and special institutions for students with developmental difficulties; art education, provided in primary music and dance schools; and adult education at the primary level, provided in regular schools

and specialized institutions. Music education also is conducted in certain regular primary schools as a separate educational program.

Exhibit 1:   Educational System for Acquiring Key Competencies

	Age	
State Matura		
Grade 4	17–18	SECONDARY SCHOOL
Grade 3	16–17	
Grade 2	15–16	
Grade 1	14–15	
Grade 8	13–14	PRIMARY SCHOOL
Grade 7	12–13	
Grade 6	11–12	
Grade 5	10–11	
Grade 4	9–10	
Grade 3	8–9	
Grade 2	7–8	
Grade 1	6–7	

Secondary education (Grades 1–4) enables all students, under equal conditions and according to each student's capabilities, to acquire knowledge and skills required for work or continuing education. Secondary schools vary based on the type of instruction plan and program offered, and include the following types: gymnasium (general or specialized), vocational or trade schools (technical, industrial, trade, and others), and art schools (music, dance, visual arts, and others).

The Republic of Croatia considers quality higher education to be a precondition for a successful society. Therefore, the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports seeks to foster an intellectual base which will effectively implement quality higher education via Croatia's universities, and two- and four-year colleges.[3]

Language/Reading Curriculum in the Fourth Grade

In 2005, the ministry began implementing a school reform project known as the *Croatian National Education Standard* (*Hrvatski nacionalni obrazovni standard*). The project marked the beginning of qualitative changes in primary school program content and introduced a new approach to teaching in primary schools that focused on students rather than on content. Within the project, an experimental syllabus was introduced in 5 percent of all primary schools during the 2005–06 school year. In accordance with recommendations of teachers who taught the experimental program and three subsequent professional revisions, subject committees created the *Syllabus for Primary School (Nastavni plan i program za osnovnu školu)*. The syllabus was implemented in August 2006 and contains the educational work plan for subjects from Grades 1–8. The *Syllabus for Primary School*, however, is not presented in the form of a curriculum, but rather as a catalogue, with education goals described for separately each subject, grade, and teaching unit.[4]

Reading Policy

Language and literature play major roles, both in primary school and in Croatian educational system overall. In preschool, children are taught the alphabet and how to put simple words together. Thus, the majority of children enter first grade with some reading skills. In Grades 1–4 of primary school, skills in reading and writing are developed. The development of reading literacy is intended to encourage students' verbal and written expression, providing new skills, enriching vocabulary, helping develop a system of values, and promoting the adoption of ethical standards, all of which are prerequisites for learning in all subjects. It is expected that, by the end of first grade, children are able to read and write.

The Croatian language is the most comprehensive subject in primary school, and is taught at all levels of primary education. Croatian language instruction is closely related to other subjects because all classes are conducted in Croatian. The fundamental aim is to enable students to communicate, making it possible to learn the content of all other courses and promote lifelong learning.

Summary of National Curriculum

Reading does not exist as a separate subject in Croatia's school curriculum; it is part of Croatian language and literature which is taught through both elementary and secondary levels. Croatian language as a subject includes four underlying components: Croatian language, literature, linguistic expression, and

media culture. The *Syllabus for Primary School* lists the following objectives for the teaching of these four components: [5]

♦ Croatian Language—Training students to successfully manage everyday situations, mastering the language resources needed for successful communication, developing an awareness of the need for linguistic knowledge, combatting fear of speaking, developing an awareness of the difference between the standard language and the native idiom, and gradually adopting the standard Croatian language.

♦ Literature—Developing familiarity with literary works, developing sensitivity to literary works, developing good reading habits, and training for independent reading of literary works.

♦ Linguistic Expression—Developing the ability to express experiences, feelings, thoughts, and attitudes; forming the habit of using correct pronunciation and spelling; and achieving a successful level of oral and written communication.

♦ Media Culture—Training for communication with various media, including theater, film, radio, the press, comic books, and computers; developing interest in theater, film, television, and radio; and learning to critique presentations in the theater, in film, and television and radio.

The curriculum emphasizes reading and writing, but does not prescribe how much time teachers should devote to each component. Teachers determine the order of addressing the various objectives, as well as the number of lessons required to introduce, practice, review, and evaluate the knowledge and skills acquired. The underlying components of the Croatian language and literature curriculum are closely related and intertwined, and they grow in parallel with the intellectual and linguistic development of students.

The first grade of primary education aims to develop the following skills in Croatian language as well as the following proficiencies in literature and linguistic expression:

♦ Croatian Language—Write letters of the alphabet and connecting them to phonemes; understand and distinguish between sound, letter, and word; combine phonemes and letters into words; learn the meanings of words; understand the term "sentence" in all kinds of situations; read and write words and sentences; distinguish lowercase from uppercase letters; engage in analytic-synthetic reading of short sentences; form a short text message independently; and distinguish among different types of sentences.

♦ Literature and Linguistic Expression—Learn how to express their own experiences in short poems appropriate to their age level, both in terms of content and style; distinguish between poetry and prose; become aware of short stories and distinguish among characters on the basis of their fundamental ethical qualities (e.g., good-bad); read and compose basic written messages; understand a stage play as a text intended for performance on stage; experience picture-books as texts closely related to pictures.

In second grade, students develop the following skills and proficiencies:

♦ Croatian Language—Understand different types of sentences; recognize a noun as a word used to name things around us; use correct spelling and the pronunciation of sounds such as *ije*, *je*, *e*, and *i*; recognize and distinguish between the letters *č* and *ć* in common words, and use this knowledge correctly in real-life situations; practice the correct writing and pronunciation of the sounds *dž* and *đ*; and practice writing capital letters in the names of the streets, squares, hills, lakes, and holidays.

♦ Literature and Linguistic Expression—Identify the parts of a poem (stanza and verse); develop reading skills; develop skills in retelling everyday situations; derive meaning from text and distinguish between main and secondary characters; identify the sequence of events in a story according to the plot; write an essay independently on a given topic; link words in a meaningful, clear and cohesive unit; shape and narrate a short story; recognize non-linguistic elements in communication; recognize time and place in a short story; develop awareness of character traits and their appearance; perceive the message of a story; and understand the causal and temporal connection among events in a story.

In the third grade, students develop the following skills and proficiencies:

♦ Croatian Language—Enhance knowledge about nouns, distinguishing common nouns from proper nouns and singular from plural; distinguish adjectives as words that describe nouns; recognize diminutives and augmentatives as types of nouns; and recognize verbs in sentences.

♦ Literature and Linguistic Expression—Distinguish between fictional and non-fictional events; recognize the use of repetition of verse to emphasize an idea; distinguish speech performance from general conversation; recognize and identify a theme in prose and poetry; understand a reference as a type of text that is verifiable and has the same meaning for all readers; identify the compositional structure of text (introduction, main part, and conclusion); enhance and develop imagination and creativity in writing; differentiate a tale as

a non-fictional story from a fairy tale as a fictional story; recognize a children's novel as a detailed text about children and their adventures; stimulate discussion, and become acquainted with the terms and rules of discussion and debate; compile stories on a variety of topics, paying attention to the composition of the text; report about a task performed, adhering to the chronological sequence of events; and apply previously acquired knowledge and skills.

In the fourth grade, students develop the following skills and proficiencies:

♦ Croatian Language—Enhance knowledge of the relationships between nouns, verbs, and adjectives; recognize the value of spoken language; identify rules for using lowercase and capital letters; identify direct and indirect speech and their use in writing; and apply previously acquired knowledge and skills.

♦ Literature and Linguistic Expression—Name main and secondary events in a story, and narrate independently; predict new events and combine them into a new story; recognize a poem as a literary text; name and explain basic features of a poem, and create poems and poetic images; recognize and distinguish between dialogue, monologue, and description; talk about an event from real life and pay attention to the order in which things happened (introduction, main part, and conclusion); learn how to interpret text; develop written and oral skills; interpret poems and identify lengths of different verses, rhythm, and rhyming scheme of poems; understand prose text; identify and distinguish among the parts of a fable (introduction, plot, and denouement); develop a habit of reading literary texts; experience prose text; and formulate and express opinions about characters.

Reading Instruction in the Primary Grades

The Republic of Croatia has no prescribed time for reading instruction. Reading instruction is conducted within the Croatian language and literature curriculum. For that subject, the curriculum prescribes five hours per week, or 175 hours during a school year. Teachers decide how much time to devote to a given component.

Instructional Materials

The Ministry of Education, Science, and Sports approves textbooks for Croatian language and literature.

Approval and procurement of textbooks is carried out under a special regulation. Textbooks are issued for regular primary schools, for classes in the language of national minorities, for students with special educational needs, and for children of Croatian citizens abroad. The teacher has the freedom to choose textbooks. The textbook must meet the scientific, ethnical, pedagogical, methodical, linguistic, and technical standards prescribed by the ministry responsible for education. The textbook is based on the curriculum, and its content must be changed when the curriculum is changed, or when the relevant professionals determine a need to introduce new concepts.[6]

Use of Technology

The *State Pedagogical Standard for Primary Education* (*Državni pedagoški standard osnovnoškolskog sustava odgoja i obrazovanja*) adopted standards for the construction of primary schools, and for the installation of the following equipment: telephones, Internet, intranet, alarm system, video surveillance, digital cameras, photocopiers, interactive whiteboards, LCD projectors, blackboards, desks, chairs, and cabinet shelves. Not all schools in the Republic of Croatia are equally equipped, but institutions are continually working on the modernization of classrooms in order to achieve easier and more active learning and teaching.

In recent years, the ministry has funded a program that provides each school with Internet service. The Hosting Service for Primary and Secondary Schools was designed for users within the school system, providing the ability to use basic network services and obtain electronic identities for all users in Croatian schools. Within the scope of this service, all schools, their employees, teachers, and students are provided free e-mail addresses and access to CARNet (Croatian Academic and Research Network) webmail.[7]

The Republic of Croatia also has established the E-islands Project, a distance learning program aimed at stopping or reducing negative demographic trends in the lightly inhabited or depopulating Croatian islands. Instruction is provided virtually to 17 island schools that are connected to five schools on the mainland wirelessly as well as to the CARNet backbone.[8]

Role of Reading Specialists

Classroom teachers are responsible for reading instruction, though speech therapists (specialists in voice-verbal communication) also play a major role. These specialists are trained in the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of disorders of all processes and functions associated with speech production as well as in the perception of oral and written language.

Second-language Instruction

Dedicated schools provide instruction in the language of national minorities. Members of national minorities are guaranteed the right to education in their language as defined by the constitution of the Republic of Croatia, the constitutional law on the rights of national minorities, and the law on education in the language of national minorities. These individuals can exercise their constitutional right to education in their mother tongue via three basic models and three specialized educational frameworks:

1. Model A Schools—Classes are conducted in the language of a national minority, with compulsory learning of Croatian language for the same number of hours in which the mother tongue of national minority is conducted (Czech, Hungarian, Serbian, and Italian);

2. Model B Schools—Classes are conducted bilingually, with science subjects taught in Croatian and social science subjects taught in the minority language (Czech or Hungarian);

3. Model C Schools—Classes are taught in Croatian, with an additional 2–5 school hours designed to foster the language and culture of national minorities (Albanian, Austrian, Czech, Hungarian, Macedonian, Slovak, Slovene, Serbian, Ukrainian, and Rusyn);

4. A Class Framework—The language of the national minority is taught as the language of the social environment;

5. Special Classes (e.g., summer school, winter classes, correspondence classes); and

6. Special Programs (e.g., for the inclusion of Roma students in the educational system).

Members of national minorities propose and choose a model and program in line with existing legislation and their ability to complete the program. All models and frameworks are part of the regular education system of the Republic

of Croatia. The Ministry of Science, Education and Sports currently oversees the implementation of the national program for the Roma.[9]

Students with Reading Difficulties

In the Republic of Croatia, education in primary schools, and education in general, is based on equality of educational opportunity for all students according to their abilities. The Primary and Secondary Education Act (*Zakon o odgoju i obrazovanju u osnovnoj i srednjoj školi*) provides students with disabilities a special curriculum, creating conditions in accordance with their capabilities and needs.

Because disabilities exist in various forms and degrees, children are assessed during admission to first grade. "The procedure to determine a child's psycho-physical state is carried out by the team of experts appointed by the minister responsible for education."[10]

The *National Strategy for Persons with Disabilities from 2003 to 2006* (*Nacionalna strategija jedinstvene politike za osobe s inavliditetom od 2003 do 2006*) and the *National Plan of Action for the Rights and Interests of the Child from 2006–2012* (*Nacionalni plan aktivnosti za prava i interese djece 2006–2012*) provide a range of measures aimed at the integration of children with special educational needs: professional development of teachers, interdepartmental cooperation with the public sector, curriculum modernization, and mobile support.

Students with mild disabilities are, in general, included in regular classes and they follow the regular curriculum through an individualized program. These students are fully integrated into the education system. Students with mild mental retardation are partially integrated into the education system, spending part of their time with students who follow the *Syllabus for Primary School* and the other part of their time with a group of students following the *Framework Syllabus for Students with Disabilities* (*Okvirni nastavni plan i program za učenike s teškoćama u razvoju*).

The Regulation on Primary Education and Education for Students with Disabilities (*Pravilnik o osnovnoškolskom odgoju i obrazovanju učenika s teškoćama u razvoju*) maintains a current list of the following types of disabilities:[11]

♦   Vision impairment;

♦   Hearing impairment;

- Disorders of speech and voice communication, specific learning difficulties (dyslexia, dysgraphia);

- Physical disability and chronic illness;

- Mental retardation;

- Behaviour disorders influenced by organic factors; and

- Autism.

The Primary and Secondary Education Act (*Zakon o odgoju i obrazovanju u osnovnoj i srednjoj školi*) also allows students who cannot attend classes for long time due to illness to be educated at home or in a health facility.

Teachers and Teacher Education

The Primary and Secondary Education Act prescribes that the duties of a classroom teacher may be performed by anyone who has completed an integrated undergraduate and graduate study program for teachers. In primary schools, classroom teachers, subject teachers, and expert associates perform these duties.

Until the 2005–06 academic year, the majority of higher education institutions had a four-year undergraduate degree program. Through the implementation of the Bologna process at Croatian universities, study programs now have the following structure: a BA degree (a three- or four-year program ending with a diploma), and an MA degree (one or two years after the first cycle).

The government is responsible for the professional, pedagogical, and psychological training of teachers and their pre-service teacher education. In the Department of Teacher Education of the Faculty of Teacher Education, students enroll in the program for primary teacher education. This program lasts five years (10 semesters, or 300 credits) and upon completion students obtain a master's degree in primary education. At the end of the program, teachers may teach classes in all subjects in the first four grades of primary school, as well as English and German as a foreign language, if they had opted for the language course of study at the time of enrollment. In the event that a classroom teacher did not opt for the language course of study, a specialist conducts foreign language instruction. Specialists teach religion in all four grades as well as music appreciation in the fourth grade. Beginning in the fifth grade, students have specialist teachers for all subjects.

After completing their studies, all novice teachers are required to complete a one-year induction program under the supervision of a teacher-mentor. Following this period, the beginner teacher must pass the state certification examination in order to become a fully qualified and certified teacher.

Teachers have the right and the obligation to improve continuously and professionally through programs approved by the ministry. A wide variety of courses and other professional development activities are available for primary and secondary teachers. The Education and Teacher Training Agency (*Agencija za odgoj i obrazovanje*) provides professional assistance and guidelines, and regularly organizes professional development activities for educational staff.[12]

The government also finances supplementary professional education in areas defined as having major relevance to educational policy. Other continuing professional development is the employers' responsibility. Costs incurred by teachers' continuing professional development are co-financed by the government as a part of the statutory state aid for education.[13]

Requirements for Ongoing Professional Development in Reading for Teachers
The Primary and Secondary Education Act defines continuous professional development and education:

> It involves individual and organized training in social science and in the fields of pedagogy, didactics, educational psychology, teaching methods, IT technology, counselling, classroom management, educational policy, and other areas that are relevant to effective and high quality performance in school.[14]

Monitoring Student Progress in Reading

The Ministry of Education, Science, and Sports prescribe methods of monitoring and evaluation to measure the quality of all components of the national curriculum. The National Center for External Evaluation of Education is responsible for external evaluation within the Croatian education and training system, as well as conducting examinations based on national standards.[15] The Center conducts national examinations and delivers the results to schools. It encourages schools to conduct self-evaluation by providing assistance and support in the form of materials, advice, and training in the areas of external evaluation and self-evaluation.

The first national assessment in Croatia was conducted in May 2006 in first grade of the gymnasia. The subjects tested were Croatian language, mathematics, first foreign language (English, German or French), and Italian as mother tongue. In 2007, national examinations were conducted, in the first and second grades of gymnasia, and in the first grade of vocational schools. Tests in mathematics and the Croatian language of eighth grade students in primary schools were also administered during the same year. In 2008, students in the third grade of gymnasia and vocational schools took national examinations, as did students in the fourth and eighth grades of primary schools. Croatia intends to administer national examinations in upcoming years, though not according to any regular cycle. The next planned national examination will be administered in the subject of mathematics at the eighth grade of primary school.

The state *Matura* is a group of examinations administered in the same way and at the same time for all students, thus making comparative results at the national level possible. Students of comprehensive schools who are completing their secondary education take the state *Matura* exam. The content, conditions, manner, and procedure for taking the state *Matura* are stipulated in the Law on Education and Training in Primary and Secondary Schools (Official Gazette No. 87/2008) and the Regulation on Taking State Matura (Official Gazette No. 97/2008). The state *Matura* consists of a set of two part examinations: mandatory and optional. All students must take examinations in mathematics, Croatian language, and foreign language (from elementary through advanced levels). According to the Regulation on State Matura exams (*Pravilnik o državne mature*, Official Gazette No. 127/10), students concurrently educated in an ethnic minority language and in Croatian must take an examination in the ethnic minority language; for the third mandatory subject examination, these students can choose between mathematics or foreign language.[16] Students in vocational and four-year art program, who complete their secondary education by preparing and defending final projects as organized and implemented by their secondary schools, may also take the state *Matura* examinations, should they wish to continue with higher education. Regulations on taking the state *Matura* are applicable to students who enrolled in Grade 1 of a comprehensive school or four-year vocational and art school in the 2006–07 school year.

The Regulatory Act on the Methods, Procedures, and Elements of Evaluation of Students in Primary and Secondary Schools (*Pravilnik o načinima, postupcima i elementima vrednovanja učenika u osnovnoj i srednjoj školi*) provides direction on the use of grades and evaluation criteria.[17]

Student achievement is monitored and evaluated throughout the school year. In Grades 1–4, about one month after the end of each unit, examinations are taken. The frequency of administration of written and oral tests, as well as the evaluation of homework, are dependent upon individual teachers. Teachers evaluate student achievement and behavior, numerically grading student performance in subjects and descriptively grading student behavior. In the first four years of primary school, grades are expressed numerically, accompanied by a clear written explanation of these grades and their meaning. For students of this age, descriptions of success or failure are easier to understand than an abstract numeric grade.

Students are assessed in terms of overall success. If at the end of the school year a student has the grade 1–insufficient in at least three subjects (e.g., due to not passing corrective exams by prescribed deadlines), then the student is required to attend the same grade level a second time. All other students who have positive grades are allowed to proceed to the next grade level. An exception to this policy is that students in primary Grades 1–3 who have an insufficient grade in only one subject may enroll in the next grade level.

Suggested Readings

Ministarstvo znanosti, obrazovanja i športa (English version). Retrieved from http://public.mzos.hr/Default.aspx?sec=2497

References

1   The Constitution of the Republic of Croatia (2010). Retrieved from http://www.sabor.hr/Default.aspx?art=2405

2   Ministarstvo znanosti, obrazovanja i športa. (2011). *Preschool education in the Republic of Croatia*. Retrieved from http://public.mzos.hr/Default.aspx?sec=2498

3   Ministarstvo znanosti, obrazovanja i športa. (2011). *The educational system*. Retrieved from http://public.mzos.hr/Default.aspx?sec=2497

4   Ministarstvo znanosti, obrazovanja i športa. (2006). *Nastavni plan i program za osnovnu školu* [Syllabus for primary school]. Zagreb: Author.

5   Ibid.

6   Državni pedagoški standard osnovnoškolskog sustava odgoja i obrazovanja [State pedagogical standards for primary education] (2008). *Narodne novine*, nr. 59/90, 26/93, 27/93, 29/94, 7/96, 59/01, 114/01, and 76/05. Retrieved from http://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/339618.html

7   CARNet for Schools. (2009). Retrieved from http://www.carnet.hr/schools

8   CARNet e-otoci. (n.d.). Retrieved from http://e-otoci.carnet.hr/index.php/Osnovne_informacije

9   Ministarstvo znanosti, obrazovanja i športa. (2009). *Education in the language and alphabet of national minorities*. Zagreb: Author. Retrieved from http://public.mzos.hr/Default.aspx?sec=3194

10 Zakon o odgoju i obrazovanju u osnovnoj i srednjoj školi [Primary and Secondary Education Act] (2008). Zagreb: Ministarstvo znanosti, obrazovanja i športa.

11 Pravilnik o osnovnoškolskom odgoju i obrazovanju učenika s teškoćama u razvoju [Regulation on Primary Education and Education for Students with Disabilities] (2010). *Narodne novine*, nr. 59/1990. Retrieved from http://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/254310.html

12 Agencija za odgoj i obrazovanje (2011). Retrieved from http://www.azoo.hr/

13 Vlada Republike Hrvatske. (2005). *Education sector development plan for 2005–2010*. Zagreb: Ministarstvo znanosti, obrazovanja i športa. Retrieved from http://vlada.hr/en/preuzimanja/publikacije/plan_razvoja_sustava_odgoja_i_obrazovanja_2005_2010/(view_online)/1#document-preview

14 Zakon o odgoju i obrazovanju u osnovnoj i srednjoj školi [Primary and Secondary Education Act]

(2008). Zagreb: Ministarstvo znanosti, obrazovanja i športa.

15 Nacionalni centar za vanjsko vrednovanje obrazovanja. (2011). Retrieved from http://www.ncvvo.hr

16 Ibid.

17 Pravilnik o načinima, postupcima i elementima vrednovanja učenika u osnovnoj i srednjoj školi [Regulatory Act on the Methods, Procedures and Elements of Evaluation of Students in Primary and Secondary Schools] (2010). Zagreb: Author. Retrieved from http://public.mzos.hr

The Czech Republic

Iveta Kramplová

Czech School Inspectorate

Language and Literacy

The official language of the Czech Republic is Czech, and the population is linguistically homogeneous. In 2009, immigrants (mostly Slavs) represented 4 percent of the population, although immigration has doubled in recent years.[1]

The language of instruction is Czech. However, students of ethnic minorities are guaranteed the right to education in their mother tongue to the extent appropriate for the development of their ethnic community. Schools for national minorities exist through the upper secondary level. With the exception of Poles, the minority population is scattered throughout the country, which is why the only minority-language schools in the country are Polish. Little interest in having instruction delivered in Slovak has been expressed, probably because of the language's close similarity to Czech. Preparatory classes for the integration of children from socially and culturally disadvantaged backgrounds have been introduced.

In 2011, the adult literacy rate, traditionally high since the 19th century, was 97.9 percent.[2] While the Czech Republic has no national projects promoting reading as of yet, there are projects at the regional and, especially, at the school levels. One important project to promote reading and reading literacy is the Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking (RWCT) program, which trains teachers in instructional methods for development of the higher-order thinking skills necessary for functional reading. This training also introduces reading workshops where children read books they choose themselves before meeting in small groups with the teacher. In these small groups, students discuss the books, their feelings about reading them, and anything they do not understand. Students also write notes in reader diaries and explain their attitudes towards the books to others. RWCT also introduces other innovative methods to develop children's reading and writing skills in and out of workshops. Step by Step is another program following goals similar to the RWCT program.

Since 2009, public libraries have cooperated with schools to implement a program promoting reading among children called I Am Already a Reader—A Book for the First-Grader. Through the program, children in the

first year of school register for library membership and participate in various reading promotion activities such as meetings with authors, book exhibitions, discussions, and performances. Students that meet certain criteria, such as successfully mastering reading at the end of the year and participating in the above-mentioned literacy activities, receive a book specially written for this project that is not otherwise available. Some students are awarded this book at a ceremony with the author and illustrator.

Since 2006, another family literacy program, Every Czech Reads to Kids, has been supported by people from the worlds of culture, art, and sports. Celebrities visit schools, libraries, and hospitals to read books to children. The program is based on the importance of reading aloud to children both for emotional development and to form reading habits. Parents also are encouraged to read aloud to their children every day for 20 minutes.

Overview of the Education System

Responsibility for schools in the Czech Republic is distributed among the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, regional education authorities, and municipalities. The ministry sets policies and assesses the state of the development of the education system. For example, the ministry defines compulsory educational components, is partially responsible for funding public schools, and oversees the school register, a tool used to ensure that all students have access to appropriate educational opportunities. The ministry also oversees institutions that provide professional development for teachers.

Between 2001 and 2003, regional education authorities were established, fundamentally decentralizing the education system. The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports retained its policymaking responsibilities but transferred administrative responsibilities to the regions. After decentralization, regions assumed responsibility for secondary schools and post-secondary technical schools. Municipalities are responsible for nursery schools and for Basic Schools, which provide compulsory primary and lower secondary education, and guarantee their funding (except for salaries and instructional equipment, which are funded by the federal government). The federal government is responsible for educational institutions related to institutional or preventive care.

Nursery schools provide education for students ages 3–6 as part of preprimary education. Attendance is not compulsory, but 84 percent of children in this age group enroll, with 91 percent of children ages 3–6 attending the year prior to compulsory schooling. This final year of preprimary is free of charge

and children have a legal right to attend.[3] Public schools do not charge tuition, but parents may be asked to pay up to 50 percent of operating costs.

Basic Schools provide nine years of education for the primary and lower secondary levels, and attendance is compulsory. The primary level lasts five years for students ages 6–11, and the lower secondary level lasts four years for students ages 11–15. At the end of the primary level (fifth year), students can leave Basic School to start an eight-year track of general secondary school (eight-year gymnasium). Similarly, at the end of the seventh year of Basic School, students can start a six-year gymnasium after passing an entrance examination set by the school. Approximately 11 percent of students study in one of the multiyear gymnasium programs.

Three kinds of schools provide upper secondary education: gymnasium schools, providing general academic programs for students ages 15–19; secondary technical schools for students ages 15–17, 18, or 19; and secondary vocational schools also for students ages 15–17, 18, or 19. Prerequisites for acceptance into upper secondary schools include successful completion of compulsory education and meeting entrance requirements set by schools. The gymnasium, technical school, and four-year vocational study programs all end with a final examination and certification that allows students to apply for post-secondary studies.

Private schools, both primary and secondary, were first established in 1990 (private universities in 1999), are mostly secular, and are usually established by for-profit or non-profit grant-aided organizations. Non-governmental Basic Schools (private and parochial schools) represent only 2.9 percent of the total number of Basic Schools and educate 1.5 percent of students at that level. In contrast, non-governmental secondary schools comprise 25.3 percent of all secondary schools and educate 15.3 percent of the students at that level.[4] Private schools receive a state contribution toward their operating costs. This funding is formula-based and the method of calculation is still under development. School fees and other private sources cover capital expenditures and rent for the school.

The school year runs from September 1 to June 30 of the following year. There is a summer holiday in July and August, a one-week holiday in spring, and other short holidays in the autumn, at Christmas, at Easter, and at the end of the first semester.

Students attend school five days per week, from Monday to Friday. In addition to morning classes, there are also afternoon classes once or twice a week. Lessons last 45 minutes, although the timetable allows for shorter lessons

and the use of block teaching. There are 18–22 lessons per week at the primary level and 28–32 lessons per week at the lower-secondary level.

Language/Reading Curriculum in the Fourth Grade

Reading Policy

Reading development is considered one of the basic goals of primary education. Since 1989, the concept of reading in Czech primary schools has changed. While only reading skills had been stressed in the past, the current concept of reading focuses on the functional use of reading—reading literacy development as a necessary means of communication and continuing education. Reading is understood not only as a skill to acquire and use, but also in a wider sense as an important means of individual cultural and personal development.

Summary of National Curriculum

In 2004, the Education Act established a two-level structure for educational programs (state and school levels). Since September 2007, instruction has followed the *Framework Educational Program for Elementary Education* (FEP EE).[a] FEP EE, produced at the central level, specifies the concrete objectives, form, length, and basic curricular content of education as well as general conditions for their implementation.[5, 6] FEP EE defines nine main educational areas (consisting of one or more educational fields), cross-curricular themes, and supplementary educational fields. School education programs provide the framework for implementing education in individual schools. Each school head devises a school educational program in accordance with FEP EE that is adapted to the school's individual context. That is, each school creates its own education program comprising the expected outcomes and topics taught in each subject. Primary education (Stage 1) is subdivided into Cycle 1 (Grades 1–3) and Cycle 2 (Grades 4–5).

Expected outcomes specified by FEP EE are activity-based, practical in focus, applicable in everyday life, and verifiable. They specify the expected capabilities of utilizing the acquired subject matter in practical situations and everyday life. The expected outcomes at the end of Cycle 1 (Grade 3) are tentative, while the outcomes at the end of Cycle 2 (Grade 5) are considered binding.

a   Two main sources—the Research Institute of Education of the Czech Republic and the Eurydice Network—describe the Czech educational system, using two different translations for the same educational program. The Research Institute of Education, which co-authored the Educational Program in the Czech language, uses the following translation: The Framework Educational Program for Elementary Education (FEP EE). The Eurydice Network provides information on and analyses of European education systems and policies, and uses the following translation: The Framework Educational Program for Basic Education (FEP BE). To maintain textual clarity, this chapter refers to FEP EE in all instances.

TIMSS & PIRLS
International Study Center
Lynch School of Education, Boston College

The Language and Language Communication educational area occupies a pivotal position in the education process. The content of the Czech Language and Literature field is complex but, for the sake of clarity, has been separated into three parts: Communication and Composition, Language, and Literature. However, the educational content of these individual parts is interconnected through instruction.

At the end of Cycle 1 (end of Grade 3), students are expected to be able to do the following:

♦ Fluently read and comprehend texts of appropriate length and difficulty;

♦ Understand written and oral instruction of reasonable difficulty;

♦ Read literary texts suitable to the given age, and recite them by heart with proper phrasing and pace;

♦ Express personal feelings about texts;

♦ Recognize prose from verse and distinguish fairy tales from other types of narratives; and

♦ Work creatively with a literary text, following teacher instructions and according to individual abilities.

At the end of Cycle 2 (end of Grade 5), students are expected to be able to do the following:

♦ Read texts of appropriate difficulty with comprehension, both silently and aloud;

♦ Recognize main ideas and details in age-appropriate texts, and take notes on main ideas;

♦ Assess the completeness or incompleteness of simple texts;

♦ Reproduce the content of texts of adequate difficulty and remember main ideas;

♦ Recognize manipulative communication in advertisements or commercials;

♦ Express and record personal impressions from reading;

♦ Reproduce texts freely according to individual abilities, and create personal literary texts on given topics;

♦ Distinguish between various types of artistic and non-artistic texts; and

♦ Use elementary literary terms when performing a simple analysis of literary texts.

The subject matter for Cycles 1 and 2 (Grades 1–3 and 4–5, respectively) includes the following:

♦ Practical reading, including reading technique, attentive and fluent reading, and knowledge of textual orientation elements;

♦ Factual reading, including reading for information, scanning, and key words;

♦ Listening to literary texts;

♦ Experiential reading and listening;

♦ Creative activities with literary texts, including recitation of appropriate literary texts, creative reproduction of texts the student has read or listened to, dramatization, and creating accompanying illustrations; and

♦ Material to familiarize students with basic literary terms, styles, and genres, including counting rhymes, riddles, nursery rhymes, poems, fairy tales, fables, short stories, writers, poets, books, readers, theatre performances, actors, directors, verse, rhyme, and simile.[7]

Development of functional reading is realized using reading materials in all subject areas. The goals defined by FEP EE stress new approaches and elements in reading instruction (e.g., active work with texts, reading for understanding, and critical thinking). Although general awareness of the new concept of reading—a change from technical reading towards functional reading—has been growing, the traditional approach to reading instruction still remains in many Czech schools.

Reading Instruction in the Primary Grades

Primary schools use various methods to develop reading literacy. Methods differ in the extent to which they are based on student cooperation with the teacher and among fellow students, creativity, thinking, experience, and independence. During reading instruction, teachers build on various reading activities, such as reading aloud or silently, and implement various forms of organization for instruction. Teachers widely believe that the best way to teach reading is through reading aloud, both individually and collectively. Reading aloud is therefore part of instruction in both primary education and in the upper grades.

Comprehension is gauged entirely through the use of so-called lower-order thinking questions, requiring only repeating and listing simple facts mentioned in the text. Children's higher-order thinking abilities are often undervalued and teachers avoid opportunities to develop student abilities to think about the text, to ask more sophisticated questions, or to require students to justify their answers. Rather, teachers ask students only to find the correct answer (often one-word) that reproduces a fact from the text.

Instructional Materials

Since 1990, teachers have been able to work with a variety of textbooks that use various methods of initial reading and have been published by several publishers. The basic materials used for reading development come from a wide range of books with samples of literature from different genres for children and youth. Usually, these books are provided in sets of materials with complementing didactic materials, such as worksheets, folding alphabet letters, and sheets for writing practice. Initial reading materials include spelling books and simple readers. Materials are offered through many catalogs and magazines, and are widely accessible.

The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports approves reading books that fit with the *Framework Educational Program for Elementary Education* and are at the necessary methodological level. Most schools have adopted the use of reading books that have Ministry approval. In some schools, reading is also developed through the use of other materials, including various text types, children's and youth magazines, children's books, and encyclopedias. New kinds of multimedia materials (e.g., CD-ROMs and other ICT media) also support reading development.

Schools are encouraged both to establish school and classroom libraries, in which some schools teach lessons, as well as to collaborate with public libraries on various projects.

Use of Technology

Use of technology in instruction depends on the finances and progressiveness of the teacher or headmaster. Currently, audio recordings of both Czech and world literature are used. In addition, CD-ROMs and PC programs also are widely used for working with dyslexic students.

Role of Reading Specialists

All primary level teachers obtain training in reading instruction and work with dyslexic students. These teachers are able to recognize and diagnose reading difficulties and help students overcome problems. School psychologists and special pedagogues also are involved in instruction, though such specialists are not yet significantly represented at Czech schools. Specialists from pedagogical and psychological centers work only with some students and not directly in instruction.

Additional specialists provide teachers with information through professional development courses or by writing textbooks or other instructional materials, and therefore can have a mediating influence on instruction.

Second-language Instruction

In December 2000, the Government of the Czech Republic adopted the Concept of Immigrant Integration in the Territory of the Czech Republic. This legislation authorizes regions to provide free Czech language teaching during compulsory schooling to children whose parents are foreign citizens. Regional authorities provide teacher professional development for this purpose. Students can receive language training at any time during their schooling at the request of the student's legal guardian, and action is required within 30 days from the request. Language classes of this type enroll a maximum of ten students, and the actual language training lasts a minimum of 70 lessons over no more than six months of schooling. In principle, the *Framework Educational Program for Elementary Education* determines the content of these classes, and the content and methods of teaching take into account the needs of individual students. After completing their language training, students receive certificates. Major factors are considered when placing children of foreign citizens into schools, including level of previous education, knowledge of Czech, and age.

Only Poles exercise the right to education of students of ethnic minorities in their mother tongue guaranteed by the Constitution from preprimary to upper secondary education. In these schools, students start Czech language from second grade, and it is taught as a second mother tongue. Students receive 3–4 lessons per week using the same materials for Czech language instruction used in the mainstream schools. Because many students are bilingual (many of them are from mixed marriages), they know both spoken languages well.

Students with Reading Difficulties

Diagnostic Testing

Reading instruction has a focus on the early detection of possible reading disabilities, such as slower reading development or dyslexia. Teachers identify reading defects by listening to students read aloud and by observing other features. Educational and psychological counselors or school pedagogues and psychologists then investigate and provide individual remedial programs, which involve intensive cooperation with teachers and parents.

Instruction for Children with Reading Difficulties

Students with special educational needs can be integrated into regular classes. Schools, classes, departments, or study groups may be established using adapted educational programs if required by the nature of the disability. Some schools provide dyslexic students with divided instruction in separate working groups. In other schools, teachers work with dyslexic students both within and outside the regular classroom. Some teachers, often in cooperation with psychological experts, create individual development programs for students with reading difficulties, especially for slowly developing readers.

Teachers can attend special seminars, lectures, and courses on reading disabilities and their remedies. These courses are organized by the National Institute of Further Education, educational faculty, or the Czech Association for Dyslexia.

Teachers and Teacher Education

Higher education institutions train Basic School teachers. Primary-level teachers (Grades 1–5) must have master's degrees, which generally take five years to complete at a school of education (usually a three-year bachelor's program followed by a two-year master's program). Graduates from these programs are qualified to teach all subjects at the primary level, obtain training in reading instruction, and work with dyslexic students. Some programs allow prospective teachers to specialize in areas such as music, art, physical education, or a foreign language. Teacher preparation includes a practicum component that lasts from six to twelve weeks. At the end of their studies, teachers are qualified at the ISCED 5A level and, once they have passed a state final exam and defended their theses, obtain a university diploma, a diploma supplement, and the academic degree of *Magistr* (master).

According to the Education Act, the head of school provides professional development for educational staff aligned with a plan developed with the relevant trade union (if there is one at the workplace).[8] The head of school must take into account the academic interests of teachers, the needs of the school, and any budget restrictions when programming professional development.

Professional development for educational staff may take place at higher education institutions, at institutions for educational professional development, at other Ministry of Education-accredited facilities, or via self-study.

The Education Act lists three types of professional development:

♦ Courses aimed at gaining required qualifications—Courses leading to either the completion of pedagogical qualification, the extension of qualifications for educational activity at a different type or stage of school, or for teaching in a different subject area.

♦ Courses aimed at meeting further qualification requirements—Courses for educational management staff, courses in educational and school psychology, or courses for specialized activities for disabled children.

♦ Courses aimed at improving professional qualifications—Teachers may improve their professional qualifications via continuing education that concentrates on theoretical and practical issues related to education. This content is shaped mainly by new information in general pedagogy, educational and school psychology, general teaching methodology, and teaching methodologies for individual subjects. It may also include new findings from various fields of science, technology, and arts, or health and safety protection. Continuing education also may include language education.

Educational institutions and programs that focus on professional development are accredited by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports through an application from an individual or legal entity. An Accreditation Commission acts as an advisory body. The accreditation of an educational institution is granted for six years and accreditation of an educational program is granted for three years.

A large number of organizations offer professional development. Some continuing education programs may only be held at higher education institutions as part of their life-long learning programs. The largest number of courses is offered by the National Institute for Further Education, which is a product of education reform efforts undertaken in 2004 and which functions

as an institution of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports. The initiative receives funding from the federal budget and has 13 regional offices, each of which offers a number of educational programs.

Project Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking (RWCT) plays an important role in reading education and introduces new methods of instruction in workshops. The program focuses on methods and skills such as quick orientation in unknown texts, controlled reading, literary groups or clubs, reading with foresight, key words, and writing skills, among others. The program also focuses on skill development for creating meaningful texts and training in school instruction. Experienced lecturers prepared a handbook to help advance reading literacy, which is available on the website of the Czech school inspectorate.

Monitoring Student Progress in Reading

Teachers continually assess students throughout the school year in individual subjects. Most schools assign grades on a scale of 1–5 for written work. Teachers also conduct verbal assessments of student progress, describing and commenting in writing about students' strengths and weaknesses. After 1990, such verbal assessment became commonplace, especially in the younger grades, and was officially authorized in 1993. Since 2005, verbal assessments have been regulated by a Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports decree. At the end of each semester, students receive either grades or comments on their report card. Student results included on a report card can be expressed with grades on the 1–5 scale, comments (from verbal assessments), or as percentages. The head of school determines the form of evaluation in each school with the consent of the school board.

Reading assessment includes the evaluation of reading speed, correctness, fluency, and pronunciation. Teachers may create their own diagnostic tests or use a standardized test. Speed and fluency are evaluated primarily through reading aloud or answering simple questions based on texts. Teachers also assess ability to work with texts, reading interests, and behavior using specific student work (e.g., solving reading literacy tasks) or through dialogue with students.

Impact and Use of PIRLS

The Czech Republic has no regular national examination of reading literacy, therefore national information comes from international IEA and OECD surveys or from specific national research. Research in reading at the national

level is conducted mostly through specific research by pedagogical faculties and usually is carried out only on a small sample of schools, students, or teachers. For this reason, international research in reading provides extremely valuable information. The instruments are developed by world experts and are always administered to a representative sample of the desired population in countries all over the world. Moreover, this research enables international comparison of student reading performance.

The Czech Republic participated in PIRLS in 2001, then skipped the cycle in 2006, and joined again in 2011. The results in 2001 showed that Czech teachers emphasized reading aloud. A consequence of these findings is that teachers have been encouraged to concentrate more on teaching intense comprehension.

Suggested Readings

Every Czech Reads to Kids. (n.d.). Retrieved from http://www.celeceskoctedetem.cz/gb/menu/7/every-czech-reads-to-kids/

References

1   Czech Statistical Office. (2009, August 9). *Cizinci v České republice* [Foreigners in the Czech Republic]. Prague: Author. ISBN 978-80-250-1993-1.

2   Unesco, Institute for Statistics. (2011, November 15). *Fact sheet*. Retrieved from http://stats.uis.unesco.org/unesco/TableViewer/document.aspx?ReportId=121&IF_Language=eng&BR_Country=2020&BR_Region=40530

3   Eurydice. (2011). *Organisation of the educational system in the Czech Republic (2009/2010).* Retrieved from http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/eurybase/eurybase_full_reports/CZ_EN.pdf

4   Eurydice. (2011). *National system overviews on education systems in Europe and ongoing reforms.* Retrieved from http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/eurybase/national_summary_sheets/047_CZ_EN.pdf

5   The Research Institute of Education (VÚP). (2007). *Framework education programme for basic education (with amendments as of September 1, 2007).* Retrieved from http://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/upload/Czech%20Republic/Czech_Republic_Framework_Education_Programme_for_Basic_Education.pdf

6   The Research Institute of Education (VÚP). (2007). *Framework education programme for elementary education (with amendments as of September 1, 2007).* Retrieved from http://rvp.cz/informace/wp-content/uploads/2009/09/RVP_ZV_EN_final.pdf

7   Ibid.

8   Education Act No.561/2004 (2004). Retrieved from http://aplikace.msmt.cz/doc/HCzakon561popravach.doc

Denmark

Jan Mejding
Mette Nørgaard Fink
Department of Education (DPU), Aarhus University

Language and Literacy

The official language in Denmark is Danish. Like most Nordic languages, Danish belongs to the Germanic family of languages. Danish is also the language of instruction in public schools and the majority of private schools. Very few private schools offer instruction in another language (e.g., English, German, or French).

Since the 1960s, immigration from both Western and non-Western countries has resulted in an increasing number of people who speak Danish as a second language. In January 2011, immigrants constituted 9.8 percent of the Danish population, and immigrants from non-Western countries alone constituted 5.6 percent of the population.[1] If necessary, second language students can receive instruction in Danish as a second language, which includes both linguistic and cultural dimensions.[2] Students study English as a foreign language in Grades 3–9 and either German or French in Grades 7–9.

Literacy has been a major focus in Denmark since 1994, when the Danish results of IEA's Reading Literacy Study (IEA-RL) caused a shock throughout the Danish educational system.[3, 4] The subsequent debate gave rise to a number of national and local initiatives, particularly in language and reading instruction in the early grades (see Impact and Use of PIRLS).

Over the past two decades, the Ministry of Children and Education (formerly the Ministry of Education) specifically has funded a large number of initiatives, research programs, and reading campaigns to strengthen student literacy. In 2005, the ministry appointed a committee to devise a national plan of action to promote reading literacy.[5] A number of amendments have been made based on this plan, including the following: mandatory language screenings by municipalities of all three-year-old children (2007) and of six-year-old children when they begin compulsory kindergarten class (2009); mandatory national tests of reading in Grades 2, 4, 6, and 8; and mandatory school-leaving examinations in reading. Since 2006, the number of Danish language lessons in Grades 1–3 has increased, and the curriculum has placed a greater emphasis on

reading in Danish language, as well as in other subjects. Many municipalities have also listed reading as a priority, and many schools have implemented literacy-improvement initiatives.

Overview of the Education System

In Denmark, public preprimary, primary and lower secondary schools are combined into one unified school, called the School for the People (*Folkeskolen*). Although the Folkeskole Act centrally regulates the *Folkeskole*, municipalities decide how local schools will function in practice within this framework.[6]

The Folkeskole Act ensures that all public schools share common goals and provisions concerning what subjects are taught at different levels, the central knowledge and proficiency areas of those subjects, and standard regulations concerning the leadership and organization of the school system. Within these parameters, however, individual schools may have their own unique focus. Every school must have a school board with representation from parents, teachers, and students. The school board makes recommendations regarding the local curricula based on national guidelines. Once the local curricula receive final approval from the municipal board, they become binding for the individual school. The majority of municipalities in Denmark choose to have a common plan for all schools within the municipality.

Education is compulsory from age 5 or 6 to 16. The *Folkeskole* consists of one compulsory year of preprimary education (kindergarten class, or Grade 0), nine compulsory years of primary (Grades 1–6) and lower secondary education (Grades 7–9), and one optional year of basic schooling (Grade 10). There is no streaming and retention is almost non-existent. Age groups define the different grades; therefore, a student normally has the same classmates in all subjects throughout all ten years of compulsory schooling.[7]

Education itself is compulsory in Denmark, not schooling. Children may be educated in public municipal schools, private independent schools, or at home, as long as certain requirements are met. Private independent schools are self-governing institutions that must meet and adhere to the standards of municipal schools. In 2010–11, 55 percent of the students leaving ninth grade attended the optional tenth grade at the *Folkeskole*, a private independent school, or a continuation school.[8, 9] Continuation schools (*Efterskoler*) are private boarding schools that offer schooling from Grades 8–10 and often emphasize social learning and fields such as sports, music, and nature.[10] Private independent schools and continuation schools receive a substantial state subsidy

based on the number of students enrolled per school year;[11] parents pay the remaining fees. Eighty percent of all students attend public schools, 14 percent attend private independent schools, 4 percent attend continuation schools, and 2 percent receive instruction through other educational options (e.g., special education schools, treatment centers, or at home).[12]

Public schooling is free in Denmark. Moreover, to give everyone equal access to training or education beyond compulsory education, the government offers a monthly grant to students 18 years of age or older who are enrolled in youth education programs (preparatory study or professional qualification programs) or further education.[13]

After compulsory education, students can choose from a variety of youth education programs (preparatory study or professional qualification programs) that are either academically or vocationally oriented, or both.

Language/Reading Curriculum in the Fourth Grade

Reading Policy

The current national reading policy is published in the ministerial guidelines, the *Common Objectives* (*Fælles mål*).[14, 15] In addition to these national goals, since 2000 it has been common practice for local schools and municipalities to develop their own reading policies based on the general curriculum guidelines. The establishment of locally anchored reading policies is important for the development of the reading level in the municipality.

Summary of National Curriculum

The introduction of the *Common Objectives* in 2003 was a milestone for Danish schools.[16, 17] For the first time, schools were required to follow national goals rather than mere recommendations for the municipalities. The *Common Objectives* establish binding national goals in the form of centrally defined objectives, intermediate and final achievement goals for each subject, and goals for the themes in the one-year kindergarten class. Moreover, the *Common Objectives* contain the common binding guidelines and recommendations for the teaching of every subject for different grade levels.

However, the *Common Objectives* do not define or prescribe specific content and teaching materials. Therefore, there are a variety of different school practices around the country. The *Common Objectives 2003* were in effect at the time when the students assessed in PIRLS 2011 attended kindergarten and Grades 1–2. The 2006 revision of the *Common Objectives* was implemented

in schools in 2009, and therefore was in effect when the PIRLS 2011 students attended Grades 3 and 4.

Since 2003, kindergarten class instruction is not divided into subjects but has compulsory themes that prepare students for school. The compulsory themes are language and methods of expression, the natural world and scientific phenomena, creativity, movement and coordination, social skills, and togetherness and cooperation. Emphasis is on learning through play and play-related activities as means of stimulating students' love of learning and of other school activities. The *Common Objectives 2003* did not require structured instruction in reading and writing but the guidelines emphasized building students' general language awareness through dialogue, experimental reading and writing, telling structured stories, and listening to and engaging in the teacher's reading. Play-related language activities (e.g., playing with rhymes, phonemes, and letters) were also emphasized, as well as activities that stimulate the development of student vocabulary and general knowledge of concepts.[18]

The *Common Objectives* 2009 underlined the aim of strengthening the linguistic skills crucial for student reading development and established national requirements to increase student vocabulary and awareness of rhymes, phonemes, and word formation, as well as to introduce the names, shapes, and sounds of the letters and let students experiment with reading and writing on paper and on a computer. Language-stimulating activities also are included across other themes (e.g., instruction in mathematical vocabulary, motor activities combined with rhymes, use of early writing in the establishment of social rules as part of the cooperation theme, and gaining knowledge of literature as part of the creativity theme).[19] Students' language skills are assessed when they begin kindergarten class. Municipalities decide how to conduct these assessments because there are only centrally defined recommendations for their content.[20, 21] This compulsory language assessment was implemented in 2009, so it was not in effect when the PIRLS 2011 students attended kindergarten class.

Danish language instruction is considered a single unit from Grades 1–10. Reading instruction is included as part of the general teaching of Danish language, which focuses on three main areas—oral language proficiency, reading, and writing skills—together with awareness of language, literature, and communication. The primary goal of Danish language instruction is to cultivate students' experience of language as a source of developing a personal and cultural identity based on aesthetical, ethical, and historical understanding.

For each language topic, there are intermediate goals and optional guidelines structured as two courses for primary school, covering Grades 1–2 and 3–4.

The *Common Objectives 2003* focus instruction in Grades 1 and 2 on the acquisition of elementary reading, writing, and spelling skills, and regard the development of reading and writing as parallel processes that supplement each other. Students' basic development of reading comprehension based on literary experience and enjoyment is central at this stage. The guidelines in the *Common Objectives 2003* emphasize the importance of the following: learning the names, shapes, and sounds of the letters; discovering the relationship between pictures and text; and learning how to use basic spelling and reading strategies. Students develop reading skills through reading alone and reading aloud to the teacher, a partner, or in a small group. As part of reading instruction, students read simple literary and informational texts in print and on the computer.

After Grade 2, students should be able to do the following: apply the shapes, sounds, and combinations of letters in reading with a steady and automatized use of decoding strategies; read simple, age-appropriate literary and informational texts; use basic comprehension strategies; and demonstrate an understanding of what they have read and present it orally.[22]

The *Common Objectives 2009* includes some changes regarding Grades 1 and 2. Students are now expected to learn the names, shapes, and sounds of letters in preschool; thus, the guidelines for the first grades emphasize further reading development by teaching students how to apply these skills in basic decoding strategies. As in the *Common Objectives 2003*, students should be instructed in the use of simple reading comprehension strategies (e.g., using headings and photos to enhance the understanding of the text) to prepare for appropriate use of these reading strategies to gain knowledge. As part of instruction, students read both literary and informational texts in print and on the computer, read alone and with a partner, and read aloud to the teacher and to other students.[23]

The guidelines for Grades 3 and 4 (*Common Objectives 2009*) stress working purposefully with reading comprehension strategies, consolidating decoding skills, and adjusting reading speed and technique to the type of text. Emphasis is on the importance of supporting and encouraging the enjoyment of reading by both reading often and by reading a variety of text types. Students practice reading literary and informational texts, which increases their awareness of the requirements of different reading purposes. The guidelines emphasize using reading as a tool for gaining the knowledge and ability to adjust one's reading

according to a given purpose. Students are taught skills to use before reading, during reading, and after reading in order to keep track of their understanding of what they have read.

After Grade 4, students should be able to read both literary and informational texts with good comprehension in print and on the computer. Students should be able to master different decoding and comprehension strategies, and to adjust search strategies according to reading purpose, genre, and text difficulty. Students should be able to search for literature in the library and on the computer, and search for definitions of words they do not understand. Students also should develop and sustain appropriate reading habits and should be able to read simple Swedish and Norwegian texts.

Reading Instruction in the Primary Grades

Instructional Materials

Individual teachers have a great deal of freedom and flexibility in choosing the instructional methods and materials they find suitable for their students.

Danish teachers often plan their teaching from a mixed-approach perspective, using a variety of materials.[24] Since the 1990s, a large number of new, creative instructional materials have been published. Although Denmark is a small country with only 5.6 million inhabitants, teachers have a wealth of material from which to choose when planning their reading instruction. A series of textbooks typically contains readers, workbooks, and teacher manuals, as well as different kinds of supplementary materials such as flash cards, overhead sheets, posters, color slides, audiotapes, talking books, songbooks, games, and computer programs. Some teachers choose to use published materials, such as basal readers, while others develop their own instructional materials.[25] Published materials usually have been prepared to cover at least three successive grades. Budget cuts, however, have put a limitation on the accessibility of new material.

Denmark does not have a central, objective authority that assesses the quality of instructional materials. It is the responsibility of individual schools or teachers to assess the quality and usability of textbooks and other teaching materials. The Ministry of Children and Education has created a popular portal for the Danish educational system—EMU.dk. This portal gathers relevant educational materials, services, and resources available on the Internet and communicates knowledge of best practices and has more than 500,000 unique users every month.[26]

Use of Technology

The use of computer technology is a priority in the Danish *Folkeskole*. During 2004–07, individual schools could apply for government grants to purchase computer equipment for third grade students, though awards were contingent upon municipal co-financing at least equal to the level of the government grants. Schools could also use these grants to purchase equipment such as video projectors and interactive whiteboards. These grants resulted in a ratio of fewer than four students per computer by 2008 and fewer than two third-grade students per computer in 2010.[27] The government also has funded initiatives supporting the development of new Internet-based educational materials.[28, 29] These initiatives have aimed to make computers a tool for students in the lower grades and to ensure that the use of computers would be included in the curriculum objectives for language instruction and other subjects by 2009. However, many teachers still prefer books to technology-based instructional materials.[30]

Role of Reading Specialists

Most municipalities employ reading consultants who play a key role in coordinating the reading and literacy strategy of the entire municipality. Reading consultants act as a resource for language-instruction teachers and other teachers at municipal schools. Reading consultants assist teachers with reading assessments, materials, and methods of reading instruction. Moreover, they may disseminate recent reading research to teaching staff, and motivate and engage the staff in reading initiatives. Reading consultants also may be responsible for monitoring the reading level of the school each year.

Since 2007, a new type of reading specialist (*læsevejleder*) has been employed at the school level. While their work is similar in nature to that of the reading consultant, it is restricted in focus to the individual schools. A national goal is to have reading specialists at every school.[31, 32]

Second-language Instruction

In Denmark, around 10 percent of all students in basic school speak Danish as a second language. There is, however, an uneven distribution of these students, ranging from less than 5 percent in some municipalities to more than 30 percent in others.[33] Schools offer instruction in Danish as a second language for students who are not able to follow the same instruction as the rest of the class, though as a rule, these students are included in the general class. While instruction in Danish as a second language is viewed as part of ordinary instruction, it is

differentiated to meet students' specific needs. If needed, students may receive instruction outside the classroom by a second-language specialist.[34]

Students with Reading Difficulties

Diagnostic Testing

Since 2009, schools have been required to perform early language screening of all students attending kindergarten class to accommodate the individual child's preparation for primary and lower secondary school education. Moreover, all municipalities must perform language screening in order to detect linguistic or cognitive difficulties in young children as early as possible and to provide any necessary intervention before the child starts school.[35] Different kinds of reading and spelling assessment materials, including group and individual tests, are available at all grade levels in school. Some materials focus primarily on decoding and comprehension, whereas others also take into account student attitudes towards reading and learning.

Instruction for Children with Reading Difficulties

When a child encounters reading difficulties, the lowest degree of intervention is preferred as a first step–usually support in the classroom from a remedial teacher. If this is not sufficient, the next step is instruction by the reading specialist at the school level, although the student is still included in the classroom's ordinary instruction in all subjects if possible. The goal is to provide structured and explicit instruction in decoding and comprehension for students encountering reading disabilities, as well as to ensure sufficient time for various tasks. Furthermore, ICT is increasingly used as both an instructional and a compensatory tool. Since 2007, special professional development programs focusing on reading disabilities and reading instruction also have been available for remedial-education teachers at the school level.

Teachers are responsible for recommending special education for individual students. If necessary, the educational psychological counseling center in the municipality assesses the student and proposes initiatives. However, the municipal board makes the final decision to place a student in a special class or school, or to provide remedial support in the classroom.[36] Larger municipalities have arranged special classes with specially trained teachers for students with dyslexia. In these cases, the student must leave the district school and attend a special class with other students requiring special education. In 2009, 8.4 percent of students in primary and lower secondary grades received

remedial support within the framework of the *Folkeskole*; of these, 4.6 percent received help in special schools or special classes.[37] Recently, the Ministry of Children and Education and Local Government Denmark (LGDK), an interest group and member authority of the Danish municipalities, have launched initiatives to focus remedial education in the classroom instead of as segregated instruction.

Teachers and Teacher Education

Teacher Education Specific to Reading

Some unique features of Danish teacher education include the broadness of the curriculum, the in-depth study of two or three subjects, and the integration of theory and practice that exists between pedagogy, psychology, school subjects, and teaching practice. Teachers are expected to be able to teach at all levels, from Grades 1–10. The admission requirements of colleges of education are comparable to the admission requirements of Danish universities (i.e., completion of ISCED level 3A). The course of study is a four-year bachelor of arts program (equal to 240 European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System credits), including 24 weeks of practice teaching.[38]

Reading is an integrated part of the Danish language course of study, which is divided into a general component and two different specialized components aimed at either Grades 1–6 or Grades 7–10. Student teachers who specialize in the Danish language must complete the general component and one or both special components. The relative emphasis on theories of reading acquisition and teaching methods varies from college to college.

In January 2007, the teacher education program for the *Folkeskole* was reformed. Teachers still graduate as comprehensive teachers for primary or lower secondary level students but, for the first time, student teachers must specialize in the subjects of Danish language and mathematics at the primary and/or lower secondary level.

Requirements for Ongoing Professional Development in Reading for Teachers

A number of university colleges, which offer pre-service teacher education, also provide professional development. This development can range from stand-alone courses in different subject areas to further education diploma programs. Participation in professional development is voluntary and a limited number of courses are available.[39] Usually, either the school or the participating teachers pay for these courses.

Monitoring Student Progress in Reading

The Folkeskole Act states that schools are obligated to evaluate student learning in relation to the binding intermediate achievement goals presented in the *Common Objectives*.[40] Since 2006, there has been an overall focus on quality assurance and evaluation in primary and lower secondary school, and a large number of national initiatives on evaluation have been introduced.

Parents receive general progress evaluations (not grades) in each subject at least twice a year until the seventh year of schooling. Beginning in the eighth year, teachers award grades in subjects that offer a leaving examination. The information is given in writing or (more commonly) verbally at a meeting attended by the student, parents, and the class teacher. In Grades 8–10, the evaluation system extends to include a written report at least twice a year showing the student's academic achievement and attainment in the application of subjects with a leaving examination.

The use of commercially available standardized tests in the primary grades to assess students' basic reading skills has been common practice for many years. Four different standardized reading tests developed in the 1970s, and further revised in the 1980s, are among those primarily used when testing elementary skills such as word recognition and sentence reading.[41, 42] These reading tests all relate to a country standard of expected reading skills.

In 2005, a report from the Danish Institute of Evaluation found that principals in 88 percent of schools reported that their schools' had developed procedures for student assessment in the first three grades. Only 60 percent of respondents confirmed that they had decided upon a systematic procedure to assess student reading skills after the third grade.

In the 2007–08 school year, Denmark introduced compulsory national computer-adaptive assessment tests related to intermediate achievement goals, although the reading test was not fully functional until 2010. These tests are pedagogical tools for teachers to use in planning the education of individual students, as well as tools for enhancing cooperation with parents. Students must complete compulsory tests in six subjects throughout their primary and lower secondary school years. Tests in reading are administered in Grades 2, 4, 6, and 8. Teachers receive guidelines for the evaluation process through a website.[43] Students who have dyslexia and use computer-assisted reading programs on a regular basis are allowed to use these programs during the national assessments. Only results at the national level are published, while results for individual

students, classes, and schools remain confidential.[44, 45] The first tests were administered in the 2010–11 year, and the system will be evaluated in 2013.

In 2009, a provision was introduced requiring teachers to prepare individual learning plans for students in Grades 0–10 and to update these plans at least once a year. Student plans contain both the results of the ongoing evaluation and a course of action based on these results. Schools provide parents with a copy of the plan, with the goal of improving discussions about how parents and the school can collaborate to support student educational development.[46]

At the end of Grades 9 and 10, students take school-leaving examinations. These examinations are compulsory after Grade 9 and voluntary after Grade 10. The tenth-grade examinations place higher academic demands on the students than the ninth-grade examinations.

Students must take examinations in a total of seven subjects. Five of the examinations are compulsory for all students: written and oral examinations in Danish, a written examination in mathematics, and oral examinations in English, and physics-chemistry. Each student also must take two examinations drawn at random: one from the humanities group, which includes written English as well as French or German, history, social studies, and Christian studies; and one from the science group, which consists of geography or biology. Standard rules for all examinations ensure uniformity throughout the country. The Ministry of Children and Education develops the written school-leaving examinations, and teachers conduct the oral examinations. In addition, a mandatory project assignment gives students in Grades 9 and 10 the opportunity to complete and present an interdisciplinary project.

Every municipal board is responsible for carrying out an annual report on the academic quality of individual schools and of the entire municipal school system. This report is a quality tool designed to ensure systematic documentation and cooperation among schools, municipalities, and the ministry.[47]

Impact and Use of PIRLS

Since the publication of IEA-RL results in 1994, the teaching of reading in primary school has received considerable attention in the Danish political arena.[48, 49] As a reaction to the results, the Ministry of Children and Education formed an expert group that provided advice to enhance the teaching of reading.[50] Since the 1990s, the government has funded a number of development

and research projects. One of the first of these was a research project analyzing differences in the teaching of reading in Grades 1–3 in Denmark as compared to Sweden and Finland, using test materials from IEA-RL in Grade 3. This study resulted in a number of suggestions for improving reading instruction in Denmark.[51] At the same time, a large-scale longitudinal study on the efficiency of different textbooks used as the basis for reading instruction in the first grades was conducted, which gave rise to a pedagogical discussion on the efficiency of the methods used in beginning reading instruction.[52]

In 1997, a concerned group of reading specialists founded an annual National Reading Initiative Award for a teacher or group of teachers who have demonstrated good teaching practices or developed new materials for the teaching of reading. Since 2007, the Danish branch of the International Reading Association, *Landsforeningen af Læsepædagoger*, has continued this award. Descriptions of each year's award-winning project and nominated runner-up projects are published to provide inspiration for other reading teachers.[53]

In 2000, test materials from IEA-RL and TIMSS 1995 were used in an evaluation of the progress in reading and mathematics in the Danish school system. Approximately 1,500 third-grade students participated in reading and about 2,500 eighth-grade students participated in both reading and mathematics. This study showed some progress in third-grade students' reading accuracy, but a decline in reading accuracy and reading speed, as well as in mathematics, for eighth-grade students.[54]

Also in 2000, the first OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) study with reading as the main subject was conducted. The Danish results for 15-year-olds were very similar to the results of the 14-year-olds nine years earlier in IEA-RL. The repeated PISA study cycles (2003, 2006, and 2009) have confirmed these results and have helped to maintain an ongoing public discussion about the quality of the educational system.[55]

In 2006, the Danish Ministry of Children and Education initiated the National Center for Reading (*Dansk Videnscenter for Læsning*), which today has become part of the Danish university colleges.

The center's mission is to promote reading, writing, and language development efforts at a national level and to help develop and maintain a high professional level in the university colleges where teacher training takes place.[56]

With the publication of the national PIRLS 2006 report, the results showed that the Danish focus, research, and campaigns on reading in primary school had been successful thus far.[57] By adding information to PIRLS from test results

obtained in the test previously used in IEA-RL, it was possible to create a link between results from the two studies that showed progress in reading from 1991 to 2006 equivalent to one school year.

However, the concern for improving Danish literacy skills continues; OECD's PISA has revealed a dissatisfactory percentage of Danish students leaving ten years of schooling with literacy skills too inadequate to complete a youth education program.[58, 59] While emphasis has been maintained on basic reading development, the pedagogical debate now also concerns instruction in reading comprehension, especially instruction in reading informational texts and in gaining experience with reading literature.

Suggested Readings

Undervisningsministeriet. (2008). *Facts about the public school system (the folkeskole) 2008*. København: Author. Retrieved from http://eng.uvm.dk/Fact-Sheets/Primary-and-lower-secondary-education

Undervisningsministeriet. (2009). *Facts about private schools in Denmark (private schools)*. København: Author. Retrieved from http://eng.uvm.dk/Fact-Sheets/Primary-and-lower-secondary-education

References

1 Danmarks Statistik. (2011). *Statistikbanken; BEF5: Population 1st January by sex, age and country of birth.* Retrieved from http://www.statistikbanken.dk/

2 Undervisningsministeriet. (2006). *Bekendtgørelse om folkeskolens undervisning i dansk som andetsprog* [Notice of public school instruction in Danish as a second language]. Retrieved from https://www.retsinformation.dk/Forms/R0710.aspx?id=24998

3 Elley, W. (Ed.). (1994). *The IEA study of reading literacy: Achievement and instruction in thirty-two school systems.* Oxford: Pergamon Press.

4 Mejding, J. (1994). *Den grimme ælling og svanerne?–om danske elevers læsefærdigheder* [The ugly duckling and the swan?–The Danish pupils' literacy skills]. Copenhagen: The Danish National Institute for Educational Research (DPI).

5 Undervisningsministeriet. (2005). *Rapport fra Udvalget til forberedelse af en national handlingsplan for læsning* [Report of the committee to prepare a national action plan for reading]. Retrieved from http://www.sm.dk/Temaer/sociale-omraader/Boern-unge-og-familie/Dagtilbudsomraadet/Bedre-kvalitet-i-dagtilbud/Documents/Rapport%20h%C3%B8ring.pdf

6 Bekendtgørelse af lov om folkeskolen [The Folkeskole Act] (2010). Retrieved from https://www.retsinformation.dk/Forms/R0710.aspx?id=133039

7 Styrelsen for Universiteter og Internationalisering, Ministeriet for Forskning, Innovation og Videregående Uddannelser. (2011). *The Danish education system*. Retrieved from http://en.iu.dk/publications/the-danish-education-system-1

8 Danmarks statistik. (2010). *Nyt fra Danmarks statistik, nr. 574*. Retrieved from http://www.dst.dk/pukora/epub/Nyt/2010/NR574.pdf

9   Danmarks statistik. (2011). *Nyt fra Danmarks statistik, nr. 632*. Retrieved from http://www.dst.dk/pukora/epub/Nyt/2011/NR632.pdf

10 Efterskolnerne værdier i hverdagen. (n.d.). *Efterskole*. Retrieved from http://www.efterskole.dk/da/Om%20efterskolen/In%20english.aspx

11 Styrelsen for Universiteter og Internationalisering, Ministeriet for Forskning, Innovation og Videregående Uddannelser. (2011). *The Danish education system*. Retrieved from http://en.iu.dk/publications/the-danish-education-system-1

12 Danmarks statistik. (2011). *Nyt fra Danmarks statistik, Nr. 632*. Retrieved from http://www.dst.dk/pukora/epub/Nyt/2011/NR632.pdf

13 Ministeriet for Børn og Undervisning. (2008). *Facts about the public school system (the folkeskole) 2008*. Retrieved from http://eng.uvm.dk/Fact-Sheets/Primary-and-lower-secondary-education

14 Bekendtgørelse af lov om folkeskolen § 10 [Act on Schools 10] (2010). Retrieved from https://www.retsinformation.dk/Forms/R0710.aspx?id=133039

15 Undervisningsministeriet. (2009). *Bekendtgørelse om formål, trin- og slutmål for folkeskolens fag og emner (fælles mål)* [Common objectives]. Retrieved from http://www.uvm.dk/Uddannelser-og-dagtilbud/Folkeskolen/Faelles-Maal?smarturl404=true

16 Undervisningsministeriet. (2003). *Fælles mål-Faghæfte 1–Dansk* [Joint target faghæfte 1–Danish]. Undervisningsministeriet, Uddannelsesstyrelsen, Område for Grundskolen.

17 Undervisningsministeriet. (2009). *Fælles mål, Dansk, Faghæfte 1* [Common goals, Danish, faghæfte 1]. Retrieved from http://uvm.dk/Service/Publikationer/Publikationer/Folkeskolen/2009/Faelles-Maal-2009-Dansk

18 Undervisningsministeriet. (2003). *Fælles mål 2003–Børnehaveklassen–Faghæfte 25,* [Common objectives 2003–Kindergarten class]. Undervisningsministeriet, Uddannelsesstyrelsen, Område for Grundskolen.

19 Undervisningsministeriet. (2009). *Fælles mål 2009, Børnehaveklassen*. [Common objectives 2009–Kindergarten class]. Retrieved from http://uvm.dk/Service/Publikationer/Publikationer/Folkeskolen/2009/Faelles-Maal-2009-Boernehaveklassen

20 Undervisningsministeriet. (2009). *Bekendtgørelse om undervisning i børnehaveklassen* [Order on education in kindergarten]. Retrieved from https://www.retsinformation.dk/Forms/R0710.aspx?id=124094&exp=1

21 Undervisningsministeriet. (2009). *Inspiration til obligatorisk sprogvurdering i børnehaveklassen* [Inspiration for the mandatory language assessment in kindergarten]. Retrieved from http://pub.uvm.dk/2009/sprogvurdering/hele_publikationen.html

22 Undervisningsministeriet. (2003). *Fælles mål-Faghæfte 1–Dansk.* [Joint target faghæfte 1–Danish]. Undervisningsministeriet, Uddannelsesstyrelsen, Område for Grundskolen.

23 Undervisningsministeriet. (2009). *Fælles mål, Dansk, Faghæfte 1* [Common goals, Danish, faghæfte 1]. Retrieved from http://uvm.dk/Service/Publikationer/Publikationer/Folkeskolen/2009/Faelles-Maal-2009-Dansk

24 EVA–Danmarks Evalueringsinstitut. (2009). *Undervisningsmidler i folkeskolen* [Educational services in schools]. Retrieved from http://www.eva.dk/eva/projekter/2009/undervisningsmidler-i-folkeskolen/projektprodukter/undervisningsmidler-i-folkeskolen

TIMSS & PIRLS
International Study Center
Lynch School of Education, Boston College

25 Ibid.

26 EMU–Danmarks Undervisningsportal. (2012). Retrieved from http://www.emu. dk/generelt/omemu/aboutemu.html

27 Undervisningsministeriet. (2009). *Facts and figures–Key figures in education 2009.* Retrieved from http://eng.uvm. dk/News/~/UVM-EN/Content/News/ Eng/2010/Jun/100629-New-publication-Facts-and-Figures-2009

28 Undervisningsministeriet. (2008). *Facts about the public school system (the folkeskole) 2008.* Retrieved from http:// eng.uvm.dk/Fact-Sheets/Primary-and-lower-secondary-education

29 EVA–Danmarks Evalueringsinstitut. (2009*). IT i skolen–erfaringer og perspektiver* [IT in schools–Experiences and perspectives]. Retrieved from http://www.eva.dk/eva/projekter/2008/ it-i-folkeskolen/projektprodukter/it-i-skolen-erfaringer-og-perspektiver

30 EVA–Danmarks Evalueringsinstitut. (2009). *Undervisningsmidler i folkeskolen* [Educational services in schools]. Retrieved from http://www.eva.dk/eva/ projekter/2009/undervisningsmidler-i-folkeskolen/projektprodukter/ undervisningsmidler-i-folkeskolen

31 Læsekonsulenternes Landsforening. (2012). *Hvem er vi?* [Who are we?]. Retrieved from http://læsekonsulent.dk/ index.php?page=hvem-er-vi

32 EMU–Danmarks Undervisningsportal. (2011). *Læsevejleder* [Reading supervisor]. Retrieved from http:// www.emu.dk/gsk/fag/ind/inspiration/ laesning/laesevejleder.html

33 Hornbek, A.M.B. (2009). *Elevernes herkomst i grunskolen 2008/2009* [Ethnic background of students in primary schools 2008–2009]. Uni-C Statistik & Analyse.

34 Undervisningsministeriet. (2008). *Facts about the public school system (the folkeskole) 2008.* Retrieved from http://

eng.uvm.dk/Fact-Sheets/Primary-and-lower-secondary-education

35 Ministeriet for Børn og Undervisning. (2012). *Sprogvurdering af børn* [Language assessment of children]. Retrieved from http://uvm.dk/Uddannelser-og-dagtilbud/Dagtilbudsomraadet/Fakta-om-dagtilbud/Sprogvurdering-af-boern

36 Undervisningsministeriet. (2010). *Bekendtgørelsen om folkeskolens specialundervisning og anden specialpædagogisk bistand* [Notices of public school special education and other special educational assistance]. Retrieved from https://www.retsinformation.dk/ Forms/R0710.aspx?id=141578

37 Undervisningsministeriet. (2009). *Statistik om specialundervisning* [Statistics on special education]. Retrieved from http://uvm.dk/ Service/Statistik/Statistik-om-folkeskolen-og-frie-skoler/Statistik-om-elever-i-folkeskolen-og-frie-skoler/ Statistik-om-specialundervisning

38 Styrelsen for Universiteter og Internationalisering, Ministeriet for Forskning, Innovation og Videregående Uddannelser. (2010). *Teacher training.* Retrieved from http://en.iu.dk/ education-in-denmark/detailed-information/teacher-education

39 Professionshøjskolen UCC. (n.d.). *De Pædagogiske diplomuddannelser* [The education diploma programs]. Retrieved from https://mereviden. ucc.dk/videreuddannelser/ depaedagogiskediplomuddannelser/

40 Bekendtgørelse af lov om folkeskolen [The Folkeskole Act] (2010). Retrieved from https://www.retsinformation.dk/ Forms/R0710.aspx?id=133039

41 Nielsen, J.C., Poulsen, A, Kreiner, S., & Søegaard, A. (1986). *Sætningslæseprøverne SL40 & SL60* [Sentence reading tests SL40 & SL60]. Copenhagen: Dansk Psykologisk Forlag.

42 Søegaard, A., Hesselholdt, S., Kreiner, S., Nielsen, J.C., Poulsen, A., & Spelling, S. (1983). *Ordstillelæsningsprøverne OS64 & OS120* [Word reading tests OS64 & OS120]. Copenhagen: Dansk Psykologisk Forlag.

43 Ministeriet for Børn og Undervisning. (2012). Retrieved from http://www.evaluering.uvm.dk

44 Undervisningsministeriet. (2008). *Facts about the public school system (the folkeskole) 2008*. Retrieved from http://eng.uvm.dk/Fact-Sheets/Primary-and-lower-secondary-education

45 Undervisningsministeriet. (2009). *Bekendtgørelse om anvendelse af test i folkeskolen mv* [Order on the use of tests in schools, etc.]. Retrieved from https://www.retsinformation.dk/Forms/R0710.aspx?id=127898

46 Undervisningsministeriet. (2009). *Bekendtgørelse om elevplaner, elev- og uddannelsesplaner samt uddannelsesplaner i folkeskolen* [Provision on student plans, student and educational programs, and curricula in schools]. Retrieved from https://www.retsinformation.dk/Forms/R0710.aspx?id=126051

47 Undervisningsministeriet. (2007*). Bekendtgørelse om anvendelse af kvalitetsrapporter og handlingsplaner i kommunalbestyrelsernes arbejde med evaluering og kvalitetsudvikling af folkeskolen* [Order on student plans, student and educational programs and curricula in schools]. Retrieved from http://www.uvm.dk/

48 Elley, W. (Ed.). (1994). *The IEA study of reading literacy: Achievement and instruction in thirty-two school systems.* Oxford: Pergamon Press.

49 Mejding, J. (1994). *Den grimme ælling og svanerne?–om danske elevers læsefærdigheder* [The ugly duckling and the swan?–The Danish pupils' literacy skills]. Copenhagen: The Danish

National Institute for Educational Research (DPI).

50 Elbro, C. (1993). *Råd til bedre læsning–Det rådgivende udvalgs rapport om læsefærdighed* [Advice for better reading–The advisory committee report on literacy]. København: Undervisningsministeriet.

51 Sommer, M., Lau, J., & Mejding, J. (1996). *Nordlæs–en undersøgelse af læsefærdigheder i 1.-3. klasse* [Nordlæs–A study of literacy in 1st–3rd grades]. København: The Danish National Institute for Educational Research (DPI).

52 Borstrøm, I., Petersen, D.K., & Elbro, C. (1999). *Hvordan kommer børn bedst i gang med at læse?* [What is the best way for children to learn to read?]. København: Center for Læseforskning, Undervisningsministeriets forlag.

53 Gamby, G. (2011). ”*Årets Læseinitiativpris*” *i sig selv et godt initiativ* ["This year's reading initiative award competition" in itself a good initiative]. Retrieved from http://www.laesepaed.dk/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=381&Itemid=139

54 Allerup, P., Mejding, J., & Zeuner, L. (2001). E*valuering af folkeskolen år 2000. Færdigheder i læsning og matematik–Udviklingstræk omkring årtusindskiftet* [Evaluation of folkeskolen 2000. Skills in reading and mathematics–Trends around the millennium]. København: Undervisningsministeriets Forlag.

55 Institut for Uddannelse og Pædagogik. (2012). *PISA-undersøgelserne* [PISA surveys]. Retrieved from http://edu.au.dk/forskning/projekter/internationaleundersoegelser/andreundersoegelser/pisa/

56 Nationalt videncenter for læsning. (n.d.). Retrieved from http://www.videnomlaesning.dk/

57 Mejding, J. & Rønberg, L. (2008). PIRLS *2006–En international undersøgelse om læsekompetence i 4. klasse* [PIRLS

2006–An international study on reading skills in fourth grade]. København: DPU Forlag.

58 Mejding, J. (2011). *PISA 2009-Danske unge i en international sammenligning, Vol. 3–Læsning af elektroniske tekster* [Reading electronic texts]. Retrieved from http://edu.au.dk/fileadmin/www.dpu.dk/centerforgrundskoleforskning/internationaleundersoegelser/andreundersoegelser/pisa/PISA_ERA_PDF.pdf

59 Egelund, N. (Ed.). (2010). *PISA 2009–Danske unge i international sammenligning*. København: Danmarks Pædagogiske Universitetsskole.

England

Liz Twist

National Foundation for Educational Research

Language and Literacy

In England, the official language and medium of instruction in all publicly funded schools is English. In 2011, 16.8 percent of students in primary schools spoke a language other than English at home, an increase from 16 percent during the previous year.[1] The most linguistically diverse area of England is London; a 2005 survey found that at least 196 languages were spoken by students ages 5–18 in the city, and at least 300 languages were spoken across England.[2] The other most predominant languages are those originally from South Asia such as Punjabi, Urdu, Gujarati, Hindi, and Bengali.[3] The official policy is to integrate all children into mainstream schools, providing additional language support if necessary. Local authorities provide classes for new arrivals and others wishing to develop their competence in English.

Overview of the Education System

In 2011, approximately 93 percent of students in England attended publicly funded educational institutions, with 1 percent of students attending special schools; [4] the remaining 7 percent attended privately funded institutions. In January 2011, there were 16,884 primary schools in England, with 4,137,755 students enrolled. This represents a decrease of 620 schools and 11,195 students since 2006.[5]

The Department for Education administers education at the national level. In the past, publicly funded ("maintained") schools were organized at a regional level by local authorities, whereas now a greater diversity of structures and providers are being developed. Some schools have been established outside local authority control and some existing schools have moved from local control and are funded directly by the central government. These latter, autonomous schools have been named academies. Established schools are being encouraged to adopt academy status by the Department for Education and some organizations have established "academy chains," consisting of several schools. Academy status introduces the following organizational changes, among others:

- ♦ Freedom from local authority control;

- ♦ The ability to set salaries and conditions for staff;

- ♦ Freedom in curriculum delivery; and

- ♦ The ability to change the length of terms and school days.

Some academies have a sponsor, which come from a wide range of backgrounds including successful schools, businesses, universities, charities, and faith bodies. Sponsors are accountable for improving the performance of their schools. Funding for academies comes from the central government, and includes a supplement to cover services not provided by the local authority. As of February 2012, there were 1,580 academies in England,[6] a majority of which are at the secondary phase of education.

A new type of school also has been introduced. Free Schools are non-profit, independent, publicly funded schools. A variety of groups can establish these schools, including charities, universities, businesses, educational organizations, teachers, or parents. As with academies, Free Schools operate with greater freedom than established publicly funded schools. In addition to the changes available to academies, Free Schools have additional freedoms such as not requiring teachers to have qualified teacher status. At present, there are relatively few Free Schools in England.

Most primary schools (63%) have no religious affiliation, although all are required to teach religious education and hold a daily act of collective worship.[7] Twenty-nine percent of primary-age students attend a school with a religious affiliation, the majority having an Anglican or Roman Catholic foundation. There are a small number of schools of other Christian faiths or with Jewish, Muslim, or Sikh affiliations.

Compulsory schooling starts from the term after the child's fifth birthday and continues to age 16. A majority of primary schools includes students from ages 4 or 5–11; the first year of primary school is generally known as the reception year. Thereafter, students move on to secondary schools, most of which include students up to age 16 or 18. At the end of 2010, 84 percent of 16- to 18-year-olds were in education and training, 9 percent of this age group were employed, and the remaining 7 percent were not in education, employment, or training.[8] Government policy is focused on this last group of young people, widely known as NEETS (Not In Education, Employment, or Training).

Publicly funded primary education is nonselective, as is most secondary, with students attending a local school based on parental choice and location. However, some schools use forms of selection based on ability or aptitude.

Exhibit 1 shows the structure of the three major phases of the education system—preprimary (up to age 5), primary (5–11 years), and secondary (11–16 years) and the components of the national curriculum.

Exhibit 1: Structure of the Education System in England

Phase	Preprimary	Compulsory Education	
		Primary	Secondary
Age	0–5	5–11	11–16
Stage	Early Years Foundation Stage: Ages 0–5	Early Years Foundation Stage: (to end of reception year) Key Stage 1: Ages 5–7 Key Stage 2: Ages 7–11	Key Stage 3: Ages 11–14 Key Stage 4: Ages 14–16
ISCED Level	Level 0: Ages 0–5	Level 1: Ages 5–11	Level 2: Ages 11–14 Level 3: Ages 14–16
Curriculum	Early learning goals: personal, social, and emotional development; communication, language, and literacy; problem solving, reasoning and numeracy; knowledge and understanding of the world; physical development; and creative development.	Core subjects: English, mathematics, science; and Foundation subjects: design and technology, information and communication technology (ICT), history, geography, art and design, music, and physical education. Religious education also is taught.	Key stage 3: Same as for primary, plus a modern foreign language and citizenship. Religious education also is taught. Key stage 4: The three core subjects plus, information and communication technology (ICT), physical education, and citizenship. Also an entitlement to choose from a variety of other subjects such as a modern foreign language, geography, history, the arts, and others.

The national curriculum was introduced in 1988 and revised in 1999. In 2007, further revisions to the curriculum for ages 11–16 were made. In September 2008, the government began to introduce these changes; however, the new administration, which took office in May 2010, has not implemented the new curriculum in full. In the past, all publicly funded schools have been obliged to follow the national curriculum for students ages 5–16, the years of compulsory schooling. Academies and Free Schools are not required to follow the national curriculum but must provide a broad and balanced curriculum to include English, mathematics, and science and to make provisions for the teaching of religious education.

The foreword to the 2000 curriculum specifies its aim as follows:

> [The national curriculum] sets out a clear, full and statutory entitlement to learning for all pupils. It determines the content of what will be taught and sets attainment targets for learning. It also determines how performance will be assessed and reported.[9]

Performance standards are described in a series of eight levels across the years of compulsory schooling. Exhibit 2 shows the expected relationship between these levels of performance and the key stages.

Exhibit 2:   Levels of Performance and Expected Attainment for Students in Key Stages 1–3

Range of Performance Levels within Which the Majority of Students are Expected to Work		Expected Performance Level Attained by the Majority of Students at the End of Each Key Stage	
Key Stage 1	Levels 1–3	At age 7	Level 2
Key Stage 2	Levels 2–5	At age 11	Level 4
Key Stage 3	Levels 3–7	At age 14	Level 5 or 6

Language/Reading Curriculum in the Fourth Grade

Reading Policy

The previous government had a series of targets related to achievement in English (reading and writing) at age 11, focusing on the proportion of students who achieved at least the expected standard, Level 4 (see Exhibit 2), in tests at the end of the primary stage of education. The latest figures show that 84 percent of students achieved at least Level 4 in reading in 2011 and that 43 percent achieved Level 5, exceeding age expectations.[10]

The national curriculum describes performance at these levels in reading as follows:

♦   Level 4—In responding to a range of texts, students show understanding of significant ideas, themes, events, and characters and begin to use inference and deduction. They refer to the text when explaining their views. They locate and use ideas and information.

♦   Level 5—Students show understanding of a range of texts, selecting essential points and using inference and deduction where appropriate. In their responses, they identify key features, themes, and characters and select sentences, phrases, and relevant information to support their views. They retrieve and collate information from a range of sources.

While there has been a focus on end of Key Stage 2 assessments as key measures of the effectiveness of primary schools, a more recent policy direction has been the identification of systematic synthetic phonics as the most effective approach in the teaching of early literacy skills. The previous focus was on "systematic phonics teaching," not explicitly synthetic phonics. In contrast to analytic phonics, in which words are broken down into their beginning and end parts, such as "str-" and "eet," synthetic phonics starts by sequencing the individual sounds in words—for example, "s-t-r-ee-t"—with an emphasis on blending them together. For the first time in 2012, a screening check will be introduced nationally at age six to identify, at the earliest opportunity, those students who have not made the expected progress in developing this underpinning phonic knowledge.

Summary of National Curriculum

Reading is one of three elements in the national curriculum for English, alongside speaking and listening, and writing. In all national curriculum subjects, the programs of study set out what students should be taught and have two strands: the knowledge, skills, and understanding to be taught; and the breadth of study (the contexts, activities, areas of study, and ranges of experience through which the subject is to be taught). The current national curriculum for English describes the development of student reading skills at each of the key stages as follows:

♦ Key Stage 1—Students' interests and pleasure in reading are developed as they learn to read confidently and independently. Students focus on words and sentences and how they fit into whole texts. They work out the meaning of straightforward texts and say why they do or do not like them.[11]

♦ Key Stage 2—Students enthusiastically read a range of materials and use their knowledge of words, sentences, and texts to understand and respond to the meaning. Students increase their ability to read challenging and lengthy texts independently. They reflect on the meaning of texts, analyzing and discussing them with others.[12]

♦ Key Stages 3 and 4—Students learn to become enthusiastic and critical readers of stories, poetry, and drama, as well as non-fiction and media texts, gaining access to the pleasure and world of knowledge that reading offers.[13, 14]

Although the programs of study set out what students should be taught, and the attainment targets set out the expected standards of student performance, the national curriculum does not specify any particular teaching strategies or resources for use in schools.

There are separate programs of study in English for the elements of speaking and listening, reading, and writing. Nevertheless there is an expectation that, because language development depends on their interrelatedness, teaching needs to build on the links between them.

The program of study for reading for Key Stage 2 (ages 7–11) is as follows: [15]

Exhibit 3: Program of Study and Expected Attainment for Reading, Key Stage 2

Section		Level Descriptors
Knowledge, Skills, and Understanding	Reading Strategies	To read with fluency, accuracy and understanding, students should be taught to use the following: phonemic awareness and phonic knowledge, word recognition and graphic knowledge, knowledge of grammatical structures, and contextual understanding.
	Understanding Texts	Students should be taught to do the following: use inference and deduction, look for meaning beyond the literal, make connections between different parts of a text, and use their knowledge of other texts they have read.
	Reading for Information	Students should be taught to do the following: scan texts to find information; skim for gist and overall impression; obtain specific information through detailed reading; draw on different features of texts, including print, sound, and image, to obtain meaning; use organizational features and systems to find texts and information; distinguish between fact and opinion; and consider an argument critically.
	Literature	To develop understanding and appreciation of literary texts, students should be taught to do the following: recognize the choice, use, and effect of figurative language, vocabulary, and patterns of language; identify different ways of constructing sentences and their effects; identify how character and setting are created, and how plot, narrative structure, and themes are developed; recognize the differences between author, narrator, and character; evaluate ideas and themes that broaden perspectives and extend thinking; consider poetic forms and their effects; express preferences and support views by referencing texts; respond imaginatively, drawing on the whole text and other reading; and read stories, poems, and plays aloud.
	Non-fiction and Non-literary Texts	To develop understanding and appreciation of non-fiction and non-literary texts, students should be taught to do the following: identify the use and effect of specialist vocabulary; identify words associated with reason, persuasion, argument, explanation, instruction, and description; recognize phrases and sentences that convey a formal, impersonal tone; identify links between ideas and sentences in non-chronological writing; understand the structural and organizational features of different types of text; evaluate different formats, layouts, and presentational devices; and engage with challenging and demanding subject matter.
	Language Structure and Variation	To read texts with greater accuracy and understanding, students should be taught to do the following: identify and comment on features of English at the word, sentence, and text level, using appropriate terminology.

Section		Level Descriptors
Breadth of Study	Literature	Students should be taught knowledge, skills, and understanding through a range of literary texts, including the following: modern fiction by significant children's authors; long-established children's fiction; a range of good-quality modern poetry; classic poetry; texts from a variety of cultures and traditions; myths, legends, and traditional stories; and play scripts.
	Non-fiction and Non-literary Texts	Students should be taught knowledge, skills, and understanding through a range of non-fiction and non-literary texts, including the following: diaries, autobiographies, biographies, and letters; print and ICT-based reference and information materials; and newspapers, magazines, articles, leaflets, brochures, and advertisements.

Reading Instruction in the Primary Grades

Instructional Materials

There are no centrally published materials for the teaching of reading, although many publishers produce sets of leveled readers for use in the early years and a variety of support materials are often used alongside leveled books with controlled vocabulary. A new program has been introduced providing government funding for approved resources in teaching synthetic phonics. Most schools used leveled programs in conjunction with selections of fiction and nonfiction texts in class and school libraries. A small number of dual-language texts also are available.

Use of Technology

The Education Reform Act of 1988 made ICT compulsory for all students ages 5–16 in publicly funded schools, and ICT is required for all students in the teaching of English. Its position in the national curriculum and the proposed program of study are currently under review.

The schools' regulator, Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills), reported on the use of ICT in the curriculum during the three years prior to 2011.[16] Ofsted reported that practice was better in primary than in secondary schools. It was found that in primary schools where effective use of ICT was seen, some schools used ICT to engage boys more successfully in English, especially in reading and writing:

> These pupils were motivated to improve their reading skills to enable them to understand and report on material researched on the Internet. In one school, the opportunity to contribute online book reviews to a site provided by a commercial book supplier was encouraging reluctant readers.[17]

A number of resources meeting the present government's core criteria for resources that promote high quality teaching of systematic synthetic phonics in the earliest stages of learning to read include material for interactive whiteboard and computer-based delivery.

Role of Reading Specialists

Typically, the class teacher teaches reading as part of the English or literacy curriculum. Within primary schools, the practice is to have subject leaders— generally, middle management teachers who focus on improving standards in their schools through lesson observation, resource management, and the dissemination of good practice including coaching and peer support. Typically, these teachers also continue with the teaching responsibility for a particular class of students for most subjects.

Some schools may have one or more teachers designated as Advanced Skills Teachers in literacy. These teachers are expert practitioners who are expected to share good practices within their own school as well as with other neighboring schools. They receive additional salary when they take on this role. Some schools may also have a trained Reading Recovery® teacher.

Second-language Instruction

Teaching is generally provided in English, but support is often provided for students who are learning English as an additional language depending on students' level of fluency. Fluency is often assessed and described using a framework originally produced by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority.[18] Support may be provided by specialist teachers or bilingual teaching assistants. Those involved are expected to plan together to provide the most effective support, which often include the following: pre-teaching, to enable students to access the lesson; support during the lesson; and follow-up consolidation.

In 2005, Ofsted published a report that focused on the writing competence of advanced bilingual learners ages 7–11, *Could they do even better?*[19] The report described advanced bilingual learners as students who have had "all or most of their school education in the United Kingdom and whose oral proficiency in English is usually indistinguishable from that of students with English as a first language but whose writing may still show distinctive features related to their language background." The report indicated that the educational attainment at the end of primary school of advanced bilingual learners suggested some underachievement, more notably in writing than reading.

Students with Reading Difficulties

Diagnostic Testing

A new, statutory phonics screening check is to be introduced for all students at age six in publicly funded schools at the end of the 2011–12 academic year. The stated purpose of this is to confirm whether individual students have learned phonic decoding to an appropriate standard. Students who have not reached this standard at the end of Year 1 should receive support from their school to ensure that they can improve their phonic decoding skills. Students will then have the opportunity to retake the screening check.

Schools also may use the national assessments at age seven to identify students not meeting expected standards. In addition, numerous standardized tests are available to schools for screening purposes.

Instruction for Children with Reading Difficulties

There are no national intervention programs for children with reading disabilities, and school managers select approaches that best suit their local circumstances. Frequently, school managers deploy teaching assistants, working under the guidance of the class teacher, or specially trained teachers to assist such children.

One of the best known programs is Every Child a Reader (ECaR), a school-wide early literacy strategy for raising attainment in Key Stage 1 through a layered approach to intervention with Reading Recovery® at the core. The overall aim of ECaR is that, by the end of Key Stage 1 (age 7), struggling readers and writers are able to achieve in line with age-related expectations or better. Further, ECaR provides professional expertise in schools to enhance literacy achievement of all students. Intervention strategies may include Talking Partners, Better Reading Partners, Early Literacy Support, Fischer Family Trust Wave 3, and Reading Recovery. The program has previously received some government funding for national roll out and evaluation, and a national appraisal of ECaR was published in 2011.[20]

Teachers and Teacher Education

In 2010, of the 196,300 regular teachers in primary and nursery schools in England, 31,200 worked part-time.[21]

Teaching is an all-graduate profession into which there are two main routes. For each route, prospective teachers must pass five or more subjects with a grade of C or higher in the General Certificate of Secondary Education

examinations (GCSEs), including English and mathematics, and pass two or more Advanced Level examinations (or equivalent) prior to acceptance to a training course. Students most commonly take GCSEs at age 16 and Advanced Level examinations at age 18.

In the first route into teaching, prospective teachers pursue a three- or four-year degree that combines the study of one or more academic subjects with professional training in aspects of education (a Bachelor of Education or Bachelor of Arts with qualified teacher status). Alternatively, teachers can pursue a three-year bachelor's degree followed by a one-year Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE). A third, less common way of attaining qualified teacher status is an employment-based route.

The majority of teachers entering secondary schools have a relevant degree and a PGCE. First degrees that confer qualified teacher status are more common among primary teachers.

The content of initial teacher training programs is in part determined by the rigorous demands of a series of professional competencies that student teachers must attain. These are organized into three interrelated categories: professional attributes, professional knowledge and understanding, and professional skills. All prospective primary school teachers receive training in the teaching of reading, and must pass skill tests in literacy, numeracy, and ICT.

Student teachers register with higher education institutions and spend a large proportion of their time in the classroom under the supervision of a practicing teacher. Primary teachers are trained to teach all subjects in the national curriculum.

During the early part of their teaching careers, mentors within their schools support newly qualified teachers and qualified teacher status is confirmed upon satisfactory completion of three school terms of teaching (the induction year). This aims to provide a bridge between initial training and effective professional practice.

Requirements for Ongoing Professional Development in Reading for Teachers
There are a variety of opportunities for continuing professional development for teachers, ranging from short, one-day courses to higher degrees, studied part-time over several years. Individual local authorities, higher education institutions, or specialist companies or consultants may provide professional development. Once they have obtained some teaching experience, teachers

may specialize in literacy instruction and lead literacy instruction in their own schools.

Publicly funded schools, but not academies, allocate five days in each academic year to professional development, deciding which specific days and subjects best suit their needs.

Monitoring Student Progress in Reading

Teachers are expected to regularly assess student attainment, using the national curriculum level descriptions and considering all three elements of English (speaking and listening, reading, and writing).

England has an extensive structure of formal assessment, starting with the mandatory assessment of five-year-olds in funded settings at the end of the Foundation Stage. Schools must then submit data on the attainment of seven-year-olds at the end of Key Stage 1 and there are external mandatory assessments in reading, writing, and mathematics at age 11, at the end of primary education. In the intervening primary years, teachers can elect to use centrally produced optional tests in English and mathematics as a means of collecting further evidence to support their own assessments. In 2012, the phonics screening check is being introduced for all six-year-olds in maintained schools.

At age 11, the national reading test comprises a full-color stimulus booklet, usually containing three or four different texts that are thematically linked, and a separate question booklet with about 30 questions. The tests are scored externally by trained evaluators, and the results are returned to schools. About 4 percent of children are judged by their teachers to be working below the levels covered by the tests at age 11.[22] These children do not participate in the main assessment.

The test results for Key Stage 2 English and mathematics are published nationally on a school-by-school basis. This has contributed to the tests' high profile in England. The results for seven-year-olds are published at a national summary level. These results also contribute to the measures of school effectiveness known as "value-added measures," which are intended to measure progress made by students from the end of one key stage to the end of another, in comparison to students of the same or similar prior attainment.[23]

The previous government encouraged the development of teacher assessment skills as part of a strategy to shift from a focus on summative assessment to a more balanced assessment regime, giving teacher assessments increased status. The current government requested a review of the assessment

arrangements at the end of primary school and has accepted the review panel's recommendations. These include significant changes in the external assessment of writing, although the process for the assessment of reading remains largely unchanged.

In the first years of schooling, teachers frequently use a "home-school book" in which teachers and parents note reading progress to encourage reading practice at home. Schools must produce annual student reports that identify student progress and targets for the forthcoming year, and these are sent to parents at the end of the school year.

Commercial publishers provide a wide variety of additional test materials, including standardized tests, that some schools elect to use to supplement the mandatory tests. In addition, national optional tests in reading and writing are available for students at ages 7–8, 8–9, and 9–10, and are used widely.

Impact and Use of PIRLS

England has participated in the two previous PIRLS assessments and has a long history of involvement with international surveys. PIRLS is becoming increasingly known among policy makers, with the assessment and its results being cited in a number of recent policy documents. The new government's white paper (leading to the 2011 Education Act), *The Importance of Teaching – The Schools White Paper 2010,* confirmed the policy of benchmarking England's performance using international surveys.[24]

One of the most challenging aspects of international surveys in England has been obtaining cooperation from the sampled schools. The 2011 Education Act now requires publicly funded schools drawn in the sample to participate in the various international surveys in which England is involved. This will apply to all international comparative surveys from 2012 onwards.

Suggested Readings

Sainsbury, M., Harrison, C., & Watts, A. (Eds.). (2006). *Assessing reading: From theories to classrooms. An international multi-disciplinary investigation of the theory of reading assessment and its practical implications at the beginning of the 21st century*. Slough: NFER. Retrieved from http://www.nfer.ac.uk/nfer/publications/ASR01/ASR01_home.cfm?publicationID=247&title=Assessing%20reading:%20from%20theories%20to%20classrooms

References

1   Department for Education. (2011). *Schools, pupils and their characteristics, January 2011* (Statistical first release SFR 12/2011). London: Author. Retrieved from http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s001012/index.shtml

2   CILT: The National Centre for Languages. (2005). *Language trends 2005: Community language learning in England, Wales and Scotland*. Retrieved from http://www.cilt.org.uk/home/research_and_statistics/language_trends/community_languages.aspx

3   Eurydice. (2011). *Eurypedia: United Kingdom (England)–Population: Demographic situation, languages and religions*. Retrieved from https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/United-Kingdom-England:Population:_Demographic_Situation,_Languages_and_Religions

4   Department for Education. (2011). *Schools, pupils and their characteristics, January 2011* (Statistical first release SFR 12 2011). Retrieved from http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s001012/index.shtml

5   Ibid.

6   Department for Education. (2012). *Academies*. Retrieved from http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/typesofschools/academies

7   Department for Education. (2011). *Schools, pupils and their characteristics, January 2011* (Statistical first release SFR 12 2011). Retrieved from http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s001012/index.shtml

8   Department for Education. (2011). *Participation in education, training and employment by 16–18 year olds in England* (Statistical first release SFR 15 2011). Retrieved from http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s001011/index.shtml

9   Qualifications and Curriculum Authority. (1999). *The national curriculum: Handbook for primary teachers in England*. London: HMSO. Retrieved from https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/QCA-99-457.pdf

10 Department for Education. (2012). *National curriculum assessments in key stage 2 in England, 2010/2011* (Revised) (Statistical first release SFR 31 2011). Retrieved from http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s001047/index.shtml

11 Department for Education. (2011). *Key stage 1: English: En2 reading*. Retrieved from http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/teachingandlearning/curriculum/primary/b00198874/english/ks1/en2

12 Department for Education. (2011). *Key stage 2: English: En2 reading*. Retrieved from http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/teachingandlearning/curriculum/primary/b00198874/english/ks2/en2

13 Department for Education. (2011). *Key stage 3: English: Programme of study*. Retrieved from http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/teachingandlearning/

curriculum/secondary/b00199101/english/ks3/programme

14 Department for Education. (2011). *Key stage 4: English: Programme of study.* Retrieved from http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/teachingandlearning/curriculum/secondary/b00199101/english/ks4/programme

15 Qualifications and Curriculum Authority. (1999). *English: The national curriculum in England (Key stages 1–4).* London: Department for Education and Employment, and Qualifications and Curriculum Authority. Retrieved from https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/Download?DownloadPublicationReference=QCA-99-459&DownloadItemReference=English%3A%20The%20National%20Curriculum%20in%20England%20Key%20Stages%201-4%20PDF(DfES%20Online%20Store)&DocumentType=PDF&Url=%2Fpublications%2FeOrderingDownload%2FQCA-99-459.pdf

16 Office for Standards in Education. (2011). *ICT in schools 2008–11.* Retrieved from http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/ict-schools-2008-11

17 Ibid.

18 Qualifications and Curriculum Authority. (2000). *A language in common: Assessing English as an additional language.* London: Author. Retrieved from http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/pdf/a/a%20language%20in%20common%20assessing%20eal.pdf

19 Office for Standards in Education. (2005). *Could they do even better? The writing of advanced bilingual learners of English at key stage 2: HMI survey of good practice* (HMI 2452). London: Author. Retrieved from http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/could-they-do-even-better

20 Department for Education. (2011). *Evaluation of every child a reader (ECaR)* (DFE research report 114). Retrieved from https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/DFE-RR114

21 Department for Education. (2011). *School workforce in England, November 2010 (Provisional)* (Statistical first release SFR 6 2011). Retrieved from http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000997/index.shtml

22 Department for Education. (2012). *National curriculum assessments in key stage 2 in England, 2010/2011* (Revised) (Statistical first release SFR 31 2011). Retrieved from http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s001047/index.shtml

23 Ibid.

24 Department for Education. (2010). *The importance of teaching. The schools white paper 2010* (CM 7980). London: Author. Retrieved from https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/CM-7980.pdf

Finland

Sari Sulkunen

Finnish Institute for Educational Research, University of Jyväskylä

Language and Literacy

Finland has two official languages—Finnish and Swedish. Finnish is spoken by 93 percent of the country's 5 million inhabitants. The other official language, Swedish is spoken by approximately 6 percent of the population, most of whom can also speak Finnish. The constitution of Finland stipulates that the two national languages are equal throughout the country with respect to dealing with authorities and schooling.

Sami is a minority language that is spoken by approximately 2,000 people (less than 0.1% of the Finnish population) living in the north of Finland. The Sami-speaking population has the right to use the Sami language when dealing with the authorities. Other language minorities include Finnish sign language users, the Roma, Russian-speakers, and more recent immigrant groups. The Sami, as an indigenous people, have the right to maintain and develop their own language and culture, as do the Roma and sign language users.[1]

Finnish and Swedish are languages of instruction for all educational levels and school subjects. Usually either Finnish or Swedish is the language of instruction, but some upper-secondary vocational institutions and universities are bilingual. Sami is the language of instruction in some basic education, upper-secondary general, and vocational institutions in the Sami-speaking areas.[2]

Finnish people are active readers and users of the public library. There are public libraries in every municipality (319), most of which also have branch libraries (496) and mobile libraries (155) for sparsely populated areas. In 2009, total annual lending was almost 100 million items (19 per capita), the number of library visits for the year was 54 million (11 per capita), and library Internet services were used 52 million times.[3] Also in 2009, 51 newspapers were published from 4–7 times a week, reaching more than 90 percent of Finns (online newspapers included).[4]

Overview of the Education System

In Finland, education is considered a fundamental right of all citizens, and the main objective of Finnish education policy is to offer all citizens equal opportunities to receive education, regardless of age, nationality, place of residence, financial situation, or mother tongue.[5]

The Finnish government determines general objectives of basic education and the allocation of instructional time among the different subjects. The National Board of Education, which reports to the Ministry of Education and Culture, decides objectives and contents of instruction and records them in the national core curriculum. Municipalities prepare their local curricula based on this national core curriculum. During the 1990s, decentralization of decision-making on curricular issues was a major emphasis. More recently, educational policy is working toward accentuating core competencies and defining standards of proficiency levels in core subject areas.

The majority of students attend publicly funded schools. Municipalities or federations of municipalities maintain most primary and upper-secondary level institutions. Private schools receive the same level of public funding as publicly funded schools.

Municipalities have significant freedom in organizing schooling along the general guidelines provided by the ministry and the national board. In addition, schools (and teachers) have autonomy regarding pedagogical practices and methods of student assessment within the guidelines of the national curriculum.

Before compulsory education begins, a child may voluntarily participate in one year of preprimary education, which municipalities are obliged to provide. Compulsory education usually starts the year in which a child turns seven. The basic education syllabus spans nine years, which nearly all children complete by attending comprehensive school. Basic education is free of charge for all students and includes textbooks and other materials, a free daily meal, and school health care and other welfare services.

The upper-secondary level comprises general and vocational education. Both have a three-year syllabus, and education is mostly free, though students must pay for materials. General upper-secondary school ends in a matriculation examination that determines eligibility for higher education studies in both polytechnics and universities. The vocational upper-secondary qualification examination gives general eligibility for all higher education.

Language/Reading Curriculum in the Fourth Grade

Reading Policy

For all nine grades of basic education, the national curriculum includes guidelines for teaching reading under the heading "Mother Tongue and Literature." The curriculum establishes the learning objectives in each subject and describes subject content on a general level. Additionally, the national curriculum for Mother Tongue and Literature includes a description of good performance at the end of Grades 2 and 5, as well as assessment criteria to be used at the end of the comprehensive school. Municipalities work together with schools to write their own, more detailed, school curricula based on the national one. Thus, the common core curriculum is open to local adaptation.

In addition to the learning objectives and subject-matter content, the national curriculum stipulates the minimum amount of instruction for each subject as the number of weekly lessons per year. For Mother Tongue and Literature, the minimum amount of instruction is 14 weekly lessons for Grades 1–2, Grades 3–5, and Grades 6–9. Municipalities decide how to distribute weekly lessons for each grade; for instance, they could distribute the 14 weekly lessons for Grades 3–5 as five weekly lessons for Grades 3 and 4, and four weekly lessons for Grade 5. Mother Tongue and Literature must be taught in every grade of the basic education cycle.[6] Municipalities may decide to exceed the minimum amount of instruction.

There are separate mother tongue curricula for Finnish, and the minority languages: Swedish, Sami, Romany, and Finnish sign language. The guidelines for teaching reading are essentially the same, especially for Finnish, Swedish and Sami; but, there are some differences and language-specific areas of emphasis.[7] The following description is based on the curriculum for Finnish as the mother tongue, because it is the curriculum taught to the vast majority of students.

The general objective of the national curriculum for Mother Tongue and Literature is that students become active and responsible communicators and readers. Instruction must be founded on students' linguistic and cultural skills and experience, and must offer opportunities for diversified communication, including reading, through which students can build identity and self-esteem. Each subject must have a foundation in a range of texts, broadly conceived; texts can be spoken or written, fictional or factual, verbal, figurative, vocal, and graphic, or a combination of these.[8]

Summary of National Curriculum

In Grades 1–2, the national curriculum emphasizes oral and written communication connected with students' everyday lives, encompassing all areas of language, and supporting the individual in language learning. The objectives for reading (and writing) include the following:

♦ Learning the basic techniques of reading and writing;

♦ Further developing reading and writing skills, including media and digital literacy;

♦ Learning to observe oneself as a reader and writer; and

♦ Gradually learning the conventions of written language.

One objective related to students' relationship with literature emphasizes reading engagement by learning to choose reading material of interest to the students and of appropriate difficulty. Basic reading technique objectives are to be met through ample practice of sound-letter correspondence; breaking down speech into words, syllables, and sounds; word recognition; and spelling at the sound and sentence level. The curriculum also includes diversified daily reading and writing as well as instruction in text-comprehension strategies to develop reading skills.[9]

In Grades 3–5, the general objectives related to reading in the national curriculum focus on learning fluent reading and writing techniques, deepening reading comprehension, and developing skills in acquiring information. The more specific reading objectives for interpreting and utilizing texts require that students learn to do the following:

♦ Read texts fluently and evaluate themselves as readers;

♦ Practice different ways of reading by applying various comprehension strategies;

♦ Choose reading material appropriate for different purposes; and

♦ Search for information from varied sources.

Furthermore, the curriculum for Grades 3–5 stresses student relationships with language and literature through reading engagement by focusing on reading ample amounts of varied literature and learning to select interesting and appropriate reading material in order to preserve positive attitudes toward reading. The Grade 3–5 curriculum also stresses text comprehension, specifically focusing on different ways of reading (e.g., skimming, literal reading, inferential

reading), reading comprehension strategies (e.g., anticipating the content and structure of texts based on illustrations and headings, distinguishing main issues from secondary ones, summarizing, posing questions), and evaluating texts. Emphasis is placed on ample reading of several types of literary content, including both common and optional materials, as well as sharing personal reading experiences.[10]

For Grades 6–9, the national curriculum defines the core task of instruction as broadening student literacy from the skills needed in their immediate environment to standard language requirements and types of text that are new to the students. Students are to improve as text analysts and critical interpreters of texts during these grades, and mother tongue instruction is to encourage students to read and evaluate literature and various texts. Specific reading objectives include the following:

♦ Gaining practice with critical reading;

♦ Developing knowledge of text types and genres;

♦ Anticipating the type of reading appropriate for various genres and reading purposes;

♦ Enhancing information acquisition skills; and

♦ Learning to use multiple sources.

In the case of the reading of literature, objectives include diversifying students' reading activities and deepening their knowledge of literature. Objectives are to be met by the following: ensuring mastery of reading processes through specific emphasis on reading comprehension; choosing appropriate methods of reading; sharing reading experiences; interpreting literary texts; familiarizing students with different types of text in factual and fictional settings, as well as in genres central to Finnish culture; analyzing texts as structural and meaningful entities; evaluating verbal, visual, and auditory elements used in texts, as well as author's intentions and choices used for argumentative purposes; summarizing texts; and evaluating values and attitudes concealed in writing and illustration. Literature instruction should also include reading complete works, both required and optional, as well as a range of shorter texts of various genres.[11]

Reading Instruction in the Primary Grades

Instructional Materials

Commercially published textbooks in the mother tongue are the primary materials for teaching reading. These are not subject to official approval, but must comply with national curriculum guidelines. The three most widely used textbook series in Grades 3–6 include a wide variety of materials for instruction: for example, the textbooks themselves, teachers' guides, assessment materials, and exercise books for differentiated instruction. Some series also include an extra reader, a reading journal, or additional remedial teaching material for students with reading or writing difficulties.

The Finnish National Board of Education produces small-circulation materials for special groups. Schools and teachers are free to choose any textbook series they find suitable. For practical reasons, teachers in the same school usually use the same textbook.

Use of Technology

Technological resources in Finnish schools are widely available. On average, there are 5.5 students per computer in basic education, and nearly 80 percent of primary schools have fewer than 10 students per computer.[12] The use of technology in reading instruction is not widespread, although learning games are available that particularly benefit struggling readers who need to practice basic reading skills (e.g. *Ekapeli*).[13] These may be used at school, but only as supplements to more traditional methods and materials.

Role of Reading Specialists

Primary schools have special education teachers who also serve as reading specialists. While classroom teachers are responsible for teaching reading, special education teachers collaborate with them in screening, testing, and supporting students with reading difficulties. These specialists provide part-time special education to students who need it, either in individual or small-group sessions, in addition to or simultaneously with other instruction.

Second-language Instruction

Students whose mother tongue is not Finnish, Swedish, or Sami receive instruction in Finnish or Swedish as a second language. This instruction partially or entirely replaces the standard Mother Tongue and Literature instruction where Finnish or Swedish is the mother tongue. The number of weekly lessons per year is equal to that for Finnish as the mother tongue.

The objectives of second language instruction in the national curriculum emphasize proficiency in Finnish or Swedish. Students who are proficient in Finnish and Swedish can study any subject and continue their studies beyond the basic education level. Lifelong language learning and developing native speaker language proficiency are encouraged to help students achieve equal opportunity in society. The national curriculum also asserts that Finnish or Swedish are both objects and instruments of learning in second language instruction. Students, therefore, learn either second language in every subject, necessitating teacher cooperation. The aim is also to support functional bilingualism and cultural identity by stressing language proficiency in the student's second language in conjunction with the students' mother tongues.[14]

Students with Reading Difficulties

Diagnostic Testing

A number of diagnostic reading tests are available in Finnish. Classroom teachers use some of these tests to screen groups, while special education teachers and school psychologists use other diagnostic tests to identify individual students' reading difficulties. The most commonly used standardized reading test is the Comprehensive School Reading test, which covers linguistic awareness, and decoding and reading comprehension for Grade 1 and Grades 2–6.[15]

Because municipalities, as education providers, and schools decide on their own assessment practices, some variation exists in the area of diagnostic testing. At many, if not most, of the primary schools, students are tested in the first or second grade as well as in the fourth grade.

Instruction for Children with Reading Difficulties

According to the Basic Education Act, students have the right to adequate support for learning within the school. Depending on student need, this support may be provided as remedial teaching, part-time special education, enhanced support according to an individual learning plan, or full-time special education.[16] The national curriculum further stresses the importance of the early recognition of learning difficulties, early support measures, different means of support, and cooperation with the students' parents.[17]

In the case of minor reading difficulties, a classroom teacher may give remedial instruction to the student or ask the special education teacher for consultation. In the case of more severe or more persistent reading difficulties, a special education teacher steps in to evaluate the nature of the difficulties and

provide part-time special education either in the class or, more commonly, in individual or small-group sessions. If these support measures are inadequate, the student may receive enhanced support or be transferred to full-time special education, based on individual teaching and learning plans.

In 2009, approximately nine percent of students in basic education were transferred to special education and another 23 percent received part-time special education. At the primary level, reading and writing difficulties were clearly the most common reasons for part-time special education: 52 percent of the students in part-time special education received special support in reading and writing.[18]

Teachers and Teacher Education

Teacher Education Specific to Reading

In Finland, a master's degree is a prerequisite for teacher qualification. Eight universities provide teacher education for both general classroom teachers as well as subject teachers. The general content and structure of teacher education programs, as well as the master's degree program requirements, are regulated by government regulations.[19] Universities have independence regarding the specific content of teacher education programs.[20]

Prospective classroom teachers for Grades 1–6 major in education. Their program requires from 5–8 credits (2–3% of the master's degree) in mother tongue, including methods of teaching reading and writing. Many universities also offer optional studies in the teaching of mother tongue and literature.

Subject teachers of mother tongue and literature major in either the Finnish language or literature, and minor in pedagogical studies (60 credits). Both classroom teachers' and subject teachers' pedagogical studies include guided practical training. The extent of the classroom teachers' guided practice varies from 26–33 credits (9–11% of the master's degree). In most universities subject specialist teachers' guided practice is 20 credits (7% of the master's degree).

Requirements for Ongoing Professional Development in Reading for Teachers

Teachers' collective agreements on working conditions regulate teachers' obligation to participate in professional development for three days during each school year.[21] Teacher employers, such as municipalities, are typically responsible for organizing and funding their staff's professional development, including in-service training. Regional authorities and the National Board of

Education also provide in-service training. The content and focus of in-service training vary between municipalities and regional authorities.

The National Board of Education also is responsible for funding, monitoring, and promoting teacher professional development, usually focusing on topics relevant to national education policy. Education providers can apply for funding from the National Board of Education on a yearly basis.[22]

In recent years, in-service teacher education participation has decreased, and the Ministry of Education and Culture has started to emphasize teacher professional development by doubling funding for this purpose and launching a new development program. The development program is organized and funded through regional authorities and the National Board of Education.[23]

Monitoring Student Progress in Reading

Reading is assessed within the subject of mother tongue and literature. The Finnish National Board of Education is responsible for developing education, and thus conducts national assessments of learning outcomes. National assessments are sample-based and focus on the central content of the national curriculum, mainly at the end of basic education. During the last decade National Board of Education has implemented national assessments of mother tongue for Grade 9 every second or third year (in 2003, 2005 and 2010), and once for Grades 3 (in 2005) and 6 (in 2007).[24] These national assessments provide schools and teachers with regular updates about the knowledge and skills of their students in relation to other schools and national objectives of instruction.[25] Teachers are responsible for student assessment in the classroom and may decide on the methods of assessment, which typically include teacher-made examinations, examinations based on the textbook, and continuous observation of student progress.

Impact and Use of PIRLS

Finland is participating in PIRLS for the first time in 2011.

Suggested Reading

Finnish National Board of Education. (2012). Retrieved from http:// www.oph.fi/ english

Ministry of Education and Culture. (n.d.). Retrieved from http:// www.minedu.fi/ OPM/?lang=en

Linnakylä, P. & Arffman, I. (Eds.). (2007). *Finnish reading literacy. When quality and equity meet*. Jyväskylä: Finnish Institute for Educational Research, University of Jyväskylä.

References

1   Finnish National Board of Education. (2010, July 12). *Language and cultural minorities*. Retrieved http://www.oph.fi/english/education/language_and_cultural_minorities

2   Ministry of Education and Culture. (2011). *Basic education*. Retrieved from http://www.minedu.fi/OPM/Koulutus/yleissivistaevae_koulutus/perusopetus/?lang=en

3   Ministry of Education and Culture. (2010). *Education and culture. Annual report 2009–2010*. Helsinki: Author.

4   Finnish Newspapers Association. (2011). *Kansallinen mediatutkimus 2010* [National media research 2010]. Retrieved from http://www.sanomalehdet.fi

5   Ministry of Education and Culture. (2011). *Basic education*. Retrieved from http://www.minedu.fi/OPM/Koulutus/yleissivistaevae_koulutus/perusopetus/?lang=en

6   Finnish National Board of Education. (2004). *National core curriculum for basic education 2004*. Helsinki: Finnish National Board of Education.

7   Ibid.

8   Ibid.

9   Ibid.

10   Ibid.

11   Ibid.

12   Finnish National Board of Education. (2011). *Tieto- ja viestintätekniikka opetuskäytössä. Välineet, vaikuttavuus ja hyödyt* [ICT use in education. Equipment, impact and benefits]. Helsinki: Finnish National Board of Education.

13   University of Jyväskylä & Niilo Mäki Institute. (2011). *LukiMat*. Retrieved from www.lukimat.fi

14   Finnish National Board of Education. (2004). *National core curriculum for basic education 2004*. Helsinki: Finnish National Board of Education.

15   Lindeman, J. (1998). *Ala-asteen lukutesti. Tekniset tiedot* [Comprehensive school reading test. Technical report]. Åbo: Åbo Akademi University Press.

16   Basic Education Act (2010). Retrieved from http://www.finlex.fi/en/

17   Finnish National Board of Education. (2004). *National core curriculum for basic education 2004*. Helsinki: Finnish National Board of Education.

18   Official Statistics of Finland. (2010). *Erityisopetus* [Special education]. Retrieved from http://www.tilastokeskus.fi/til/erop/index.html

19   Government Decree on University Degrees (2004). Retrieved from http://www.finlex.fi/en/

20   Pehkonen, E., Ahtee, M., & Lavonen, J. (Eds.). (2007). *How Finns learn mathematics and science*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.

21   Opetushenkilöstön virka- ja työehtosopimus [Teachers' collective

agreement] (2010). Retrieved from http://www.kuntatyonantajat.fi/fi/ sopimukset/opettajat/Sivut/default.aspx

22 Finnish National Board of Education. (2011). *Opetustoimen henkilöstökoulutus* [Teachers' professional development]. Retrieved from http://www.oph. fi/rahoitus/valtionavustukset/ opetustoimen_henkilostokoulutus

23 Ministry of Education. (2011). *Opetustoimen täydennyskoulutus* [Teachers' professional development]. Retrieved from http://www.minedu.

fi/OPM/Koulutus/artikkelit/ Opetustoimen_txydennyskoulutus_/ index.html?lang=fi

24 Finnish National Board of Education. (2011). *Arviointi- ja seurantatieto* [Assessment]. Retrieved from http:// www.oph.fi/tietopalvelut/arviointi-_ja_ seurantatieto

25 Ibid.

France

Marc Colmant
Ministry of Education

Language and Literacy

Since June 25, 1992, constitutional law has specified that "French is the language of the Republic." French also is the language of instruction in France and the most widely spoken language in the country.

However, an amendment to the constitution (article 75-1) in May 2008 recognizes that "regional languages belong to the heritage of France." In 2010, the Ministry of Culture reported that 2 percent of primary school students receive their entire primary education in a regional language (i.e., a language other than French, such as Alsatian, Breton, Basque, *Langue d'Oc*, Corsican, and Catalan) in one-third of the 30 French regional education authorities.[1] The regions with the largest proportions of regional languages are Corsica, Guyana, Strasbourg, and Toulouse, comprising approximately 135,000 of the 6.665 million students enrolled in primary school in both public and private sectors.[2] Less than 1 percent of students receive bilingual education in a regional language.

Recent immigration primarily to urban areas also is associated with various additional languages being spoken. In efforts to integrate foreign-language lessons into the education curriculum, France has signed international agreements, called *Enseignement de langue et de culture d'origine* (Instruction in native language and culture), with several foreign countries (e.g., Algeria, Portugal, Italy, Spain, Morocco, Turkey, Tunisia, Croatia, Serbia). In the 1970s, the first objective of these agreements was to allow the foreign students to better fit into the French educational system, while maintaining links with their heritage and protecting the possibility of return in their country. Today, however, the objectives are to value the student's native culture and language while improving their language skills and their success at school. The total number of students receiving such instruction varies from 75,000 to 100,000 per year.

Emphasis on Literacy

Every year, the Ministry of Education organizes or supports a number of nationwide literacy events. These events serve several purposes, but prima rily aim to facilitate an interest in reading and to promote access to reading outside of school. Some examples of these activities include the following:

♦ Week of the Media in School—All teachers are invited to participate in a civic education activity to help students become familiar with printed media.[3]

♦ Poets' Spring—Thousands of activities occur nationwide during an entire week devoted to promoting poetry.[4]

♦ Week of the French Language and the French-speaking World— Schools participate in hundreds of events organized throughout the country. Students often participate through theme projects focusing on the importance of France's literary heritage and on literacy as a key to self-enjoyment.[5]

♦ Read and Help Read—To encourage an interest in reading and literature, retired persons coordinate with teachers and schools to share the pleasure of reading with elementary school students.[6]

♦ Reading Battle—A competition where 6- to 12-year-old children write articles and book reports to help them discover the world of books.

Two additional entities play a significant role in promoting literacy—the National Reading Observatory and the National Agency to Fight Against Illiteracy. The National Reading Observatory is a literacy advisory group of the ministry created in June 1996. This advisory group brings together researchers, teachers, inspectors, and parent representatives to analyze educational practices in the field of learning and improvement in reading.[7] Lastly, the National Agency to Fight Against Illiteracy also has the goal of coordinating and optimizing resources provided by the state, regions, and companies to battle illiteracy.[8]

Overview of the Education System

France's education system is a federal responsibility, with the government's Ministry of Education responsible for the definition and implementation of education policy. The ministry's goals are to distribute resources dedicated to education, guarantee equal access to this public service, and monitor education policies. Specifically, the federal government defines educational orientations and curricula; and it recruits, trains, and manages education staff, determines

the status of schools and the rules on which they function, and appoints teachers and administrative staff. Only the federal government may define and establish diploma levels.

For many years, France's education system had been highly centralized, hierarchical, and uniform in its organization and operations. In 1982, the federal government began to decentralize, transferring some federal powers and responsibilities to regions and departments.[9] The federal government still retains responsibility for curriculum definition, diploma distribution, and personnel recruitment and development at all levels. However, regions are currently responsible for overseeing investment, operations, and personnel management in upper-secondary schools (*lycées*). Similarly, departments (smaller administrative entities) have the same responsibilities for lower-secondary schools (*collèges*), while individual towns are responsible for local nursery and elementary schools. Towns own school premises and oversee construction, reconstruction, extension, and major repairs; thus, they manage local school equipment, operations, and maintenance, and can organize additional educational, sports, and cultural activities within the school buildings.

Structure of the Education System

France provides free education for all students in primary and secondary schools, and schooling is compulsory at the elementary and lower-secondary levels, from ages 6–16. Children must be registered at elementary school at the beginning of the school year (September) in the calendar year in which they reach age 6. In 2010–11, France had 48,522 public schools and 5,276 private schools at the primary level.[10]

Since 1990, primary schooling has been organized in three cycles: Cycle 1 is the cycle of first learning (first and second years of preprimary); Cycle 2 is the cycle of fundamental learning (third year of preprimary, Grades 1 and 2); and Cycle 3 is the cycle of consolidation of learning (Grades 3, 4, and 5).

Preprimary school (i.e., nursery school) is free of charge but not compulsory, and accepts children between ages 3-5, starting from age 2 when places are available. In 2010, 100 percent of children between ages 3-5, as well as 14 percent of two-year-old children attended a nursery school.[11] All nursery schools benefit from the services of a specialized administrator, recruited by the municipality, whose task is to assist the teacher in all non-educational activities. The general objective of nursery school is to help children develop and form their personalities and prepare them for success in elementary school. In

nursery school, mastery of language is emphasized; children practice speaking skills, begin to build their vocabulary, and learn to write. Artistic education also is an important part of the nursery school curriculum, as is discovering the universe of numbers. In 2010, the average class size in nursery schools was 26 students.[12]

Schooling at the elementary level is usually five years, although the period may be increased or decreased by one year based on individual student knowledge. Promotion from primary school to the first class of secondary education is automatic. At the primary level, many schools have classes composed of two or more grade levels. In 1999, for example, mixed-level primary school classes represented nearly 22 percent of all French classes. Some schools, mostly rural, contain only a single class with all grade levels grouped together; in 2010, these schools accounted for 6.9 percent of French schools. During the 2010–11 school year, 55 percent of primary and elementary schools had between one and five classes, 33 percent of schools had between six and ten classes, and 12 percent had eleven or more classes.[13] In 2010, the average size of classes in elementary schools was 23 students.[14]

The two main components of primary education are mastery of the French language, as well as the main elements of mathematics. The competencies with respect to the French language that students must reach by the end of each cycle are described below:

♦ Cycle 2 (Grades 1–2)—Students learn to read and write in French while becoming acquainted with some major aspects of the written culture.

♦ Cycle 3 (Grades 3–5)—Students develop mastery of the French language and continue to acquire foundations for further education.

Secondary education is divided into two successive stages: lower-secondary and upper-secondary school. Lower-secondary school is from Grades 6–9 (usually ages 11–15). In 2010, 3.1 million students were enrolled in public and private lower-secondary schools.[15] Upon completion of the ninth grade, students attend a general and technical or a vocational upper-secondary school that prepares them for the corresponding *Baccalauréat* (known as "*le Bac*"), an examination usually taken at age 18. There are two types of upper-secondary schools:

♦ General and Technological Schools—These schools lead to either the General and Technological *Baccalauréat* or the Certificate of Technician, respectively. The general track includes literature, economics, social studies, and science. The technological track includes tertiary science

and technology, industrial science and technology, and laboratory science and technology.

♦ Vocational Schools—These schools lead to the Vocational Aptitude Certificate, the Vocational Studies Certificate, or the Vocational *Baccalauréat*.

State education enrolls 86.6 percent of students at the primary level and 78.7 percent at the secondary level.[16] Private schools are primarily religious, mostly Roman Catholic, and are subject to monitoring by the state.

Language/Reading Curriculum in the Fourth Grade

Reading Policy

To facilitate learning to read in the primary grades, oral language must be developed in preprimary school. In France, knowing how to read and enjoying reading are the major objectives of the first years of elementary school.

Between ages 6–7 (Grades 1–2), children become acquainted with the functioning of written language. This includes connecting sounds with letters, understanding the structure of sentences in simple texts, and understanding the differences between written and spoken language.

Between ages 8–10 (Grades 3–5), students begin reading to learn. They begin encountering long, increasingly complex texts across all disciplines. These rich texts motivate students to think, be moved, enjoy themselves, and learn. In literature, the goal of the curriculum of Cycle 3 is to expose every student to a set of texts suited to his or her age and preferences of youth literature. Reflection on the French language leads students to examine written materials, describe them, and define their characteristics. Students compare different linguistic elements (texts, sentences, words, sounds, and written forms) to describe similarities and differences between texts.

Summary of National Curriculum

France has a national curriculum that covers reading instruction at the fourth grade of elementary school, and the reading portion alone has been renewed ten times over a 90-year period. The curricula are national and compulsory for all teachers and students, and they govern teacher practice. Teachers are responsible for building a coherent progression through the curriculum, adapting the pace of the curriculum to suit children's abilities and needs, defining instructional strategies, and evaluating students.

France's present primary school curriculum was officially implemented at the beginning of the 2008–09 school year and covers Grades 2, 3, and 4. However, students assessed in PIRLS 2011 would have begun compulsory schooling in Grade 1 under the previous 2002 curriculum. Despite having official status, new syllabi require time for implementation following publication (e.g., time of appropriation by the teachers, renewal of textbooks); thus, it is difficult to estimate the impact of each curriculum in the schooling of the PIRLS student sample. Therefore, in addition to the 2008 curriculum, the following descriptions include information on the 2002 curriculum, particularly in regards to the Cycle of Fundamental Learning (Grades 1–2).

Previous Curriculum

From 2002 to 2008, the elementary school curriculum outlined two different components in learning to read: identifying written words, and understanding the meaning of words in verbal and nonverbal contexts.[17] The first component is specific to reading, while the second also encompasses oral language.

To improve reading comprehension, the curriculum emphasized reading for literary experience and information acquisition. It also encouraged reading for oral expression in addition to social awareness or civic duty. Unfortunately, the curriculum allowed little time for reading for enjoyment.

The curriculum also stressed the diversity of written language and the variety of text types, and learning to read for specific school courses, including the use of a variety of text types across disciplines.

Based on the 2002 curriculum, students were expected to acquire the following general reading competences by the end of the Cycle of Fundamental Learning (Grades 1–2):

♦   Understand explicitly stated information in a literary or documentary text suited to both their age and culture;

♦   Find answers to simple questions in a printed informational text or on a website;

♦   Find the subject of a literary text;

♦   Read a short passage aloud after silent preparation, with the correct accents and intonation;

♦   Independently read an illustrated story previously read in class by or with the teacher;

♦   Understand the alphabetical system of coding-writing;

♦ Recognize the regular correspondence between graphemes and phonemes;

♦ Propose a possible (phonetically correct) spelling for a regular word;

♦ Decipher an unknown word; and

♦ Immediately identify most short words (up to four or five letters) and the most frequently used long words.

Current Curriculum

Since 2008, mastery of the French language and the main elements of mathematics have been the priority objectives for Grades 3, 4, and 5 (Cycle 3).[18] The 2008 curriculum defines knowledge and skills for development throughout the cycle.

The first three points of emphasis in the French language curriculum concern oral language, reading (with elements of literature) and writing texts, and the study of vocabulary, grammar, and spelling. Regarding the second point of emphasis, reading and writing are systematically connected throughout the cycle and are practiced daily in all subjects, not just in French. The study of texts, particularly literary texts, aims to develop understanding and supports the learning of autonomous writing.

Throughout this cycle, reading continues to be learned systematically and includes the following goals:

♦ Recognizing words automatically, easy reading of irregular and rare words, increased speed and efficiency in silent reading;

♦ Understanding sentences;

♦ Understanding school texts (problems statements, instructions, lessons, and exercises in textbooks);

♦ Understanding informative and informational texts; and

♦ Understanding literary texts (e.g., narratives, descriptions, dialogues, and poems).

Students learn to understand the meaning of texts by rephrasing essential sections and answering questions about them. Students report on their reading, express their reactions or points of view, and discuss these subjects. When interpreting a text, students must examine it for evidence to support or disprove interpretations. This level of understanding depends on being able to locate the text's main elements (e.g., the subject of an informational text,

the characters and events of a narrative) and precise analysis. This analysis is determined mainly by observation of the distinctive features giving coherence to the text (i.e., title, sentence and paragraph organization, role of punctuation and connecting words, and use of pronouns, verbs tenses, and lexical fields).

The literature syllabus aims to give every student a set of age-appropriate texts, drawn from French heritage and from contemporary and classic youth literature. It also encourages the development of a common literary culture as well as reading for pleasure.

Progression of Teaching

French language and mathematics syllabi are planned by grade and published jointly with the curriculum. These provide teaching staff with directions for organizing the progression of student learning. The new knowledge and skills goals for Grade 4 in reading are the following:

♦ Reading school work instructions and problems statements without assistance;

♦ Preparing and reading a ten-line text aloud with fluidity and in a meaningful way;

♦ Reading a literary or informational text silently and understanding it (i.e., being able to rephrase, summarize, and answer questions);

♦ Locating explicit information in a text and deducing new implicit information;

♦ Understanding the configuration of a scene or a place described in a narrative, using connecting words marking spatial relations;

♦ Understanding the use of the imperfect tense, the simple past in narrative texts, and the use of present in scientific or informational texts;

♦ Capturing the atmosphere or the tone of a descriptive, narrative, or poetic text, using its vocabulary;

♦ Participating in a debate on a text by presenting and supporting one's own interpretation to other students or teachers;

♦ Using classroom tools (textbooks, displays, etc.) to search for information and overcome reading difficulties; and

♦ Conducting research, with the help of an adult, using reference sources or multimedia products.

The new knowledge and skill goals for Grade 4 in literature are the following:

♦ Reading at least one book every two to three months and reporting on it;

♦ Adapting one's reading behavior to overcome difficulties (e.g., using notes to help one memorize and engaging in second reading, asking for help);

♦ Remembering title and author of texts read; and

♦ Participating in a debate on a text by presenting and supporting one's own interpretation to others.

Common Base of Knowledge and Skills

The *Common Base of Knowledge and Skills* is a third reference text used, along with the curriculum and syllabi, for planning at each cycle and grade.[19] Article 9 in the Law and Policy Agenda for the Future of the School describes the principle of a "common base of knowledge and skills," specifying the following:

> Compulsory education must guarantee to every student the means for the acquisition of a common base of knowledge and skills which is indispensable to achieve a successful schooling, to pursue training, to build personal and professional future and to make life in society a success.[20]

This common base is organized according to seven skills. Five of these are part of the current teaching curriculum: French language ability; practice of a living foreign language; basic skills in mathematics and in scientific and technological culture; mastery of common techniques for information and communication; and humanist culture. The remaining two domains are social and civic skills, and autonomy and initiative, although these have not yet received sufficient attention within schools. All seven skills are designed as combinations of fundamental knowledge for times we live in, abilities to implement this knowledge in various situations, and vital attitudes throughout life. The latter include openness to others, interest in seeking the truth, respect for self and others, and curiosity and creativity.

The *Common Base of Knowledge and Skills* states that at the end of compulsory education, each student should be able to do the following:

♦ Read a prose or poetic text aloud and expressively;

♦ Analyze the grammatical elements of a sentence to clarify its meaning;

- ◆ Understand the essential idea of a text (written or oral);

- ◆ Show understanding of various text types (e.g., informational or literary);

- ◆ Understand a statement or an instruction; and

- ◆ Read complete literary works, particularly classics, and write book reports.[21]

Reading Instruction in the Primary Grades

The school year in France lasts at least 36 weeks, according to the national school calendar established by the Ministry of Education. Since PIRLS 2006, however, the organization of instructional time in French schools has changed. Prior to 2008, average instructional time in elementary schools was 26 hours per week, with a maximum of six hours per day, including two 15-minutes breaks, representing a total instructional time of 936 hours per year (36 weeks of 26 hours per week).

Since June 5, 2008, all students receive 24 hours of instruction per week, though underachieving students may receive an additional two hours for personalized help. These 24 hours are divided into four days—Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday—with six hours of instruction per day, from 8:30 am to 4:30 pm. Thus, with 144 school days (4 days over 36 weeks), France currently distinguishes itself with the shortest school year of OECD countries and, paradoxically, by a large number of school hours (864 hours, or 36 weeks of 24 hours per week).

The new curriculum prescribes ten hours per week in Cycle 2 and eight hours per week in Cycle 3 for French language instruction, including reading. The exact amount of time set aside for reading instruction varies according to school and teacher practices. After school hours, teachers also frequently oversee additional supervised studies for children with working parents.

Instructional Materials

France does not have compulsory instructional methods or materials for reading instruction. Commercial publishers, local or regional associations, and resource centers offer a range of materials. A school's teachers discuss and decide upon teaching equipment and materials.

In 2003, the National Reading Observatory addressed the issue of how best to select and use a reading schoolbook for Grade 1 students.

While the Observatory's published manual did not provide a specific list of recommendations, it did present a complete and meticulous analysis of textbooks through clearly defined criteria.[22]

Generally, official documents recommend using a textbook (regardless of which one) for reading instruction, particularly for novice teachers. However, a textbook can never be the only book used in class; teacher-facilitated reading of literature is also necessary, and remains the primary means of fostering the comprehension of complex texts.

Use of Technology

In 2009, almost all primary schools had computers for educational use. Sixty-seven percent of preprimary schools and 91 percent of elementary schools had Internet access.[23] That same year, a digital technology development plan in rural schools placed equipment in about 7,000 schools situated in municipalities with fewer than 2,000 inhabitants.

In 2011, preprimary schools had one computer available for every 24 students, on average. In elementary schools, there is one computer for every ten students, on average. However, the extent to which these computers are used for reading instruction is unknown.[24]

Role of Reading Specialists

As an institutional network of teachers and psychologists, the *Réseaux d'Aides Spécialisées aux Élèves en Difficultés* (Network of Specialist Aides for Students with Difficulties) assists children with learning difficulties. The network's mission is to work with teachers in providing specialized help either inside or outside of the classroom to students who are struggling in ordinary classes. Assistance is not specific to reading and can often include educational, rehabilitative, or psychological help. To arrange for specialized help, a dialogue is organized between the head of school, the network members, and the teacher of the underachieving student.

Second-language Instruction

Non-French-speaking children who have recently arrived in France currently comprise 4 percent of the overall student population. The French school system has provisions for integrating these students so that they become fluent enough in French to follow ordinary class curricula. Provisions include remedial courses and "initiation" classes. Integrated remedial courses are held for small groups of children within ordinary classes. "Initiation" classes, which use a

special syllabus for non-French speaking students, group together students in Grades 1–5 (with a maximum of 15 students per class) to provide instruction in French as a second language. The role of these classes is to integrate the children into ordinary classes as quickly as possible. In 2010, 18,500 students benefited from classes that taught French as a second language.[25]

Students with Reading Difficulties

Diagnostic Testing

Since 1989, France has systematically administered a diagnostic assessment in French and mathematics to all students at the beginning of Grades 3 and 6. Conceived as a diagnostic tool, this assessment provides teachers with information on the strengths and weaknesses of each student. The goal of this assessment has been to facilitate early tracking of students with difficulties in reading, writing, and calculation, and who may be at risk of not acquiring the necessary competencies by the end of the cycle.

In 2008, the diagnostic assessments system evolved to align with school curricula and to account for the implementation of the new primary school syllabus. These assessments continue to monitor achievement in French and mathematics. Currently, these national assessments are administered to all students in Grades 2 and 5—approximately 1.5 million students—and take place in mid-May for Grade 2 and in mid-January for Grade 5.

Both assessment systems are educational tools used to help identify each student's level and to provide assistance if necessary. Results for each student are communicated directly to his or her parents by the school within two weeks. Anonymous, aggregated results are also published for every department and regional education authority, together with the national average, within approximately one month.

Instruction for Children with Reading Difficulties

The yearly assessments at Grades 2 and 5 help identify students with learning difficulties. A personalized program for educational success (PPRE) is then proposed for each student showing weaknesses related to the "common base of knowledge and skills."

PPRE is a coordinated, though temporary, plan of action, and its duration varies according to student needs and progress. It can intervene at any time during compulsory education to meet the needs of a student. PPRE is devised by the teaching staff (teacher of the class and head of school), discussed with

the family, and presented to the student as a formal plan; it represents a contract between the school and the family. PPRE provides assistance in various forms, from educational differentiation in the class to specialized help, and mainly focuses on French and mathematics. It deals with precise objectives and methods to assess student progress. PPRE prevents the escalation of difficulties, allows the student to surmount learning obstacles, and provides coherent assistance from which students can benefit. It is required for students who repeat a year.

Some regions of France also have higher concentrations of students with economic and social difficulties. These schools receive additional resources (personnel and financial) to help students reach curriculum requirements.

In 2010, 126,000 students with disabilities attended school at the primary level. Within a school, integration can be individualized or collective.[26] Individualized instruction is the first solution sought (provided to two-thirds of students with disabilities), with one or several disabled students in a regular class receiving adapted instruction within the framework of a personalized program. Collective instruction is the second solution sought (provided to one-third of students with disabilities), and consists of a special class of disabled students (generally, 10–12 students) in a regular school. Since 1991, integration classes (CLIS) within elementary schools have focused on students with physical, sensory, intellectual, or mental disabilities who can benefit from learning in the normal school environment. Minor intellectual or cognitive disabilities represent 79 percent of CLIS students. Within CLIS, students receive an education that is adapted to their age, capacities, and disabilities, and share certain activities with other students in the school.

Teachers and Teacher Education

Generally, primary school teachers are responsible for teaching all subjects to their class. However, if a team of teachers agrees, these teachers may group and teach students by subject. Teachers are prepared to teach at preprimary or elementary level, according to their preference and the availability of jobs in the local area where they wish to teach. In 2011, there were 331,000 primary school teachers in the public sector, 81.7 percent of whom were women. The average age was 40.2 years, and 12.1 percent were working part-time.[27]

Teacher Education Specific to Reading

Primary school teacher recruitment is based on a competitive exam. The Ministry of Education defines the number of jobs available each year and all qualified citizens of the European Union may apply.

From 1992 to 2011, primary school teachers were required to hold a diploma of at least three years of academic study in higher education in order to compete for teaching positions. Recently, though, the conditions for the primary school teachers' competitive exam have been modified, and a master's degree (i.e., 5 years of higher education) will now be required. Once hired, new primary school teachers are assigned to a class. During the first year in this class, these new teachers benefit from assistance from a tutor teacher and short periods of training throughout the year.

These recent changes to teacher qualification standards are far too new to have influenced work conditions of Grade 4 students sampled in PIRLS 2011. For this reason, the following description discusses teacher education of the majority of teachers working during the 2010–11 school year.

Initial training of the primary school teachers sampled in PIRLS 2011 took place at a university institute of teacher education. Candidates were recruited into the first year based on either their secondary school credentials or subsequent interviews. At the end of the first year of university study, all preprimary and elementary teachers were required to take a competitive examination, after which successful students became trainee teachers and were paid for a compulsory year of training. Course work for learning to teach the French language, conducted concurrently with this training, includes the problems of learning to read, the analysis of textbooks, the study of the connection between reading and writing, and the evaluation of reading competencies.

During this one year of vocational training, the university institutes of teacher education included approximately 1,000 hours of training, divided into three parts: learning (45%); practice in schools (40%); and personal work (15%). Training future teachers in school disciplines totaled 450 hours. Of these, approximately 100 hours were dedicated to French language education (didactics and pedagogy of oral expression, reading, and writing), a large part of which focused on reading and youth literature. At the end of training, trainees were assessed on the following: their work with students in class, the disciplines studied at the university, and a report written by the trainee concerning a

practical aspect of education. Upon validation of this work, trainee teachers became full-fledged primary school teachers with civil service status.

Requirements for Ongoing Professional Development in Reading for Teachers

Besides the initial vocational training of teachers, university institutes of teacher education are also responsible for organizing professional development. During their careers, primary school teachers may obtain up to 36 weeks of further training (the equivalent of a school year), although such professional development is not obligatory. Local and national education priorities determine the content of annual in-service training courses offered at each respective level, and the teaching of reading generally features strongly in these courses.

Monitoring Student Progress in Reading

Every child has a school report card regularly sent to his or her parents. This report card is a good instrument for connection and communication between the teacher and family. It details the results of periodic competencies assessments, recommendations for student promotion in the next grade or cycle, and final decisions. The cycle teachers' council, along with recommendations of the student's teacher, decides whether a student will be promoted to the next cycle. In France, there are no examinations of consequence for students in elementary school. Thus, promotion and retention depend on academic progress, though only at certain key points rather than at each grade.

Since 2008, the Personal Skills Booklet (*Livret Personnel de Compétences*) has become a part of the school report card.[28] This booklet provides evidence of the acquisition of the common base of knowledge and skills (referred to as the "common base"), from primary school to the end of compulsory education. Acquisition of the common base is progressive and takes place in three stages: Stage 1 (up to Grade 2), Stage 2 (Grades 3–5), and Stage 3 (Grade 6 to middle school). The booklet gathers certificates of knowledge and skills of the common base acquired in these three stages. At every stage, the family is informed of student progress. At the end of primary school, the booklet is passed on to the future middle school.

Competencies that students must reach are fixed for each cycle. If students have not met required competences at the end of each cycle, the cycle teachers' council can suggest retention for one year. In this case, the head of school presents this proposition to the parents. If they disagree, parents may appeal to the inspector of schools, who makes the definitive decision regarding promotion

or retention. During the past decade, the French educational system has worked on lowering retention rates. Indeed, at the end of elementary school in 2001, 19.5 percent of students were at least one year behind. By 2006, this proportion had decreased to 16.2 percent, and in 2010 only 13.2 percent of students were at least one year behind.

Impact and Use of PIRLS

Despite dissemination efforts, the public paid little attention to PIRLS-2001 results, perhaps because student performance was above the international average. Also, the performance of French students in previous large-scale studies of educational achievement had not been unexpected or overly concerning.

Results of PIRLS 2006 had much greater impact because the results allowed for consideration of the evolution of French student achievement in reading literacy over time. For France, the administration of PIRLS 2001 took place just before the new (2002) curriculum became effective. A comparison of the performance of the 2001 students with the performance of the 2006 students provided a valuable indicator of the effectiveness of the new curriculum's focus on language skills, especially (within the context of PIRLS) on reading comprehension.

However, PIRLS results for France were not significantly different between 2001 and 2006. Consequently, the 2002 curriculum did not seem to have changed achievement. Thus, following PIRLS 2006, the focus of the public and policymakers changed from maintaining the status quo to improving the skills of French young people in their national language, in particular in reading comprehension.

Using PIRLS 2006 results confirmed by other information gathered nationally, in the Fall of 2008, the Minister of National Education, Youth, and Sport reformed numerous aspects of primary school: new syllabi were elaborated upon and made shorter, clearer, and more readable; school time was reorganized with differentiated student schedules; two new national evaluations were created to better define the needs of students; and it is now necessary to possess a master's degree to become a teacher. In November 2008, during a colloquium concerning education within the framework of French presidency of European Union, Minister Darcos presented all of these measures and insisted that international assessments, and PIRLS in particular, are "beneficial" for decision-makers and represent "a strong source of inspiration."

PIRLS 2011 ENCYCLOPEDIA
240 FRANCE

TIMSS & PIRLS
International Study Center
Lynch School of Education, Boston College

IEA

Suggested Readings

Ministère de l'Éducation nationale—Direction de l'évaluation de la Prospective et de la Performance. (2011). *Repères et références statistiques sur les enseignements, la formation et la recherche* [Statistical references on education, formation and research]. Paris: Author. Retrieved from http://media.education.gouv.fr/file/2011/01/4/DEPP-RERS-2011_190014.pdf

This volume presents all statistical information available on the French educational and research system, compiled around 180 themes. This vast data set contributes to and supports debate on the functioning and the results of French schools.

Ministère de l'Éducation nationale—Direction de l'évaluation de la Prospective et de la Performance. (2010). *L'état de l'école, activités, coûts, résultats, comparaisons internationales (29 indicateurs)* [The state of education, costs, activities, results—29 indicators on the French education system]. Paris: Author. Retrieved from http://media.education.gouv.fr/file/etat20/87/0/l_etat_de_l_ecole_2010_160870.pdf [In English: http://media.education.gouv.fr/file/etat20/41/7/The_state_of_education_168417.pdf]

Gathered in 29 statistical indicators, this twentieth edition of *The state of education* proposes a synthetic analysis of the costs, activities, and results of the French educational system. Illustrating the compelling questions of French schools, this volume observes school evolutions in light of international comparisons.

Ministère de l'Éducation nationale—Direction de l'évaluation de la Prospective et de la Performance. (2011). *Géographie de l'école* [Education geography]. Paris: Author. Retrieved from http://media.education.gouv.fr/file/geo10/59/4/DEPP-geographie-ecole-2011_180594.pdf

This publication aims at locating geographical disparities of the French educational system. Thirty years after the first laws of decentralization, this volume describes the variety of educational contexts within French national territory, and situates current transformations within a historical framework.

References

1   Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication—Délégation générale à la langue française et aux langues de France. (2010). *Rapport au parlement sur l'emploi de la langue Française* [Report to parliament on the use of French language]. Paris: Author. Retrieved from http://www.ladocumentationfrancaise.fr/rapports-publics/104000568/index.shtml

2   Ministère de l'Éducation nationale—Direction de l'évaluation de la Prospective et de la Performance. (2011). *Repères et références statistiques sur les enseignements, la formation et la recherche* [Statistical references on education, formation and research] (pp. 74–75). Paris: Author. Retrieved from http://media.education.gouv.fr/file/2011/01/4/DEPP-RERS-2011_190014.pdf

3   Semaine de la presse et des médias dans l'école. (2011). Retrieved from http://www.clemi.org/fr/spme/

4   Le printemps des poètes. (2011). Retrieved from http://www.printempsdespoetes.com/

5   Semaine de la langue Française et de la Francophonie. (2011). Retrieved from http://www.dismoidixmots.culture.fr/

6   Lire et faire lire. (2011). Retrieved from http://www.lireetfairelire.org/LFL/

7   Observatoire National de la Lecture. (2011). Retrieved from http://onl.inrp.fr/ONL/garde

8   Agence Nationale de Lutte contre l'Illettrisme. (2011). Retrieved from http://www.anlci.gouv.fr/

9   La Loi de Décentralisation du 2 mars 1982 [Law of Decentralization] (1982). Retrieved from http://www.vie-publique.fr/decouverte-institutions/institutions/approfondissements/loi-decentralisation-du-2-mars-1982.html

10 Ministère de l'Éducation nationale—Direction de l'évaluation de la Prospective et de la Performance. (2011). *Repères et références statistiques sur les enseignements, la formation et la recherche* [Statistical references on education, formation and research] (pp. 36–37). Paris: Author. Retrieved from http://media.education.gouv.fr/file/2011/01/4/DEPP-RERS-2011_190014.pdf

11 Ibid., pp. 80–81.

12 Ibid., pp. 38–39.

13 Ibid., pp. 36–37.

14 Ibid., pp. 38–39.

15 Ibid., pp. 94–95.

16 Ibid., pp. 77 & 95.

17 Ministère de l'Éducation nationale. (February 2002). *Qu'apprend-on à l'école élémentaire? Les nouveaux programmes* [What do we teach at primary school? The 2002 new curriculum]. Paris: CNDP-XO Editions. Retrieved from http://www2.cndp.fr/ecole/quapprend/pdf/755a0212.pdf

18 Ministère de l'Éducation nationale. (2008). *Horaires et programmes d'enseignement de l'école primaire* [Schedules and education syllabi at primary school]. Bulletin Officiel hors-série n° 3, June 19, 2008. Paris: Author. Retrieved from http://www.education.gouv.fr/bo/2008/hs3/default.htm

19 Ministère de l'Éducation nationale—Direction générale de l'enseignement scolaire. (2006). *Le socle commun des connaissances et des compétences* [Common base of knowledge and skills]. Paris: Author. Retrieved from http://media.education.gouv.fr/file/51/3/3513.pdf

20 Loi d'orientation et de programme pour l'avenir de l'école [Law and Policy Agenda for the Future of theSchool], L. No. 2005-380 of 23-4-2005, JO 24-4-2005 (NOR: MENX0400282L) (2005) (enacted).

21 Ibid.

22 Observatoire National de la Lecture, Coédition Centre National de Documentation Pédagogique. (2003). *Le manuel de lecture de CP, réflexions, analyses et critères de choix.* Savoir Livre, Hatier: CNDP.

23 Ministère de l'Éducation nationale—Direction de l'évaluation de la Prospective et de la Performance. (2009). *Repères et références statistiques sur les enseignements, la formation et la recherche* [Statistical references on education, formation and research]. Paris: Author. Retrieved from http://media.education.gouv.fr/file/2011/01/4/DEPP-RERS-2011_190014.pdf

24 Ibid., pp. 54–55.

25 Ibid., p. 28–29.

26 Ibid., pp. 26–27.

27 Ibid., pp. 280–281 & 286–287.

28 Ministère de l'Éducation nationale. (n.d.). *Livret personnel de compétences* [Personal notebook of skills]. Retrieved from http://media.education.gouv.fr/file/27/02/7/livret_personnel_competences_149027.pdf

Georgia

Magda Nutsa Kobakhidze
National Assessment and Examinations Center

Language and Literacy

The official language of the Republic of Georgia is Georgian, a member of the South Caucasian (Kartvelian) family of languages which uses a unique alphabet known since the fifth century A.D. According to the constitution, the Abkhazian language also is recognized as an official language in the territory of Abkhazia (currently under Russian occupation).

Georgia has been a multiethnic country for centuries, hosting more than 26 ethnic groups.[1] Georgians are the country's predominant ethnic group (83.8%) while other major ethnic groups include Azeris, Armenians, Russians, Abkhazians, Ossetians, Greeks, Jews, and Kurds.[2] Although Georgian is the primary language of instruction, Article 4 (IV) of the Law on General Education states that ethnic minorities also have right to receive instruction in their native languages in secondary schools.[3]

The Ministry of Education and Sciences of Georgia initiates various civic integration programs for ethnic minorities. Particularly noteworthy is the Georgian Language for Future Success program, which promotes Georgian language teaching in ethnic minority districts. In 2011, MoES sent 140 volunteers to regions populated with ethnic minorities to help teach Georgian to local school teachers.[4] Another program, Teach Georgian as a Second Language, involves sending qualified teachers of Georgian language to the minority-populated regions to teach Georgian.

Georgia always has enjoyed a strong literacy tradition. According to the UNESCO Institute of Statistics, adult literacy (i.e., ages 15 and older) rates in Georgia are 99.7 percent among women and 99.8 among men, and youth literacy (specifically, ages 15–24) rates are 99.9 and 99.8 percent among women and men, respectively.[5] In 2009, Georgia's net enrollment rate in primary education for both genders was 100 percent, as was the transition rate from primary to secondary education.[6]

Overview of the Education System

The Ministry of Education and Sciences of Georgia (MoES), a main governmental body, together with its centers (legal entities of public law) forms educational objectives and short- and long-term strategic plans, establishes national standards, creates and approves national curricula, and determines criteria for textbook evaluation.

During the last decade, the Georgian education system has undergone large-scale, simultaneous changes that included decentralization of management, new national curricula and school textbook development, and changes to a per capita financing system, teacher professional development programs, and standardized student assessments. Decentralization of education management has led to the formation of twelve regional resource centers responsible for monitoring and overseeing the general education system in their assigned regions of the country.

During these reforms, the government policy on education has aimed at improving oversight and funding mechanisms for education, granting autonomy to educational institutions, and improving learning and labor market outcomes of educational programs. This includes establishing a quality assurance system at all education levels in addition to improving local school infrastructure and management.

Georgia's general education system is divided into three levels: primary education, covering Grades 1–6; basic (lower secondary) education, covering Grades 7–9; and upper secondary education, covering Grades 10–12.[7] Article 6 (VI) of the Law on General Education states that students enter primary school at the age of five unless exceptions are made by MoES. Under the current Constitution, education is compulsory through Grade 9. Completion of three-year upper secondary education provides access to higher education after passing a school-leaving and competitive university entrance examination.

The Georgian education system encompasses both public and private schools. In the 2010–11 school year, there were 2,430 schools in the country, of which 2,130 were public and 300 were private. The same year, 595,400 students were enrolled in general education schools in Georgia (542,400 in public and 53,000 in private).[8] There are a total of 71,843 teachers in all levels of education in Georgia in all school subjects, of which 46,997 are primary school teachers (Grades 1–6).[9]

Language/Reading Curriculum in the Fourth Grade

Reading Policy

In Georgia, the national curriculum includes national standards consisting of achievable outcomes and grade-level indicators for each subject taught in school. In primary education (Grades 1–6), the reading curriculum is part of the language curriculum. Exhibit 1 presents the national standards in Georgian language for fourth-grade students.

Exhibit 1:   National Standards for the Language/Reading Curriculum, Grade 4[10]

Target Standard at End of Grade 4	Evidence of Achieving Target
Read literary and non-literary texts on various topics independently	Discussing a meaningful relationship between a title and a text;
	Naming alternative versions of a title;
	Identifying and naming topics and main issues of a text (literary and non-literary), and discussing them;
	Differentiating between external and internal characteristics of subjects and events;
	Identifying the voice of the author and a story's characters, as well as the use of monologue and dialogue in the text;
	Independently searching for and finding words and phrases in the text used by the author to describe characters, events, and facts;
	Telling the story from the perspective of a character in a literary text;
	Asking questions about the past in order to better understand a text; and
	Relating information given in the text to a student's experience.
Express attitudes toward literary and non-literary texts, and express the desire to evaluate a text from an ethical and aesthetic point of view	Naming one's favorite book, text or literary work, author, and character, and explaining one's choice;
	Explaining why a particular text is interesting;
	Indicating what one likes and what one finds most interesting in a text (e.g., information, story, behavior or character, description of nature, or dialogue); and
	Participating in discussions about reading, and employing relevant excerpts from the reading or one's own experience in order to support an opinion.
Employ various strategies to look for information and elaborate on specific topics	Using alphabetical and thematic catalogues in children's libraries;
	Properly understanding and employing library catalogues and information on library cards (e.g., author, title, and number of pages);
	Identifying and correctly finding children's periodical issues in the library (e.g., fairy tales from other countries, children's literature, Georgian national fairy tales, and children's encyclopedias);
	Adequately using symbols (e.g., logos, rubrics, and schemata), illustrations, auxiliary tables, and simple graphs; and
	Using a dictionary to acquire the precise meaning of a word.

Summary of National Curriculum

Within the scope of ongoing Georgian education reform, the curriculum has been changed several times, with the most recent revision being effective for the period 2011–16. It is mandatory that all schools in Georgia fulfill national curriculum guidelines. According to the Law on General Education, the national curriculum determines the distribution of teaching hours for each educational level, conditions for organizing the school environment, necessary subjects and subject groups at each education level, and the competencies and skills students should attain at each level. The national curriculum emphasizes student-based teaching and learning approaches and includes a modified curriculum for students with special needs. The curriculum also has been translated and adjusted to meet the needs of minority groups.

The Georgian language occupies a central role in the national curriculum, and Georgian language and literature is taught from Grades 1–12. However, Georgian language and literature is not considered as just one curricular subject; it is seen as a tool for teaching and learning all subjects. In primary education, teaching Georgian language facilitates the formation of all necessary linguistic skills for self-expression—listening, speaking, reading, and writing.[11]

Reading Instruction in the Primary Grades

Instructional Materials

All textbooks adhere to national standards. In the 2011–12 school year, teachers based their textbook selections on the recommended list of textbooks published by the National Curriculum and Assessment Center. Following selection, schools are obligated to use the textbooks for a minimum of five years.

In primary education, textbooks used in the language curriculum include various children's stories in addition to both literary and non-literary works.

Use of Technology

Computerization of the Georgian school system has been one of the main goals of education reform, and currently, all schools in Georgia are equipped with computers. Teachers are encouraged to use information and communications technologies (ICT) in teaching.

Second-language Instruction

Georgian is a second language in minority-populated regions of the country where the languages of instruction are Azeri, Armenian, and Russian. Under the aegis of the Ministry of Education and Sciences' Civil Integration Program,

MoES promotes the teaching of Georgian as an official language in these regions, supplying schools with special textbooks for Georgian as a second language.[12]

Students with Reading Difficulties

Reinforcing inclusive education practices is one of the main educational policy initiatives in Georgia. In 2009–11, with the assistance of the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, MoES implemented a three-year project aimed at introducing and developing inclusive education in nine regions of Georgia. This project included the following: identifying students with special needs; training teachers, school administration, and specialists (e.g., speech therapists and psychologists); adapting school physical environments; and raising public awareness.[13]

Inclusive education is incorporated into the national curriculum in Georgia and there is a modified curriculum for students with special educational needs. Although there is no special training for reading teachers, professional standards require teachers to know the basics of inclusive education and be able to employ special techniques with students with special educational needs. In 2009, the Curriculum and Assessment Center published a *Handbook of Inclusive Education for Teachers*, an extensive part of which focuses on teaching reading to students with special educational needs. The book includes several strategies for teaching reading for both teachers and parents.

Until recently, the diagnostic testing of students with special needs did not exist in Georgia. Currently, the National Examinations Center, with the support of the non-governmental organization Save the Children, initiated a new project that aims to introduce and adapt the following diagnostic tests in school settings: Wide Range Achievement Test 4, Vineland Adaptive Behavior Scale II, and Emotional Disturbance Decision Tree.

Teachers and Teacher Education

Teacher Education Specific to Reading

According to the Primary Teacher Standards and the Law on General Education of Georgia, a person should complete at least a bachelor's degree in the field of education to teach at the primary level.

In 2010, the National Examinations Center, together with the National Center for Teacher Professional Development, launched the Teacher Certification Examinations. The process is voluntary until 2014, but holding this certification is mandatory for every individual wishing to teach in schools

thereafter. To earn certification, teachers must pass examinations in their respective subjects and professional skills. While mentoring is not compulsory for maintaining teacher status, all those with the relevant teaching qualification (i.e., pre-service education) must complete a one-year induction program before taking their certification examination.

Requirements for Ongoing Professional Development in Reading for Teachers

The National Center for Teacher Professional Development offers trainings for primary school teachers both in primary school subjects, including the Georgian language, and in professional skills. The center organizes seminars and meetings with teachers throughout the country to design effective strategies for teaching reading.

Monitoring Student Progress in Reading

In 2011, Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia introduced the School Leaving Examinations (SLE). To obtain a school diploma, twelfth-grade students must pass computer adaptive standardized examinations in nine main subjects. Apart from SLE, there are no other centralized examinations in schools. Schools have the right to introduce their own examinations at the end of the academic year if they decide to do so.

The grading system in Georgia ranges from one to ten, with the following four levels of grades: high (10, 9, and 8), average (7 and 6), below average (5 and 4), and poor (3, 2, and 1). Numerical grades are not given in Grades 1–4; instead, class teachers write short notes about students' overall performance based on information from all teachers at the end of each semester.

Impact and Use of PIRLS

Several initiatives can be considered impacts of PIRLS in Georgia. In particular, the National Examinations Center designed the following list of handbooks for assisting teachers and parents to teach reading:

♦ *How to Teach Reading* was developed to help teachers in teaching reading at the primary school level. The book consists of both original and translated materials on teaching reading. Education specialists and psychologists wrote original material that serves as a practical guide to modern techniques and methodologies of teaching reading. The second part of the book is a translation of the UNESCO handbook, *Guide to Teaching Reading at the Primary School Level*.[14, 15]

♦ *Let's Learn to Read* is a practical guide to teaching reading comprehension in primary schools. It has a collection of children's stories and includes both literary and informational assessment blocks. Questions follow each text with varying levels of difficulty to assess students' level of performance in reading comprehension.[16]

♦ *PIRLS 2006 in Georgia* is the PIRLS 2006 national report describing and interpreting Georgian student performance on the PIRLS assessment. Especially noteworthy is the list of policy recommendations at the end of the report that describe in detail what should be done in order to improve student performance in reading. In addition, the last part of the report includes methodological suggestions and practical exercises for teachers and parents on how to teach reading.[17]

In 2009, to accommodate teacher professional development needs, the government of Georgia began providing teachers with government-funded vouchers in order to finance professional development training. Similar to this government program, the National Curriculum Center and National Center for Teacher Professional Development designed and implemented more tailored teacher voucher programs in two areas: Literacy in Primary Grades (LPG) and Georgian as a Second Language (GSL). Each voucher given to a teacher within the scope of the program covered three credits for LPG programs and six credits for GSL programs, with each credit equivalent to 15 contact hours.[18]

Specifically, LPG is a pilot teacher professional development program that was launched in four regions of the country: Kakheti, Mtskheta-TianeTi, Racha-Lechkhumi, and Tbilisi. Apart from the capital Tbilisi, regions were selected because they had the lowest PIRLS achievement results among Georgian students. Various educational organizations, with sufficient capacity to serve as education providers, designed and implemented professional development modules. By the end of December 2010, 2,370 primary grade teachers had used the special vouchers to finance the Literacy for Primary Grades program.[19]

In compliance with this professional development program, the National Center for Teacher Professional Development has developed additional learning resources to enhance teaching literacy and reading skills. In 2010, the center prepared a video educational resource, Effective Methods of [Teaching] Reading, which included six methods for teaching and enhancing reading skills. In 2011, the center prepared a new volume, Effective Methods of [Teaching] Reading 2, which contained five methods for teachers of all grades. Due to the increasing interest and efficiency of video resources, the center plans to create a third

volume of instructional materials, containing novice methods for teaching reading skills and comprehension.[20]

Another long-term initiative is the Georgian Primary Education (G-PriED) project funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). G-PriED is a five-year project initiated and implemented by Chemonics International in Georgia, which aims to provide comprehensive assistance at the primary education level to improve reading and mathematics competences for Georgian and ethnic minority students. This project includes teacher education, improvement of reading and mathematics standards, and development of subject experts both in schools and at the departments of education at Georgian universities.

References

1 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. (2009). *EFA global monitoring report*. Paris: UNESCO Publishing, Oxford University Press. Retrieved from http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0017/001776/177683E.pdf

2 Central Intelligence Agency. (n.d). *The world factbook* [Data file]. Retrieved from https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/gg.html

3 Law on General Education (2011).

4 Ministry of Education and Sciences of Georgia. (2012). Retrieved from http://mes.gov.ge/

5 UNESCO Institute for Statistics (Data Center). (2009). *UIS statistics in brief: Education (all levels) profile–Georgia*. Retrieved from http://stats.uis.unesco.org/unesco/TableViewer/document.aspx?ReportId=121&IF_Language=eng&BR_Country=2720&BR_Region=40505

6 Ibid.

7 Law on General Education (2011).

8 Department of Statistics of Georgia. (2012). *Education and culture*. Retrieved from http://www.geostat.ge/?action=page&p_id=205&lang=geo

9 National Curriculum and Assessment Center. (2009). *National curriculum for schools for academic year 2009–2010*. Retrieved from http://ganatleba.org/index.php?m=102

10 National Curriculum and Assessment Center. (2012). Retrieved from http://ganatleba.org/

11 Ibid.

12 Ministry of Education and Sciences of Georgia. (2012). Retrieved from http://mes.gov.ge/

13 Ibid.

14 National Examinations Center. (2010). *How to teach reading: Chrestomathy for primary school teachers*. Tbilisi: NAEC.

15 N'Namdi, K.A. (2005). *Guide to teaching reading at the primary school level.* Paris: UNESCO.

16 Otkhmezuri, T. & Gordeladze, N. (Eds.). (2005). *Let's learn to read: Volume I, volume II*. Tbilisi: National Examinations Center.

17 Kutaladze, I. (2008). *PIRLS 2006 in Georgia*. Tbilisi: National Examinations Center.

18 National Center for Teacher Professional Development. (2011). Retrieved from http://tpdc.ge/ge/main

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.

Germany

Irmela Tarelli
Wilfried Bos
Institute for School Development Research
TU Dortmund University

Albert Bremerich-Vos
University of Duisburg-Essen

Language and Literacy

In the Federal Republic of Germany, the official language of administration and the judiciary is German. In accordance with the European Charter of Regional and Minority Languages of the Council of Europe, languages of minority groups with a history of residence in Germany (e.g., Danish, Friesian, Sorbian, Romany, and Low German) are acknowledged regionally as official languages.[1] The demographic, cultural, and social heterogeneity in Germany differs among regions. Overall in 2010, 19 percent of the total German population and 31 percent of children ages 5–15 had an immigrant background.[2] In some larger cities the percentage of young people with an immigrant background reaches more than 50 percent.[3, 4] Apart from German, Turkish and Russian were the most commonly spoken languages in families of fourth grade students.[5]

Although there are no legislative provisions on the language of instruction, German is usually the language of instruction in preprimary schools, general education and vocational schools, and institutions of higher education. Exceptions include some private schools, bilingual schools and classes, or extra classes offered in the mother tongue for students whose native language is not German.[6]

Many national and regional initiatives are in place to encourage student enthusiasm for reading. Organizations such as the German Society for Reading and Writing (*Deutsche Gesellschaft fuer Lesen und Schreiben*, or DGLS), a department of the International Reading Association (IRA), advocate fostering literacy.[7]

The Reading Foundation (*Stiftung Lesen*) enacts projects to encourage reading, in cooperation with non-profit organizations and partners in various fields like childcare institutions, schools, and libraries as well as in the media.[8]

One example is the project Start Reading–3 Milestones for Reading (*Lesestart–3 Meilensteine fuer das Lesen*).[9] The Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) funds this program aimed at promoting family literacy in early childhood.

A project called ProReading–On the way towards a Reading-school (*ProLesen. Auf dem Weg zur Leseschule*) aims to foster reading in all school subjects, is carried out in all 16 *Laender* (federal states), and has been initiated by the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the *Laender* in the Federal Republic of Germany (Standing Conference).[10]

Since 2005, the Internet portal Reading in Germany (*Lesen in Deutschland*) has been documenting and providing online resources and materials on reading.[11]

Besides providing access to books and electronic resources, public libraries often organize special programs for young readers, such as reading nights, reading clubs, holiday events, reading aloud activities, and competitions. In general, public libraries are regarded as important keys to literacy. In 2010, almost 8 million borrowers were registered at about 10,000 public libraries in Germany.[12] In order to reach readers in remote or rural areas, some public libraries use special buses that hold more than 5,000 books.[13] Some of these mobile libraries cooperate closely with schools.

Germany has a great variety of nationwide daily newspapers, as well as regional or local newspapers in most towns. The circulation of daily newspapers is 267 per 1,000 inhabitants.[14] Several school projects aim at making the concept of newspapers accessible to students in ways such as composing a class newspaper or publishing student articles in special sections in local newspapers.

Overview of the Education System

Germany is a federal republic consisting of 16 federal states, the *Laender*. Each *Land* (federal state) has supreme legislative and administrative power over all cultural policy issues within its geographic boundaries, including its education system. This administrative power includes regulation of curricula and time schedules, professional requirements, teacher recruitment, and quality development in schools. Some crucial aspects of the German school system (such as definition of a grade scale) are standardized through treaties. In addition, the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the *Laender* in the Federal Republic of Germany (Standing Conference) coordinates the activities of the 16 Ministries of Education and

Cultural Affairs of the *Laender* in the areas of education, science, research, and culture. In this chapter, North Rhine-Westphalia, the largest *Land* in terms of population, serves as an example in cases where the specificity of particular topics makes it impossible to give a universal description for all *Laender*.

The majority of students in Germany are enrolled in public schools, which are free of charge. In the 2010–11 academic year, approximately 8 percent of all school-aged children were enrolled in institutions offering general education and approximately 3 percent of primary school students attended private school.[15] Some private schools or boarding schools are tuition based. The *Laender* accredit, supervise, and to a certain extent subsidize all private schools.[16]

Structure of the Education System

Preprimary education in Germany includes primarily children ages 3–6 and is not compulsory. Recently, however, German policy makers have acknowledged preprimary education as an essential part of the education system. The child and youth welfare sector oversees preschool education, which is provided mainly by childcare institutions (*Kindergaerten*) caring for children up to age 6. In general, preprimary education is only partially subsidized by the government, although more *Laender* and communities have been fully subsidizing the final one or two years. Since 2008, cooperation between institutions of preprimary education and primary schools has been compulsory. In 2004, the Standing Conference agreed on a binding framework for elementary education in preprimary institutions, which specifies for the first time language, reading and writing skills, mathematics and science as explicit educational objectives.[17] For children with an immigrant background, special assessment and support programs are in place to enhance German language competencies.

Compulsory schooling for all children usually begins the year they turn six years old and involves nine years of full-time schooling (ten years in the *Laender* of Berlin, Brandenburg, and Bremen; in North Rhine-Westphalia, the duration of full-time compulsory education is nine years for the Gymnasium and ten years for other school types providing general education). In some *Laender*, children who have not yet attained an adequate developmental level to start school by age six are accommodated with school kindergarten (*Schulkindergaerten*) or preschool classes (*Vorklassen*). Over the last couple of years, a new school entry phase, called flexible school entry (*flexible Schuleingangsstufe*), has been implemented in eleven of the *Laender*. This system allows students to complete the first two class levels of primary school in one, two, or three years.

Primary school is the first level of the compulsory education system and generally covers Grades 1–4 (ages 6–10). In two of the 16 *Laender*, namely Berlin and Brandenburg, primary school covers Grades 1–6 (ages 6–12). In terms of allocation to schools students must, in principle, attend a primary school in their residential area. However, in some *Laender*, parents are granted the right to be involved in choosing the primary school. Children with special needs can attend a primary school if the particular institution is capable of assuring the necessary special educational and material support, and if the premises are suitable. Otherwise, children with special needs may attend special schools (*Foerderschulen*).

Throughout primary education, German (comprising instruction in reading, spelling, writing, and literature), mathematics, and *Sachunterricht* (an integrated subject of natural and social science) are considered main subjects and are mandatory in all *Laender*. Art, music, physical education, foreign language instruction, and (in most *Laender*) religious education also are taught throughout primary school.[18, 19] The total instructional time, as well as subject-specific instructional time, differs among grades and across *Laender*. In North Rhine-Westphalia, language and reading instruction is allocated 19 percent of the total instructional time.[20]

Traditionally in Germany, instruction in primary schools is organized for half-day attendance. However, following a rather large initiative (€4 billion, $5.3 billion USD) of the federal government, 36.9 percent of all primary schools were offering all-day schooling in 2008, which extends care and supervision for children outside lesson time and involves activities educationally related to morning lessons.[21, 22] Variations of all-day schooling include the following: fully bound form, in which all students are required to attend; partially bound form, in which only some groups of students are obliged to attend; or open form, in which individual students may attend, based on parental discretion. The majority (88.2%) of primary schools that offer all-day schooling offer it in an open form.[23]

After successful completion of primary school, children are assigned to different courses of education (*Bildungsgaenge*) according to their ability level (based on grades) and predicted academic potential.

Secondary education is divided into lower and upper secondary education. Lower secondary education starts at Grade 5 in 14 *Laender* (Grade 7 in Berlin and Brandenburg) and ends at Grade 9 or 10 (i.e., beginning at

ages 10–12 and ending at ages 15 or 16). Generally speaking, students are assigned to one of three courses of education:

♦ Basic general education (*Hauptschulbildungsgang*)—This course of education covers Grades 5 (or 7) to 9 or 10, and its completion entitles students to proceed to vocational training or higher types of secondary school.

♦ Extensive general education (*Realschulbildungsgang*)—This course of education covers Grades 5 (or 7) to 10, and its completion entitles students to proceed to vocational training, upper secondary school, or a vocationally oriented upper secondary school (*Fachoberschule*) that may qualify students for universities of applied sciences.

♦ Intensified general education (*Gymnasialer Bildungsgang*)—This course of education covers Grades 5 (or 7) to 12 or 13, and its successful completion leads to acquisition of the General Higher Education Entrance Qualification (*Allgemeine Hochschulreife*, *Abitur*).

The three above-mentioned courses of education are taught either at specific types of schools (*Hauptschule*, *Realschule*, or *Gymnasium*) or at schools that offer two or three courses of education. In the 2010–11 academic year, about 17 percent of German students in Grade 8 attended a *Hauptschule*, about 25 percent attended a *Realschule*, and about 36 percent attended a *Gymnasium*.[24]

Although these school types are the most common in secondary education, several others are available in the various *Laender* and may vary considerably from this structure. For example, some *Laender* offer comprehensive schools (*Gesamtschule*) that can substitute for or compete with at least two of the previously described school types. In 2010–11, about 9 percent of German Grade 8 students attended a comprehensive school.[25]

After completing lower secondary schooling, most students follow different pathways for upper secondary education (ages 15 or 16 until 18 or 19). Assignment to the different types of upper secondary education depends on the qualifications and entitlements obtained at the end of lower secondary education. One pathway for students is full-time general education, comprising Grades 11–12 or 13, which leads to a higher education entrance qualification. Another pathway includes full-time vocational schooling combined with vocational apprenticeship training at the workplace. Within this dual system, businesses providing apprenticeships contribute financially.

Language/Reading Curriculum in the Fourth Grade

Reading Policy

The Standing Conference has agreed upon national educational standards (*Bildungsstandards*), beginning with primary school, and all 16 *Laender* have committed to implementing these standards by establishing core-curricula. These educational standards serve as objectives that are binding for all *Laender*, and they specify the curricular elements for core subjects, such as German, that are to be achieved by students after a defined number of school years. The Ministry of Education and Cultural Affairs in each *Land* manages the curricula. As a result, almost every *Land* has its own curricula for specific courses of education, subjects, and grade levels.

Introduction to reading starts at age 6 with compulsory schooling. Reading instruction is usually divided into two stages. During the first stage, children learn the alphabetic principle—that words are composed of letters that correspond to sounds. After Grade 2 (at the end of the school entry phase), children are supposed to be able to read short, unfamiliar texts fluently, draw information from texts, and rephrase them. Furthermore, all *Laender* emphasize the development of interest and motivation in reading as an objective for the first phase. The most frequent recommendation for motivating children is to choose a wide variety of texts that are adapted to children's interests and individual development.

At the end of the second stage (Grade 4), students should be able to fluently read accented and meaningfully age-appropriate texts (narrations, lyric and scenic texts, non-fictional books, children's magazines, and easy discontinuous texts). Furthermore, they should know and apply certain reading strategies. It is expected that students be able to conduct research on their own in lexica, specialized books, and Internet search engines for children.

Mixed analytical-synthetic methods are compulsory. With these methods, children first become acquainted with simple, regular words that are analyzed into elements of letters, syllables, and sounds. Using all senses, children differentiate between letters visually, differentiate syllables and sounds by hearing and speaking, and copy and write letters and words. In all *Laender,* the goal is to achieve a balanced approach to learning reading and writing.

In most curricula, there is a special section on differentiated teaching, which takes into account individual differences between children due to a variety of factors (e.g., initial range in abilities before entering compulsory schooling, linguistic ability, motivation, interest in learning, and learning ability). Some

curricula include special consideration of children whose first language is not German.

Summary of National/Regional Curriculum

The curricula in each *Land* are published as regulations by the respective Ministries of Education and Cultural Affairs. They are binding for teachers, and head teachers are responsible for ensuring compliance. The curricula are formulated in a general way, allowing teachers considerable freedom with regard to content, objectives, and teaching methods. To reach a degree of consensus on methods and assessment criteria at schools, teachers of a particular subject are encouraged to reach agreement on specified subject-specific or generalized school curricula.

Exhibit 1 presents an overview of the content of the curriculum taught at the primary school level in the *Land* North Rhine-Westphalia, which is fairly representative for the curricula of the 16 *Laender*.[26]

Exhibit 1: **Example German Language Curriculum Guidelines, Primary Level, North Rhine-Westphalia, Reading Topic: Management of Texts and Media**

Expected Competencies: End of School Entry Phase	Expected Competencies: End of Grade 4
Emphasis: Reading Proficiency	
Students…	Students…
Read short written work orders and instructions, and act accordingly (e.g., crafting instructions, recipes);	Understand and act according to written instructions independently;
Read short texts suitable for their age group and answer questions; and	Find and describe specific information in texts; and
Choose texts for reading on their own made available in the classroom in book boxes, class, or school libraries.	Choose texts according to interests and give reasons for their decisions.
Emphasis: Reading Experience	
Students…	Students…
Choose books and other text-based media according to interests (from the class or school library, or public libraries);	
Read various texts (e.g., poems, stories, non-fictional texts); and	Recognize and differentiate fictional, lyric, and scenic texts and talk about their effects;
	Understand non-fictional and informative texts (e.g., encyclopedia texts) and discontinous texts (e.g., tables and diagrams);
Read children's books suitable for their age group and talk about their impressions.	Identify writings, authors, figures, and plots from children's literature; and
	Describe their own reading experiences (e.g., introduce a children's book, keep a reading diary).

Expected Competencies: End of School Entry Phase	Expected Competencies: End of Grade 4
Emphasis: Exploit Texts and Make Use of Reading Strategies	
Students…	Students…
Formulate reading expectations (e.g., using illustrations or based on signal words and headings);	Use strategies for orientation in texts (e.g., detailed, selective, and scanning techniques);
	Comprehend and summarize central message of texts (e.g., using keyword cards, summaries, sketches, diagrams);
	Verify statements using text passages;
	When facing problems in comprehension, obtain help by asking questions, looking up words, and splitting texts;
	Formulate their own thoughts, perceptions, or inferences for texts and exchange findings with others;
Express thoughts and feelings about texts; and	State their own positions on plots and characters in texts;
	Find differences and similarities of texts; and
Rearrange simple texts (e.g., change the end of a story).	Process texts (e.g., illustrate, create a collage).
Emphasis: Presenting Texts	
Students…	Students…
Present short texts from print or from memory (e.g., poems);	Fashion texts through speaking and performing from print or from memory (e.g., stories, dialogues, poems, and scenes);
Read aloud short, familiar texts; and	Introduce children's books and give reasons for their choice; and
Contribute to performances (e.g., puppet theaters).	Contribute to readings and performances.
Emphasis: Media Competence	
Students…	Students…
Search for information in print and electronic media, with supervision;	Research subjects or tasks in print and electronic media (e.g., children's encyclopedias, books, search engines for children);
Use media as a stimulus to talk, write, and read; and	Select offers in newspapers and magazines, on the radio, TV, and telecommunications devices, and on the Internet, and give reasons for their choices;
	Use media to create their own media reports;
Exchange experiences on reading motives and choices as well as on personal media experiences.	Compare different effects of text versions (e.g., print, film, audio, and video); and
	Assess media reports critically (e.g., by differentiation and separation of informative and advertising contributions).

Reading Instruction in the Primary Grades

Instructional Materials

Independent publishers provide textbooks, which are designed to correspond to the curriculum of the respective *Land* and must be approved by the Ministry of Education and Cultural Affairs of that *Land*. Different publishing houses publish a range of textbooks. Each school's teacher committee selects textbooks from a regularly updated list. The great majority of first-grade teachers use a basic reader (*Fibel*). In later classes, most of the teachers use textbooks that contain

exercises for German lessons. Teachers may choose from a list of approved textbooks, as long as these are consistent with the chosen teaching methods. Also, many teachers use special exercise worksheets from existing materials or which the teachers themselves have created.

Mostly, teachers use basic readers (*Fibel*) for reading instruction, embracing both an analytic and synthetic approach. Words are broken down into syllables and phonemes, the phonemes are attached to characters, and the characters are rejoined into words. In addition to this clearly structured and teacher-focused way of instruction, there are more open and learner-focused approaches. According to the concept of "reading through writing" for example, children are encouraged from the very beginning to write words that are important to them—more or less correctly—using a special phonetic table, the *Anlauttabelle* (initial sound table). Proponents of this concept oppose explicit reading instruction as they assume that reading skills are acquired through writing activities and teachers should wait until students start reading by themselves as a consequence of their writing. Findings indicate that children from families with lower socio-economic status or with an immigrant background are less successful with a learner-focused approach such as "reading through writing." However, some longitudinal studies comparing course-oriented to more open ways of instruction showed only small effects of instructional methods on student reading performance.

Use of Technology

Computer workstations or laptops are available in about two-thirds of all schools. In primary schools, the ratio of students to computers is approximately 5:1 (of which 65% were connected to the Internet).[27] In general, policy documents increasingly emphasize new media (multimedia) as a teaching aid, as a subject, and as a personal skill students should acquire. For some approved reading instruction textbooks, publishing houses offer supplemental electronic or online materials. In addition, the Internet is used for initiatives that offer a common platform to teachers and parents with online programs meant to foster reading motivation in the classroom and at home.[28]

Role of Reading Specialists

Principally, classroom teachers are responsible for teaching the initial stages of reading. Special teachers are available in some schools for remedial education, teaching groups of children with difficulties in reading and spelling.

Second-language Instruction

Some non-native speaking students have difficulties learning not only German but also their mother tongue and, as a result, struggle with reading and writing in both languages. Regardless of their linguistic and cultural backgrounds, all children learn to read and write in German, though some schools may offer learning-to-read programs in two languages (bilingual alphabetization).

Preparatory classes are available to students with an immigrant background who do not yet show a proficient level of understanding the language of instruction (German). Furthermore, instruction in several mother tongues is provided in all *Laender*. For example, in North-Rhine Westphalia, these classes take place if there are at least 15 students from the same language group in one school. When there are fewer students, schools may collaborate to provide language classes. Among other things, these classes aim at preserving and expanding oral and written skills in the specific language.

Students with Reading Difficulties

Diagnostic Testing

The identification of students with reading difficulties is considered the responsibility of the school. There are currently no mandatory comprehensive screening tests in use to identify students with reading difficulties; identification is based on teacher observations. Reading instruction, therefore, focuses on the early detection of possible difficulties, such as dyslexia. According to recommendations by the Standing Conference, observations should assess the student's level of linguistic development, as well as social-emotional and fine motor skills.[29] Further, the student's motivation to learn reading and writing, as well as perceptive ability, should be considered. In addition to the general recommendations, all *Laender* have special regulations for the diagnosis and remedial education of children with specific reading and spelling difficulties.

In North Rhine-Westphalia, for example, assistance measures can be provided for students who fail to meet the basic goals of reading and writing instruction in Grades 1 and 2, or whose performance in higher grades of primary school does not meet the requirements over a period of more than three months. The respective decision is based on teacher observation.

Teachers may refer students with severe difficulties in reading and spelling to a school psychologist for reading, spelling, and intelligence testing. In certain circumstances, medical specialists are consulted.

Instruction for Children with Reading Difficulties

All *Laender* provide directives according to which students with reading difficulties are supported within their classes. This includes the adaptation of teaching methods and workload to the needs and capacities of these students (internal differentiation). In order to provide individual assistance to students with difficulties in reading and spelling, individualized remedial programs or plans are developed by the teacher in cooperation with other teachers and the student's family. Remedial measures also can include small group and individual teaching (external differentiation).

If problems persist in spite of intensive supportive measures within the school, teachers might suggest consulting educational and psychological counselors and therapists.

Teachers and Teacher Education

Teachers are employed by the Ministries of Education and Cultural Affairs of the *Laender* on a full-time or part-time basis. In the 2010–11 academic year, about 71 percent of general education teachers and 87 percent of primary school teachers were female.[30] Teachers in Germany tend to be older than those in other OECD countries.[31] In 2010–11, 48 percent of general education teachers and 25 percent of primary teachers were 50 years or older.[32] In 2010, about 80 percent of the teachers in Germany had civil-servant status.[33] However, there is ongoing debate in some *Laender* about whether that status should be retained. As a result, some *Laender* have suspended or abolished the civil-servant status of new teachers. The percentage of teachers with civil-servant status differs among the *Laender,* as do teachers' working hours and salaries.

The individual *Laender* regulate teacher education, although a resolution agreed on by the Standing Conference guarantees recognition of university examinations for the teaching profession in the different *Laender*. Teacher education in Germany has recently been restructured from a course of study ending with state examinations into a course of study culminating in a bachelor's or master's degree, but most teachers involved in PIRLS 2011 would have been educated within the prior system. Therefore the former structure of teacher training is presented below.

Teacher education in Germany is offered through universities, education colleges, and art and music colleges. Admission to a teacher education program requires the higher education entrance qualification (in most cases, the *Abitur*). Teacher education is structured in two phases, both of which terminate in a

state examination (First and Second State Examination). Passing the First State Examination is a precondition for admission to the second stage, and teachers are officially qualified to practice only after taking the Second State Examination.

The first stage of teacher education (6–7 semesters for primary school teachers and up to nine semesters for secondary school teachers, or 3–4.5 years) is part of the first stage of tertiary education. It includes at least one practical training period of several weeks and incorporates general didactics or a subject related didactics placement. The second stage, *Referendariat*, usually lasts one and a half to two years and consists mostly or partly supervised pedagogical training conducted in the classroom.

Teacher Education Specific to Reading

In the restructured system, in most *Laender* prospective primary teachers must study the subject area German for Primary Schools (i.e., basic education in linguistics, or *Lernbereich Sprachliche Grundbildung*) and mathematics (i.e., basic education in mathematics, or *Lernbereich Mathematische Grundbildung*). It also is mandatory to study educational science (*Bildungswissenschaften*), a subject that includes, among other topics, general and school pedagogy, and psychology. Additionally, students can choose between the subjects *Sachunterricht* (integrated subject of natural and social science), English, sports, arts, and religious education (Protestant or Catholic).

In October 2008, the Standing Conference adopted common content standards for the subject discipline (*Fachwissenschaften*) and subject-related pedagogy (*Fachdidaktiken*) in teacher education (*Laendergemeinsame inhaltliche Anforderungen fuer die Fachwissenschaften und Fachdidaktiken in der Lehrerbildung*). Across all *Laender*, students that study the subject area German for Primary Schools become acquainted with models of reading instruction, methods for supporting children with learning problems and reading disabilities, and learning process diagnostics. Nevertheless, in some *Laender*, the amount of study time devoted to reading instruction is minimal and often related only to initial reading instruction.

Because reading is embedded in the teaching of the German language, there are no specific reading teachers. Teachers in primary schools are expected to teach in all major subject areas (German, mathematics, and *Sachunterricht*), even if not trained specifically for these subjects.

Requirements for Ongoing Professional Development in Reading for Teachers

To ensure ongoing professional development, teachers are required to participate regularly in training and development. Although professional development is regulated differently in the 16 *Laender*, there is ample opportunity for teachers to participate, and teachers are mostly free to choose the content and quantity of the courses, programs, and workshops they want to attend. Teacher professional development focuses on keeping teachers up-to-date in the subjects they teach and the teaching methods used, as well as in the broader fields of psychology and sociology in education. In a survey in 2009, teachers were asked about their participation in in-service training or continuing education courses during the previous 18 months and about half of the primary school teachers reported between one and ten days of participation. However, 40 percent of the German and English teachers across all types of schools reported no participation in courses focusing on subject-specific pedagogy, especially on reading comprehension and reading strategies, during the past five years.[34]

Monitoring Student Progress in Reading

National Assessments

Since 2007, all *Laender* have administered comparative central examinations (*Vergleichsarbeiten*) in mathematics and German in Grade 3.[35] The test items are developed by the independent Institute for Educational Progress (*Institut zur Qualitaetsentwicklung im Bildungswesen*, or IQB), which was established by the Standing Conference in 2003. These cross-*Laender* comparative studies are administered like regular classroom tests, although they also serve as standardized school achievement tests based on the national educational standards (*Bildungsstandards*). Reading comprehension is a regular part of the examination. The test results provide teachers with information about the strengths and weaknesses of their students, as well as subject-specific pedagogical and educational psychology recommendations to improve their instruction.

In 2011, a sample-based study was conducted to compare students' reading skills across all 16 *Laender*. Subsequent comparisons will be carried out every five years.[36]

Use of Grades, Marks, and Report Cards

In state-run schools, teachers monitor individual student progress continuously throughout the academic year. The evaluation of a given student's performance in a particular class is based on all of the work the student has done in that

class—specifically, written, oral, and practical work and tests. Oral work refers a student's verbal contributions and is evaluated in class. In such subjects as sports, music, or arts and crafts, practical achievements serve as the basis of evaluation. In addition, teachers can make use of the feedback they receive in the context of the cross-*Laender* comparative studies.

In Grades 1–2, the focus is on direct observation of students; written class tests are gradually introduced beginning in Grade 2 in certain subjects (especially German, and mathematics, and *Sachunterricht*).

In general, individual student progress and development are documented and defined within performance standards for each subject in report cards given to students and their parents twice a year (in the middle and at the end of the school year). The structure and content of these school report cards vary across the *Laender*. In some *Laender*, report cards contain feedback concerning in-class participation and social conduct within the school in addition to the grades awarded for individual subjects. Teachers in most schools also discuss the child's progress and behavior with parents during Parent-Teacher Day.

According to a resolution agreed on by the Standing Conference in 2010, teachers are asked to develop special monitoring and feedback methods for low-performing students. These methods comprise individualized learning plans as well as intensified and individualized monitoring activities, such as the documentation of progress in learning diaries or language portfolios.[37]

Classroom Tests

Written exercises and classroom tests are carried out at regular intervals throughout the school year and are designed to measure the standards laid out in the curricula.

Generally speaking, primary and secondary schools in all *Laender* conduct oral and written examinations at regular interval throughout the school year, which are used in all school types to monitor student learning. Examinations are always based on curriculum requirements, as well as on the level of knowledge, abilities, and skills students should have acquired in class. These examinations are used as one basis for report cards, which have consequences for individual students, such as for promotion to the next grade or entry to a higher school system or university. In all *Laender*, students are automatically promoted from Grade 1 to Grade 2. From Grade 2 onward, students might need to repeat a year if their progress is insufficient, although promotion polices after Grade 2 differ among the *Laender*. Overall, in the 2010–11 school year, only 0.5 percent of all students in primary education repeated a year.[38]

Impact and Use of PIRLS

Germany participated in PIRLS 2001 and 2006 (for the participation in other studies see Schwippert, 2007 and Lenkeit, Goy, & Schwippert, 2012). During administration of PIRLS 2001, Germany increased its sample and also assessed Grade 4 students in mathematics and science using TIMSS 1995 instruments. National comparisons of student achievement results were then possible for all three domains, but only between the seven of the 16 *Laender* where PIRLS 2001 was conducted with a representative sample.

In PIRLS 2006, the sample size was extended for all 16 *Laender*, to allow national comparisons of achievement levels. Because Germany participated in TIMSS 2007 with Grade 4 students for the first time, it was not necessary to assess these subjects alongside PIRLS 2006. Currently, Germany is taking part in both PIRLS 2011 and TIMSS 2011 (Grade 4 only), making use of the national option to administer the same Grade 4 students in the same schools usually on two consecutive days.

When mapping and contextualizing PIRLS within Germany's major policy discussions and changes, educational researchers can identify four areas of influence: [39] the introduction of system monitoring; [40] the introduction of nationwide educational standards; [41] the increase in empirical education research; [42, 43] and the launch of programs for the evaluation and development of the curricula.

Suggested Readings

European Commission. (2010). *Organisation of the education system in Germany 2009/2010.* Brussels: Education, Audiovisual & Culture Executive Agency. Retrieved from http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/eurybase/eurybase_full_reports/DE_EN.pdf

Lenkeit, J., Goy, M., & Schwippert, K. (2012). The impact of PIRLS in Germany. In K. Schwippert & J. Lenkeit (Eds.), *Progress in reading literacy in national and international context. The impact of PIRLS 2006 in 12 countries* (pp. 85–105) (Studies in International Comparative and Multicultural Education; vol. 13). Münster: Waxmann.

Schwippert, K. (2007). The Impact of PIRLS in Germany. In K. Schwippert (Ed.), *Progress in reading literacy: The impact of PIRLS 2001 in 13 countries* (Studies in International Comparative and Multicultural Education Series, 93–108). Münster: Waxmann.

Weishaupt, H., Baethge, M., Döbert, H., Füssel, H-P., Hetmeier, H-W., Rauschenbach, T., Rockmann, U., Seeber, S., & Wolter, A. (2010). *Bildung in Deutschland 2010: Ein indikatorengestützter bericht mit einer analyse zu perspektiven des bildungswesens im demografischen Wandel* [Education in Germany 2010: A report based on indicators including an analysis on perspectives in the educational sector considering

demographic changes]. Bielefeld: W. Bertelsmann Verlag GmbH & Co. Retrieved from http://www.bildungsbericht.de/daten2010/bb_2010.pdf

References

1 European Commission. (2010). *Organisation of the education system in Germany 2009/2010*. Brussels: Education, Audiovisual & Culture Executive Agency. Retrieved from http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/eurybase/eurybase_full_reports/DE_EN.pdf

2 Tarelli, I., Bos, W., & Bremerich-Vos, A. (2011). *Own analysis based on Statistisches Bundesamt—Bevölkerung und Erwerbstätigkeit: Bevölkerung mit Migrationshintergrund-Ergebnisse des Mikrozensus 2010* [Population and employment: Population with an immigrant background-Results of the Mikrozensus 2010]. (Unpublished analysis.)

3 Weishaupt, H., Baethge, M., Döbert, H., Füssel, H-P., Hetmeier, H-W., Rauschenbach, T., Rockmann, U., Seeber, S., & Wolter, A. (2010). *Bildung in Deutschland 2010: Ein indikatorengestützter bericht mit einer analyse zu Perspektiven des bildungswesens im demografischen wandel* [Education in Germany 2010: A report based on indicators including an analysis on perspectives in the educational sector considering demographic changes]. Bielefeld: W. Bertelsmann Verlag GmbH & Co. Retrieved from http://www.bildungsbericht.de/daten2010/bb_2010.pdf

4 Statistisches Bundesamt. (2011). *Allgemeinbildende schulen: Schulen, schüler nach schulart* [General education schools: Schools, students by school type]. Retrieved from http://www.destatis.de/

5 Bos, W., Strietholt, R., Goy, M., Stubbe, T.C., Tarelli, I., & Hornberg, S. (2011). *IGLU 2006. Dokumentation der erhebungsinstrumente* [IGLU 2006. Documentation of the survey instruments]. Münster: Waxmann.

6 European Commission. (2010). *Organisation of the education system in Germany 2009/2010*. Brussels: Education, Audiovisual & Culture Executive Agency. Retrieved from http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/eurybase/eurybase_full_reports/DE_EN.pdf

7 Deutsche Gesellschaft fuer Lesen und Schreiben. (2012). *DGLS–Deutsche gesellschaft fuer lesen und schreiben.* [German society for reading and writing]. Retrieved from http://www.dgls.de/

8 Stiftung Lesen. (2012). *Stiftung Lesen.* [Reading foundation]. Retrieved from http://www.stiftunglesen.de/

9 Stiftung Lesen. (2012). *Lesestart–3 Meilensteine fuer das Lesen* [Start reading–3 milestones for reading]. Retrieved from http://www.lesestart.de/

10 Bayerisches Staatsministerium für Unterricht und Kultus/Staatsinstitut für Schulqualität und Bildungsforschung (Hrsg.). (2010). *ProLesen. Auf dem weg zur leseschule. Leseförderung in den gesellschaftswissenschaftlichen Fächern. Aufsätze und materialien aus dem KMK-projekt "ProLesen"* [ProReading–On the way towards a reading school. Fostering reading in the social science subjects at school. Essays and materials from the KMK-project "ProReading"]. Donauwörth: Auer Verlag.

11 Deutsches Institut für Internationale Pädagogische Forschung. (2012). *Lesen in Deutschland* [Reading in Germany]. Retrieved from http://www.lesen-in-deutschland.de/

12 Deutsche Bibliotheksstatistik. (2011). *Gesamtauswertung berichtsjahr 2010* [German library statistics. Overall evaluation for the year 2010]. Cologne: Centre for Academic Libraries in North Rhine-Westphalia. Retrieved from http://www.hbz-nrw.de/dokumentencenter/produkte/dbs/aktuell/auswertungen/gesamt/dbs_gesamt_dt_10.pdf

13 von Freymann, J. (2012). *Die deutschen fahrbibliotheken im internet* [German mobile libraries on the Internet]. Retrieved from http://www.fahrbibliothek.de/

14 UNESCO Institute for Statistics. (2009). *General profile–Germany*. Retrieved from http://stats.uis.unesco.org/unesco/TableViewer/document.aspx?ReportId=124&IF_Language=eng&BR_Country=2760&BR_Region=40500

15 Statistisches Bundesamt. (2011). *Bildung und kultur. Private schulen. Schuljahr 2010/2011* [Education and culture. Private schools. School year 2010/2011]. Wiesbaden: Author. Retrieved from http://www.destatis.de/jetspeed/portal/cms/Sites/destatis/Internet/DE/Content/Publikationen/Fachveroeffentlichungen/BildungForschungKultur/Schulen/PrivateSchulen2110110117004,property=file.pdf

16 Lohmar, B. & Eckhardt, T. (2010). *The education system in the Federal Republic of Germany 2008. A description of the responsibilities, structures and developments in education policy for the exchange of information in Europe*. Bonn: Secretariat of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Laender in the Federal Republic of Germany. Retrieved from http://www.kmk.org/fileadmin/doc/Dokumentation/Bildungswesen_en_pdfs/dossier_en_ebook.pdf

17 Jugendministerkonferenz & Kultusministerkonferenz (Jugendministerkonferenz & Kultusministerkonferenz, Hrsg.).

(2004). *Gemeinsamer Rahmen der Länder für die frühe Bildung in Kindertageseinrichtungen. Beschluss der Jugendministerkonferenz vom 13./14.05.2004; Beschluss der Kultusministerkonferenz vom 03./04.06.2004* [Common framework of the Laender for early education in day-care centers. Decision of the Conference of ministers responsible for youth of 13./14.05.2004, Decision of the Standing Conference of 03./04.06.2004]. Retrieved from http://www.kmk.org/fileadmin/veroeffentlichungen_beschluesse/2004/2004_06_04-Fruehe-Bildung-Kitas.pdf

18 Lohmar, B. & Eckhardt, T. (2010). *Das bildungswesen in der bundesrepublik Deutschland 2009: Darstellung der kompetenzen, strukturen und bildungspolitischen entwicklungen für den informationsaustausch in Europa* [The education system in the Federal Republic of Germany 2009: A description of the responsibilities, structures and developments in education policy for the exchange of information in Europe]. Berlin: Secretariat of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Laender in the Federal Republic of Germany. Retrieved from http://www.kmk.org/fileadmin/doc/Dokumentation/Bildungswesen_pdfs/dossier_dt_ebook.pdf

19 European Commission. (2010). *Organisation of the education system in Germany 2009/2010*. Brussels: Education, Audiovisual & Culture Executive Agency. Retrieved from http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/eurybase/eurybase_full_reports/DE_EN.pdf

20 Ministerium für Schule und Weiterbildung des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen. (2006). *Stundentafel für die grundschule. Zuletzt geändert durch Verordnung vom 5. Juli 2006 nach der neuen ausbildungsordnung für die grundschule* [Schedules for primary

schools, last amended by directive of 5 July 2006 according to new education directive for primary schools]. Retrieved from http://www.schulministerium.nrw.de/BP/Schulrecht/APOen/Stundentafeln/GrundschuleNeu.html

21 Lohmar, B. & Eckhardt, T. (2010). *The education system in the Federal Republic of Germany 2008. A description of the responsibilities, structures and developments in education policy for the exchange of information in Europe.* Bonn: Secretariat of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Laender in the Federal Republic of Germany. Retrieved from http://www.kmk.org/fileadmin/doc/Dokumentation/Bildungswesen_en_pdfs/dossier_en_ebook.pdf

22 Weishaupt, H., Baethge, M., Döbert, H., Füssel, H-P., Hetmeier, H-W., Rauschenbach, T., Rockmann, U., Seeber, S., & Wolter, A. (2010). *Bildung in Deutschland 2010: Ein indikatorengestützter bericht mit einer analyse zu perspektiven des bildungswesens im demografischen wandel* [Education in Germany 2010: A report based on indicators including an analysis on perspectives in the educational sector considering demographic changes]. Bielefeld: W. Bertelsmann Verlag GmbH & Co. Retrieved from http://www.bildungsbericht.de/daten2010/bb_2010.pdf

23 Ibid.

24 Statistisches Bundesamt. (2011). *Bildung und kultur. Allgemeinbildende schulen. Schuljahr 2010/2011* [Education and culture. General education schools. School year 2010/2011]. Retrieved from http://www.destatis.de/jetspeed/portal/cms/Sites/destatis/Internet/DE/Content/Publikationen/Fachveroeffentlichungen/BildungForschungKultur/Schulen/AllgemeinbildendeSchulen2110100117004,property=file.pdf

25 Ibid.

26 Ministerium für Schule und Weiterbildung des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen. (2008). *Richtlinien und Lehrpläne für die Grundschule in Nordrhein-Westfalen: Deutsch, Sachunterricht, Mathematik, Englisch, Musik, Kunst, Sport, Evangelische Religionslehre, Katholische Religionslehre* [Directives and curricula for the primary school in North Rhine-Westphalia: German, general studies, mathematics, English, music, arts, sports, protestant religious education, catholic religious education]. Frechen: Ritterbach. Retrieved from http://www.standardsicherung.schulministerium.nrw.de/lehrplaene/upload/lehrplaene_download/grundschule/grs_faecher.pdf

27 Hornberg, S., Faust, G., Holtappels, H.G., Lankes, E-M., & Schulz-Zander, R. (2007). *Lehr- und lernbedingungen in den teilnehmerstaaten* [Teaching and learning conditions in the participating states]. In W. Bos, S. Hornberg, K.-H. Arnold, G. Faust, L. Fried, E.-M. Lankes, et al. (Eds.), *IGLU 2006. Lesekompetenzen von Grundschulkindern in Deutschland im internationalen Vergleich* [IGLU 2006. Reading competencies of primary school students in Germany in an international comparison] (pp. 47–79). Münster: Waxmann.

28 Bildungshaus Schulbuchverlage. (2012). *ANTOLIN. Mit lesen punkten!* [ANTOLIN. Collecting points with reading]. Retrieved from http://www.antolin.de/

29 Sekretariat der Ständigen Konferenz der Kultusminister der Länder in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. (2003). *Grundsätze zur förderung von schülerinnen und schülern mit besonderen Schwierigkeiten im lesen und rechtschreiben oder im rechnen* [Principles on fostering students with special difficulties in reading, spelling or calculating]. Berlin: Author.

Retrieved from http://www.kmk. org/fileadmin/veroeffentlichungen_ beschluesse/2003/2003_12_04-Lese-Rechtschreibschwaeche.pdf

30 Statistisches Bundesamt. (2011). *Bildung und kultur. Allgemeinbildende schulen. Schuljahr 2010/2011* [Education and culture. General education schools. School year 2010/2011]. Retrieved from http://www.destatis.de/jetspeed/portal/ cms/Sites/destatis/Internet/DE/Content/ Publikationen/Fachveroeffentlichungen/ BildungForschungKultur/Schulen/Allge meinbildendeSchulen2110100117004,pro perty=file.pdf

31 OECD–Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development. (2005). *Education and training policy. Teachers matter: Attracting, developing and retaining effective teachers*. Paris: Author. Retrieved from http://www.nefmi.gov. hu/letolt/nemzet/oecd_publication_ teachers_matter_english_061116.pdf

32 Ibid.

33 Statistisches Bundesamt. (2011). *Finanzen und steuern 2010. Personal des öffentlichen dienstes* [Finances and taxes 2010. Employees in civil service]. Retrieved from http://www. destatis.de/jetspeed/portal/cms/ Sites/destatis/Internet/DE/Content/ Publikationen/Fachveroeffentlichungen/ FinanzenSteuern/OeffentlicherDienst/ PersonaloeffentlicherDienst21406001070 04,property= file.pdf

34 Weishaupt, H., Baethge, M., Döbert, H., Füssel, H-P., Hetmeier, H-W., Rauschenbach, T., Rockmann, U., Seeber, S., & Wolter, A. (2010). *Bildung in Deutschland 2010: Ein indikatorengestützter bericht mit einer analyse zu perspektiven des bildungswesens im demografischen wandel* [Education in Germany 2010: A report based on indicators including an analysis on perspectives

in the educational sector considering demographic changes]. Bielefeld: W. Bertelsmann Verlag GmbH & Co. Retrieved from http://www. bildungsbericht.de/daten2010/bb_2010. pdf

35 Institut zur Qualitätsentwicklung im Bildungswesen. (n.d.). *VERA/ Lernstandserhebungen* [VERA–A survey on education]. Retrieved from http:// www.iqb.hu-berlin.de/vera

36 Institut zur Qualitätsentwicklung im Bildungswesen. (2011). *Ländervergleich in der primarstufe 2011* [Country comparison in the 2011 primary education]. Retrieved from http://www. iqb.hu-berlin.de/laendervergleich/ LV2011

37 Sekretariat der Ständigen Konferenz der Kultusminister der Länder in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. (2010). *Förderstrategie für leistungsschwächere schülerinnen und schüler. Beschluss der kultusministerkonferenz vom 04.03.2010* [Strategies for fostering lower performing students. Decision of the standing conference of 04.03.2010.]. Berlin: Author. Retrieved from http://www.kmk. org/fileadmin/veroeffentlichungen_ beschluesse/2010/2010_03_04-Foerderstrategie-Leistungsschwaechere. pdf

38 Statistisches Bundesamt. (2011). *Bildung und kultur. Allgemeinbildende schulen. Schuljahr 2010/2011 [*Education and culture. General education schools. School year 2010/2011]. Retrieved from http://www.destatis.de/jetspeed/portal/ cms/Sites/destatis/Internet/DE/Content/ Publikationen/Fachveroeffentlichungen/ BildungForschungKultur/Schulen/Allg emeinbildendeSchulen2110100117004,p roperty=file.pdfSee ref. 6 (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2011, Allgemeinbildende Schulen)

39 Sekretariat der Ständigen Konferenz der Kultusminister der Länder in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. (2006). *Gesamtstrategie der kultusministerkonferenz zum bildungsmonitoring* [Comprehensive strategy by the standing conference for educational monitoring]. Berlin: Author. Retrieved from http://www.kmk.org/fileadmin/veroeffentlichungen_beschluesse/2006/2006_06_02-Bildungsmonitoring.pdf

40 Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF). (2004). *The development of national educational standards. An expertise.* Berlin: Author. Retrieved from http://www.bmbf.de/pub/the_development_of_national_educationel_standards.pdf

41 See Euen, B., Wendt, H., & Bos, W. (2012). Germany. In I.V.S. Mullis, M.O. Martin, C.A. Minnich, G.M. Stanco, A. Arora, V.A.S. Centurino, & C.E. Castle (Eds.), *TIMSS 2011 Encyclopedia: Education policy and curriculum in mathematics and science, Volumes 1 and 2.* Chestnut Hill, MA: TIMSS & PIRLS International Study Center, Boston College.

42 European Commission. (2010). *Organisation of the education system in Germany 2009/2010.* Brussels: Education, Audiovisual & Culture Executive Agency.

Retrieved from http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/eurybase/eurybase_full_reports/DE_EN.pdf

43 Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung (BMBF). (2008). *Rahmenprogramm zur förderung der empirischen bildungsforschung.* [Framework programme for the promotion of educational research]. Berlin: Author. Retrieved from http://www.bmbf.de/pub/bildungsforschung_band_zweiundzwanzig.pdf

Honduras

Renán Rápalo Castellanos

Ministry of Education, Institute of Research, National Pedagogical University

Language and Literacy

The total population of Honduras is estimated at 8 million: 90 percent are mestizos (mixed Amerindian and European), 7 percent are Amerindian, 2 percent are Black, and 1 percent are White.[1] Although the country was populated by a number of ethnic groups (e.g., Mayas-Chortis, Lencas, Tolupanes, Pech, Tauhacas) before Spanish colonization, most groups have been culturally integrated. Following colonization, some other ethnic groups such as the Garifunas and Misquitos have settled in the north coast of the country.

Spanish is the official language of Honduras, though a number of Amerindian dialects continue to be used in some parts of the country. In addition, English is common in the Bay Islands, and most well-educated people on the mainland understand English. Both the mass media and local press use Spanish as the language of communication.

All instruction and textbooks are in Spanish, and children with a different mother tongue begin learning Spanish when they enter school. Through the implementation of several cultural and ethnic education programs, most Honduran ethnic groups receive education in both their own native language and in Spanish at public schools. An increasing number of private schools in urban areas use English or French as the language of instruction. As of 2010, the Republic of Honduras had a literacy rate of about 85 percent and an average of 7.5 years of schooling.[2]

Honduras has very few public libraries. All public libraries are located in major cities and have very little contact with public schools.
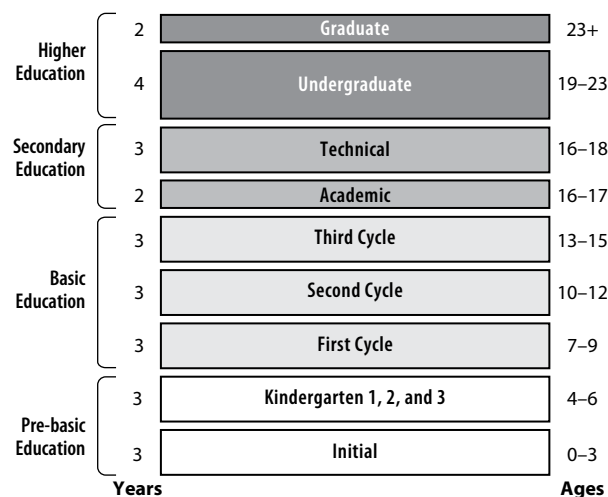
Overview of the Education System

According to the national constitution of the Republic of Honduras,[3] the provision of education is a key federal function. National education is defined as secular and is based on the fundamental principles of democracy and free access to everyone, without any type of discrimination.

The formal education system in Honduras remains highly centralized, despite many previous and current efforts to decentralize.[4] The government of Honduras finances public education, while private schools raise their funds almost exclusively from tuition fees.

The Ministry of Education (*Secretaría de Educación*) is responsible for providing educational services and upholding the education laws through secondary school. The ministry's main activities include the formulation and implementation of the intended curriculum in all subjects. With the formulation and approval of the new intended curriculum for basic education in 2003, the ministry collaborated with the international community (bilateral and multilateral partners) to produce and distribute syllabi, standards, textbooks, and teaching guides for all the public schools in the country. In addition, the ministry appoints, transfers, promotes, and dismisses teachers in public schools with the help of its departmental offices and specially appointed commissions, which are constituted by ministry officials and members of the teachers unions.

The ministry regulates both formal and informal education sectors in Honduras, though it is primarily in charge of the formal sector (see Exhibit 1). The informal education sector includes several flexible options from short-term courses for specific trades to academic programs that allow students with special needs to complete their formal education in the first three stages of formal education, or to acquire specific skills to enter the labor market.

Exhibit 1:   The Structure of the Formal Education System in Honduras

	Years		Ages
Higher Education	2	Graduate	23+
	4	Undergraduate	19–23
Secondary Education	3	Technical	16–18
	2	Academic	16–17
Basic Education	3	Third Cycle	13–15
	3	Second Cycle	10–12
	3	First Cycle	7–9
Pre-basic Education	3	Kindergarten 1, 2, and 3	4–6
	3	Initial	0–3

Formal education in Honduras begins with pre-basic education, which is not compulsory. The initial years of pre-basic education, encompassing ages 0–3, is mainly the responsibility of the family. For children ages 4–6, Honduras has numerous Kindergarten programs ranging up to three years in length, though children from poor families frequently attend less than one year. Enrollment rates in Kindergarten programs have gradually increased in the last two decades, due mainly to the growth of non-formal alternatives. Honduras's education system offers nine years of free and compulsory basic education and two or three years of secondary schooling.

Basic education is sub-divided into three cycles: first cycle encompasses Grades 1–3 (ages 7–9); second cycle encompasses Grades 4–6 (ages 10–12); and third cycle encompasses Grades 7–9 (ages 13–15). According to the basic education curriculum, the first cycle initiates the students in the development of instrumental skills, such as basic language skills; the second cycle continues with the development of instrumental skills; and the third cycle completes the development of instrumental skills, and introduces students to reading scientific and technological material.[5]

Secondary education is sub-divided into two levels: academic secondary school lasts two years, and is intended for students whose main goal is to continue into higher education; and technical secondary school lasts three years, and is intended for students whose main goal is to enter the labor market. *Escuelas Normales*, or normal schools, are three-year secondary education schools with a special status. These schools prepare teachers to work as basic education teachers for first or second cycle, or to continue at the university level to become third cycle or secondary education teachers.

Tertiary education includes several national universities and an increasing number of private universities, with several undergraduate and graduate options. The cost of tertiary education for parents and students is relatively inexpensive because national universities are heavily subsidized by the government and still cover a higher percentage of the enrollment.

Since 2003 Honduras has benefitted from the Fast Track Initiative for Education for All, primarily sponsored by the World Bank. This initiative is focused on improving conditions to ensure that children have access to and successfully complete basic education.[6] With this special aid, the new curriculum for basic education was designed and approved in 2003. Implementation of the curriculum for all cycles of basic education began in 2004. In addition, new

textbooks and teachers' guides have been developed for mathematics, Spanish, and science for the two first levels of basic education.

In January 2012, the Honduran government approved a new General Education Law. This new law is intended to maintain the present structure of the education system and the curriculum, but also to introduce profound changes in the areas of management, teacher education, and assessment of the quality of education. The law will be enacted as of 2012.

Language/Reading Curriculum in the Fourth Grade

Honduras's basic education curriculum is uniquely organized into curricular areas, as opposed to subjects, and all curricular areas across all cycles incorporate three dimensions, or *ejes transversales*: identity, work, and participatory democracy. The first two cycles contain five areas: communications (languages and art education), mathematics, social sciences, natural sciences, and physical education (sports). In the third cycle, technology is added as a sixth area. Learning to read and literacy are part of the communications area in both the new basic education curriculum and the national standards.[7] According to the basic education curriculum, "the communications area helps students organize, develop, and build communication skills. It empowers students to deal appropriately with their social context at the local, national, and international levels." [8]

The basic education curriculum states that students in the first and second cycles (Grades 1–6) should achieve the following reading competencies: understanding text, comparing texts, understanding various meanings within texts, and reading various texts for different purposes.

The objectives of the communications area are to teach students to do the following:

♦ Use Spanish and their mother tongue (if other than Spanish) properly, as communication tools for personal expression, critical thinking, and interacting with other people;

♦ Understand that language is associated with scientific, technological, socioeconomic, historical, and cultural advances;

♦ Enhance mental and logical organization by the scientific study and proper use of language structure;

♦ Use the skills and basic abilities in their mother language, Spanish, and a foreign language to interact in a globalized world; and

♦ Develop artistic activity and appreciation through the creation and interpretation of works of art, music, and drama.

The communications area includes four separate subjects: mother tongue, Spanish, foreign language, and art. The teaching of each of these subjects is divided into four blocks: oral language, written language, reflection on language, and artistic creation. Reading is part is of the second block because writing and reading are considered complementary.[9]

Learning to read begins in the first grade, and children are expected to begin reading on the first day of school. In the first cycle (Grades 1–3), reading and writing include content and activities that introduce students to the interpretation and production of different types of level-appropriate literary and informational texts. The texts used include ones commonly found in students' school, home, and social environments: invitations, instructions, cartoons, and letters. Children continue to develop their reading skills by reading and, in the second cycle (Grades 4–6), discussing mostly literary texts written by Honduran or international writers. This activity emphasizes the pleasure of reading and develops both aesthetic sensibilities as well as a critical appreciation of the texts.[10]

For the fourth grade, the basic education curriculum defines the following general goals (*expectativas de logro*) related to reading:[11]

♦ Develop reading comprehension skills to differentiate the main types of texts, according to their characteristics and function, and interpret what they read;

♦ Find specific information within the universe of written information;

♦ Enjoy and develop an aesthetic sensitivity and critical appreciation for narrative texts and other literature;

♦ Learn about the structure of literary and dramatic narrative texts; and

♦ Critically read and interpret messages from the mass media.

The basic education curriculum also defines the following specific goals that fourth grade students are expected to master related to (Spanish language) reading: [12]

♦ Oral Language—Discursive forms, types of textural superstructures, types of texts, stages of reading, reading techniques for research, developing metacognitive skills, literary texts, informational texts, oral reading of texts, and critical reading of media texts.

- ♦ Written Language and Literary Expression—Textual superstructure, types of paragraphs, non-verbal language, school library, literary texts, linguistic variety, morphosynthesis, semantics, phonetics, and semiotics.

Reading Instruction in the Primary Grades

The Ministry of Education in Honduras mandates two hundred school days per year, though frequent teacher strikes make this difficult to achieve. By law, students in basic education receive instruction through roughly 36 periods each week, with each period lasting approximately 45 minutes. In all Grades 1–9, students are taught five periods of mathematics and the natural sciences per week. With the introduction of the new curriculum, however, school principals have the authority to adapt these time allocations to the needs of their schools.[13] Also, instructional time may differ slightly in schools that have fewer than six teachers—as of 2011, at least one third of schools in Honduras had only one or two teachers.

Through the sixth grade of basic education, schools have no specialist teachers in the fields of language. Beginning in the third cycle (Grades 7–9), specialist teachers are required to have degrees in Spanish or literature in order to teach in the communications area. However, general teachers or non-qualified teachers commonly teach these subjects in rural areas and in some private schools.

Instructional Materials

The Ministry of Education is responsible for selecting appropriate textbooks for students, and local schools are not involved in the decision-making process. Following the approval of the new basic education curriculum in 2003, the ministry adopted and adapted textbooks and reading books and materials from Mexico. Since 2003, a great effort has been made to provide every school with official textbooks, students' workbooks, and teacher's guides. However, many schools still do not have these materials or do not have enough for every student.

Teachers also commonly use other textbooks and materials compiled by independent national or international publishers. Although these publishers refer to the basic education curriculum when creating their materials, Honduras has no formal guidelines or committee to review or approve these textbooks and instructional materials. As a result, the country has no list of approved texts or instructional materials for the teaching of language or any other subject in the schools.

Use of Technology

The new curriculum prescribes the teaching of technology as part of the natural sciences in the first two cycles and as a separate subject in the third cycle of basic education. However, Honduras lags behind most other countries in Central America regarding access to information and communication technology (ICT).[14] Only about 12 percent of Honduran households have access to a computer, and only about 13 percent of the population use the Internet at least once a month.[15, 16] There is no data on the availability of ICT in schools and the government currently lacks a specific plan or strategy to provide schools with computers or laboratories.

To place the use of technology in schools in context, it is important to note that most schools in Honduras are rural and lack access to the most basic services such as water and electricity. Urban schools (especially private schools) are usually well equipped, even with sophisticated ICT. In the last decade, with assistance from international agencies and the private sector, the government has piloted several programs to furnish some schools with either computers, laboratories, or both. However, these isolated efforts have not made a widespread difference with regard to national ICT indicators.

There is some hope for change; the present government is now implementing the One Computer per Child Program (*EDUCATRACHOS*) that has seen some success in other Latin American countries.[17] The program is intended to reach all public schools and already has begun to benefit students and teachers from schools in Honduras's poorest villages. While obtaining the financial resources will be a challenge, the program could have great long-term impact, if implemented as designed.

Role of Reading Specialists

Language teachers and teacher-librarians (in large urban schools) are chiefly responsible for teaching reading, having received special training during their teacher-education programs. No other type of reading specialist plays a role in reading instruction in Honduran public schools.

Second-language Instruction

In international schools, Spanish is taught as a second language. In public schools with a large proportion of ethnic representation (e.g., Mayas-Chortis, Lencas, Tolupanes, Pech, Tauhacas), Spanish is taught along with the mother tongue. Students in the regular public schools begin to learn English in Grade 7,

but current legislation proposes to make the learning of English mandatory beginning at Grade 4.

Students with Reading Difficulties

Unfortunately, early detection of reading and learning disabilities is not generally available in Honduran schools. There are no standardized tests for assessing progress in reading or any special programs for reading enhancement in school settings. Only a very few special teachers and psychologists in special schools use diagnostic tests to diagnose reading difficulties in children with serious reading problems.

Teachers have no special training in modern reading theories or in teaching strategies for children with reading disabilities. If a problem emerges in reading, or in any other field of learning, schools generally are not able to help. In public schools, it is difficult to carry out a remediation program for poor readers, due in part to a lack of qualified teachers to do this work as well as because hiring additional teachers or extending the teaching time can be problematic. Some schools, however, have been successful in organizing additional time for instruction and tutoring students with reading disabilities without changing teaching strategy and methods.

Teachers and Teacher Education

Institutional reform efforts in teacher education in Honduras over the past two decades have failed to achieve an effective or sufficiently large-scale impact on the core of teaching practice in classrooms and schools. Because of this failure, Honduras remains one of the few countries in the world where the professional education of teachers from the first two cycles (Grades 1–6) of basic education is not accomplished at the tertiary education level.[18] To become a teacher for Grades 1–6, prospective teachers must attend three years of the secondary cycle in normal schools (*Escuelas Normales*). After completing the program they are awarded a teaching certificate (*Maestro de educación primaria*). To teach in the third cycle of basic education (Grades 7–9) or at the secondary level, aspiring teachers must first obtain a secondary education diploma, preferably at a normal school. Then they must complete an undergraduate program at the National Pedagogical University or complete the pedagogy program at the Autonomous National University of Honduras.[19] However, many teachers at the third level of basic education, or even at the secondary education level, commonly do

not have a higher education diploma or have not completed an undergraduate program in the subject that they teach.

Honduras has no shortage of students wishing to become basic or secondary education teachers. Since the approval of the new Law for Teachers (*Estatuto del Docente*) in 1997, teachers have had access to relatively better salaries, job stability, and other important social benefits. As a result an increasing number of students wish to study at the normal schools and at the National Pedagogic University. However, despite the influx of students into the field of education, once these students obtain their diplomas, there is no guarantee that the best will be hired in the education system; Honduras's system for selecting and hiring teachers is not fair.

Overall, the weak training of teachers in Honduras is a major impetus for continuing to reform teacher education in the country. Because many teachers receive only a secondary level education, teachers of the first two cycles of basic education frequently lack a solid background in subject matter knowledge and pedagogy, and have only limited practical work experience. Teachers for the third cycle of basic education and secondary education have university or college degrees, and thus would be expected to have more subject matter and pedagogy knowledge. However, even at this level, their practical work experience is poor. In addition, the country has no support or induction mechanism for new teachers. Finally, Honduras's education system lacks a continuous accreditation process for teacher education institutions and programs.

Requirements for Ongoing Professional Development in Reading for Teachers

The Ministry of Education has not created an effective system of professional development of teachers. In the last two decades, the professionalization of in-service teachers has been of the responsibility of the National Pedagogic University, primarily through two programs: the Continuous Education Program for Basic Education, and the Special University Education Program for Teachers. While an increasing number of teachers are graduating from both these programs, there is still no evidence of their impact on the quality of education.[20] The Ministry of Education has established the National Institute for Educational Research and Training to oversee professional development of teachers through refresher courses not leading to higher degree diplomas. The role of the institute has become more important as a direct result of the introduction of the new and more ambitious 2003 curriculum. However, the institute remains a traditional, centralized, and underfunded institution that

is unable to provide all teachers with the skills required to implement the new curriculum and to develop their teaching careers.

Finally, Honduras has no standards for the evaluation of the performance of teachers. Although required by current laws, the ministry and the teacher's unions have not been able to reach agreement on this issue. As a result, career progression and salary increases for teachers are based on the number of years of experience and on participation, often as a passive recipient, in training activities. A criticism is that this current practice does not give teachers incentives or encourage them to make any effort to innovate or seek new ways of teaching.

Monitoring Student Progress in Reading

Since the mid-1990s, assessing the quality of basic education has been a top priority for the Ministry of Education. As a result, a National System of Evaluation of Academic Achievement (SINECE) has been designed. This system has been operating with an internal unit within the ministry and an external unit called External Unit for the Measurement of Quality of Education that belongs to the National Pedagogic University. It is this external unit that has conducted the national tests administered between 1997 and 2005. However, SINECE does not have a legal charter. As of 2012, the Honduran government is discussing the creation of an independent institute to run the national assessment system.

With assistance from the World Bank, the External Unit for the Measurement of the Quality of Education was created at the National Pedagogic University. The unit designs, develops, and administers criterion-referenced standardized assessments to a sample of basic education students, mainly those in Grades 3–6, in mathematics, language, and sometimes science. From 1997–2004, the External Unit for the Measurement of Quality of Education regularly administered assessments to a sample of schools nationally. These were low-stakes assessments, with no consequences for schools, teachers, or students. Their main purpose was to monitor the academic progress of the education system and investigate the factors that affect it. Reports were produced for every school, with a detailed analysis of the performance of its students in every subject and a general comparison with other schools within the area and at the national level. The report also contained some recommendations for improving performance. Most recently, these assessments have been used to measure the progress of the education system in reaching the achievement goal of Education for All.

In 2004, the US Agency for International Development (USAID) implemented the Honduras Improving Student Achievement Project. The project was designed to improve student achievement through reformed and prioritized standards, an enhanced curriculum, and a systematized, integrated, standards-driven testing system designed to measure student achievement of Education for All goals.[21] The project also aimed to develop new standards for basic education, and other materials such as standardized tests administered by the same teachers every two months. Since 2004, the Improving Student Achievement Project has also sponsored development and administration of standardized tests in mathematics and language for all basic education grades. However, the results of these tests are not technically comparable with the ones produced by the External Unit for the Measurement of the Quality of Education. The integration of all these external efforts and the ones developed by the Ministry of Education into a coherent system of evaluation of the quality of education remains a challenge in Honduras.[22]

At all education levels, teachers monitor the progress of individual students through grades and report cards. At the basic and secondary levels, students receive certificates each term, with marks allocated in each subject. Periodically, parents receive school reports of their child's progress, which are to be signed and returned to the school. This allows parents to follow their child's progress and take action when low achievement is reported. At the end of basic and secondary education, students receive school-leaving certificates that enable them either to study at the next level or to seek employment.

Honduras has no high-stakes tests or national examinations, not even at the end of the secondary school. Because there are no final examinations, the overall grade obtained by the student during the school year determines grade promotion. Entrance examinations to the universities are recent, and are developed and administered by the universities themselves.

The Ministry of Education has recently introduced policies aimed at controlling student dropout rates and problems associated with grade repetition; for example, automatic or flexible promotion is currently in an experimental state. In the third cycle of basic education and in secondary education, students who do not pass a class usually get a second chance or get help with remedial classes. If they still fail to get promoted in two or more classes, then they have to repeat the whole year. Despite these improvements, a relatively high number of students in the first three grades of the basic education still fail to be promoted.

Suggested Readings

Ministry of Education of Honduras. (2011). Retrieved from http://www.se.gob.hn/

National Institute of Statistics of Honduras. (2011). Retrieved from http://www.ine. gob.hn/

Partnership for Educational Revitalization in the Americas–Fundación para la Educación Ricardo Ernesto Maduro (PREAL/FEREMA). (2010). *Informe de progreso educativo de Honduras* [Honduras report card].

United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization. (2010). *World data on education: Honduras.* Retrieved from http://www.ibe.unesco.org

References

1   Central Intelligence Agency. (2011). *The world fact book: Honduras.* Retrieved from https://www.cia.gov/library/ publications/the-world-factbook/maps/ maptemplate_ho.html

2   Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas. (2009). *Encuesta de hogares* [Household survey]. Tegucigalpa: Author. Retrieved from http://www.ine.gob.hn/drupal/

3   Constitución de la República de Honduras [Honduras National Constitution] (1982). Tegucigalpa: Asamblea Nacional Constituyente.

4   Partnership for Educational Revitalization in the Americas– Fundación para la Educación Ricardo Ernesto Maduro (PREAL/FEREMA). (2010). *Informe de progreso educativo de Honduras* [Honduras report card].

5   United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization. (2008). *National report on the development of Honduras education.* Comayagüela: Secretaría de Educación, Republica de Honduras. Retrieved from http://

www.ibe.unesco.org/National_Reports/ ICE_2008/honduras_NR08.pdf

6   Opazo, J.E.M. (2009). *Education for all–Global monitoring report 2009– Case study: Honduras.* Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. Retrieved from http://unesdoc.unwesco.org/ images/0018/001802/180201e.pdf

7   Secretaría de Educación. (2003). *Currículo nacional básico* [Basic education curriculum]. Comayagüela: Author.

8   Ibid.

9   Ibid.

10 Ibid., p. 42.

11 Ibid., p. 54.

12 Secretaria de Educación. (2003). *Curriculo nacional básico, segundo ciclo, capítulo 10* [National basic education curriculum, second cycle, chapter 10]. Comayagüela: Author.

13 United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization. (2010). *World data on education: Honduras.* Retrieved from http://www.ibe.unesco.org

14 International Telecommunications Union. (2009). *Measuring the information society–The ICT development index.* Retrieved from http://www.int/ ITU-D/it/publications

15 Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas. (2009). *Encuesta de hogares* [Household survey]. Retrieved from http://www.ine. gob.hn/drupal/

16 Conatel. (2008). *Indicadores nacionales.* Retrieved from http://www.conatel.hn/ ING.aspx

17 EDUCATRACHOS. (n.d.). *El portal educativo de Hoduras* [Educational portal of Honduras]. Retrieved from http:// www.educatrachos.hn/joomla/

18 Partnership for Educational Revitalization in the Americas–Fundación para la Educación Ricardo Ernesto Maduro (PREAL/FEREMA). (2010). *Informe de progreso educativo de Honduras* [Honduras report card].

19 Salgado, R. (2004, September). *La formación inicial, profesionalización y capacitación docente en Honduras* [Initial and in-service education of teachers in Honduras]. Paper presented at the *Seminarion regional sobre las instituciones de formacion en America Latina: De las normales a las universidades* [Seminarion regional training institutions in Latin America: From public school to university], Copan, Honduras. Retrieved from http://www.radu.org.ar/Info/17%20form%20doc%20honduras.pdf

20 Partnership for Educational Revitalization in the Americas–Fundación para la Educación Ricardo Ernesto Maduro (PREAL/FEREMA). (2010). *Informe de progreso educativo de Honduras* [Honduras report card].

21 United States Agency for International Development. (2004). *Mejorando el Impacto al Desempeño Estudiantil de Honduras (MIDEH)* [Improving student achievement of Honduras]. Retrieved from http://www.equip123.net/equip2/mideh/

22 Partnership for Educational Revitalization in the Americas–Fundación para la Educación Ricardo Ernesto Maduro (PREAL/FEREMA). (2010). *Informe de progreso educativo de Honduras* [Honduras report card].

Hong Kong SAR

Tse Shek Kam

University of Hong Kong

Language and Literacy

The Cantonese dialect of Chinese is the everyday mother tongue of the overwhelming majority of the residents of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) of China. English and Chinese enjoy equal status as official languages, although only 2.8 percent of the population use English as their lingua franca. The Cantonese dialect of Chinese is the colloquial language used by 90.8 percent of the population; Putonghua, the official spoken language of the People's Republic of China, is the first language of communication for only 0.9 percent of the population; and other dialects of Chinese are commonly used by 4.4 percent of Hong Kong's citizens.[1] Chinese (Cantonese) has been the medium of instruction in most secondary schools since 1998 and is the preferred language of instruction in all government-funded primary schools.[2] The government increased the use of Chinese as the medium of instruction at Grade 7 (Secondary 1) beginning with the 2010–11 school year, and Chinese will continue to become more prevalent in subsequent years as this cohort of students moves through secondary school.[3]

The Education Bureau (EDB) has implemented a series of initiatives to boost literacy levels in Hong Kong. Promoting the use of reading as a vehicle of learning and as a source of pleasure is one of the four key goals of recent curriculum reforms. EDB has energetically launched Reading to Learn, a school development project to help primary schools improve the teaching of reading and develop school-based strategies for building a reading culture. This project features Book Works, an interactive reading website for students,[4] as well as seminars and training programs designed to help teachers and librarians widen the use of children's reading books in schools.[5] In addition, EDB and the Leisure and Cultural Services Department have jointly organized the Library Cards for All School Children endeavor to encourage students to make full use of the resources available in Hong Kong's public libraries and to develop reading as a life-long habit.[6] The Quality Education Fund has allocated generous funding to encourage schools to experiment with reading projects.[7]

Overview of the Education System

The education system in Hong Kong SAR is largely decentralized, with EDB responsible for formulating, developing, and reviewing policies, programs, and legislation from the preprimary through the tertiary levels. EDB oversees the implementation of educational programs, disseminates authority to schools, and encourages school-based curriculum development.[8] This structure requires active support and participation from numerous members of the community.[9] EDB provided different forms of on-site support for approximately 431 primary and 311 secondary schools in the 2009–10 academic year, including support services for school-based curriculum development.[10]

In 2010, the total number of students enrolled in kindergarten, primary, and secondary education was approximately 930,000. Of the total enrollment across all educational levels, 16 percent of students were in kindergarten, 36 percent in primary schools, and 48 percent in secondary schools.[11] More than 60 percent of young people ages 17–20 attended some form of post-secondary education.[12]

Preprimary education consists of childcare for children from birth to age 3 and kindergarten for children ages 3–6. All 951 kindergartens in Hong Kong are privately run. In the 2010–11 school year, 148,940 children were enrolled in kindergarten, and the student-teacher ratio was 9.8 per class.[13]

The 572 primary schools in Hong Kong provide free schooling for children ages 6 to 11. In the 2010–11 school year, the average class size in primary schools was 29.[14] In the 2005–06 school year, primary school enrollment in Hong Kong began to decline significantly, falling from 429,900 to 348,500 students in 2009–10, with a further decrease to 334,400 students in 2010–11.[15] To capitalize on this trend and enhance the quality of teaching and learning, EDB conducted a Small Class Teaching study involving 37 public-sector primary schools, starting from Grade 1 (Primary 1) in the 2009–10 school year.[16]

The government provides free secondary schooling. In the 2010–11 school year, 449,737 children were enrolled in secondary schools, with an average class size of 34.4 in Grades 7–11 (Secondary 1–5) and 30.1 in Grades 10–13 (Secondary 6–7); the overall student-teacher ratio at this time was 15.2 per class.[17] Under the New Academic Structure, implemented in September 2009, all students have the opportunity to study free of charge through Grade 12 (Secondary 6).[18]

At the tertiary level, Hong Kong has 16 degree-awarding institutions of higher education: seven universities and one teacher education institution

funded by the University Grants Committee, seven self-financing universities and colleges, and one publicly funded performing arts academy.[19] In addition, nine campuses under the Hong Kong Institute of Vocational Education offer skill-oriented programs.

In addition to government schools, Hong Kong has aided schools and Direct Subsidy Scheme (DSS) schools. Aided schools are free and funded by the government but operated by a sponsoring entity. DSS schools, which constitute a sizeable segment of the education system, are private schools that receive some government funding. In September 2011, there were 74 DSS schools: 53 at the secondary level, eleven at the primary level, and ten with classes at both the secondary and primary levels.[20] As of September 2010, Hong Kong also had 48 international schools, including 15 schools run by the English Schools Foundation. Providing education for some 36,100 students, international schools offer curricula from the United States, Australia, Great Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Switzerland, Japan, Korea, and Singapore.[21] Most international schools offer curricula culminating with conventional A-level final examinations, though some run International Baccalaureate programs.[22]

Language/Reading Curriculum in the Fourth Grade

Reading Policy

The main goal of the overall reading policy in Hong Kong SAR (and especially at Grade 4) is to enable all children to read with comprehension for learning and pleasure. A principal objective of education reform in recent years has been for all students to develop proficiency in reading independently in both official languages, Chinese and English. Lower primary school students (Grades 1–3) are expected to master the basic skills of reading and writing, to develop an interest in reading, and to acquire the habit of reading. Upper primary school students (Grades 4–6) are expected to apply their reading and writing skills with increasing fluency, to communicate effectively both orally and in writing, and to use their reading as a vehicle for learning.

Curriculum reform has identified the promotion of a reading culture as one of the key components of lifelong learning.[23] The Reading to Learn initiative is one of the four key components of curriculum programs in kindergarten, primary, and secondary schools. EDB also promotes the concept of reading across the curriculum, which teaches students to use and apply their reading skills in all lessons. Resources are available for schools and teachers, including seminars and special training courses, lists of reading materials, and information

about local initiatives.[24, 25] These resources enhance teachers' professional subject matter knowledge and pedagogy, providing them with strategies to help students approach various types of texts and the literacy demands associated with all subjects across the curriculum. EDB also has made special funding available for schools to purchase supplemental reading resources, such as books and materials for the Extensive Reading Scheme in Chinese.[26] In addition, schools are encouraged to develop systematic programs for teaching reading skills during lessons such as drama, to organize reading clubs for the various cohorts, and to work with parents to promote students' reading at home.

Summary of National Curriculum

Although schools are permitted to modify the school curriculum to suit the specific needs of their particular school population and location, EDB offers clear central guidelines for all schools. These guidelines state that all students in Hong Kong SAR will be taught reading in primary school starting at age 6. In fact, many students begin learning to read in kindergarten, and some children are already able to read when they begin school. Schools are encouraged to draw upon the support of parents and the community to promote good reading habits in students and encourage a culture of pleasure reading at home for every child. Schools have the power to adjust the curriculum and timetable to meet the literacy needs of their students. They may introduce innovative teaching strategies to motivate students and teach them reading comprehension. The effective use of reading schemes (leveled readers) and reading programs helps sustain student interest and efforts. At the same time, the availability of quality reading materials, both in schools and public libraries, is crucial for engaging students to read in school and at home.

In 2010, the Curriculum Development Council (CDC) established clear reading goals for schools. The whole school is expected to be involved in the promotion of reading and to help build a vibrant culture of reading within the school. Language teachers are expected to focus specifically on reading strategies and skills instruction, while other teachers are expected to help students broaden and strengthen their reading abilities by having them read for both information and understanding in every subject area. In addition, the school librarian is expected to play a crucial role in developing students' information-seeking skills.

CDC goals for the Chinese reading curriculum state that students in Grades 1–3 (Primary 1–3) should be able to do the following: [27]

♦ Acquire basic reading abilities;

♦ Read different types of texts;

♦ Acquire vocabulary and sentence structures;

♦ Have a basic knowledge of language;

♦ Understand and become knowledgeable about Chinese culture; and

♦ Develop positive habits and attitudes toward reading.

CDC goals for the Chinese reading curriculum state that students in Grades 4–6 (Primary 4–6) should do the following:

♦ Develop basic reading abilities;

♦ Read different types of texts;

♦ Develop the ability to read independently;

♦ Acquire vocabulary and sentence structures;

♦ Improve basic knowledge of language;

♦ Improve understanding and knowledge of Chinese culture; and

♦ Develop positive habits and attitudes toward reading.

CDC also recommends that students apply the following different reading strategies from the beginning of primary school: [28, 29]

♦ Use appropriate language knowledge and experiences to understand reading materials;

♦ Identify and use key words, sentences, and paragraphs in specific language situations;

♦ Raise expectations and ask appropriate questions to guide reading, and use inference and verification skills;

♦ Select different reading strategies to suit different reading objectives;

♦ Develop an interest in reading, positive attitudes, and the habit of reading for pleasure;

♦ Read independently for information and for pleasure to acquire knowledge; and

♦ Use reading skill techniques to access a range of reading materials.

Reading Instruction in the Primary Grades

Instructional Materials

Before the 2000 Education Reform Act, teaching focused mainly on textbooks prescribed by the school, and most Chinese language teachers tended to rely on those texts. About six to seven periods per week were devoted to Chinese language teaching, and for most of this lesson time, teachers explained texts, provided background information about authors, reviewed vocabulary, and discussed themes and author style. After the 2000 reform, CDC recommended the extension of teaching materials to include online and audio-visual materials. In addition to using EDB-recommended reading materials, schools are encouraged to let students choose what they want to read in class and to read different types of text that cover various themes from diverse sources.[30]

Use of Technology

The Information and Communications Technology (ICT) curriculum enables students to access information independently at their own pace and at a time of their own choosing, at home or school. Teachers are encouraged to help students develop relevant knowledge and ICT skills, as well as appropriate attitudes towards using ICT, the Internet, and educational software. Many literacy software programs provide instant feedback, enabling personal assessment by recording and monitoring the user's learning progress.[31] One example of ICT reading instruction is the website HK Reading City, set up by Hong Kong Education City. This website helps schools promote a rich reading culture by providing an online reading service and experience for students, recommending books and other reading resources for teachers and school librarians, and delivering the latest information on reading materials to the public.[32]

Role of Reading Specialists

Language teachers and teacher-librarians are chiefly responsible for teaching reading, having received special training. However, the notion of reading across the curriculum implies that teachers of other subjects accept a measure of responsibility for helping students learn specialist vocabulary and conventions associated with those subjects. These vocabulary and conventions include ICT specialist conventions and language usage, map reading, historical date charts, science formulae, tables and charts, and mathematical formulae and specialist lexical vocabulary.

Second-language Instruction

Most schools used English as the medium of instruction when Hong Kong was under British colonial rule. When Hong Kong became a Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China in 1997, the new government raised the status of the mother tongue without weakening support for learning English. Chinese (Cantonese) is currently the medium of instruction in the vast majority of primary schools, with English taught as a core subject from the first year of primary school. Although schools have officially been encouraged to adopt Chinese as the medium of instruction, many are reluctant to move away from English, because of parental preferences for their children to learn English.

Although Chinese is the first language for the majority of students in Hong Kong, an increasing number of students are members of ethnic minorities, according to school enrollment statistics. The languages these students speak at home include Urdu, English, Nepali, Tagalog, and Hindi, and few of these students know Chinese. These students are generally referred to as "non-Chinese speaking" (NCS) students,[33] and in this sense, Chinese is their second language.

EDB's *Supplementary Guide to the Chinese Language Curriculum for Non-Chinese Speaking Students* provides suggestions and resources for schools to use when teaching Chinese to NCS students. In addition, a research team from the University of Hong Kong has developed teaching packages designed to help NCS students learn Chinese. Teachers regularly attend seminars and workshops at which second-language teaching strategies are demonstrated.

Students with Reading Difficulties

Diagnostic Testing

The early identification of children with special educational needs and reading disorders is paramount in Hong Kong SAR. Government assessment services for school-age children are provided by EDB, the Department of Health, and the Hospital Authority. EDB provides assessment service for students in public-sector primary and secondary schools who have learning and emotional difficulties, as well as speech and sensory impairments. The Department of Health and the Hospital Authority provide assessment for children under the age of twelve with individual or multiple developmental problems.[34] In addition, educational psychologists and other experts have developed assessment tools to help diagnose the nature of any specific learning difficulties in reading and writing.[35] Students diagnosed with such difficulties receive appropriate remedial intervention.

Instruction for Children with Reading Difficulties

Students with reading difficulties invariably require additional time to learn, and they need parental and teacher support to help them keep pace with their classmates. Schools must establish deliberate and focused education plans if these students are to make satisfactory progress. Teachers should create lesson plans that take these students into account, using differentiated instruction, multisensory teaching, and one-on-one hands-on experiences to boost students' learning. Daily Assessment and Teaching for Primary Aged Children (Datapac) is one recommended program, in which parents, teachers, or older students spend about 15 minutes each day teaching struggling readers a small number of words, identified on the basis of known weaknesses and forthcoming lessons. Students focus on these five to ten words until they master them. Paired reading on a regular basis is also encouraged to help students with reading difficulties access meaning, complete learning tasks, and read for enjoyment.[36]

Games also have proved to be an enjoyable approach to helping students learn Chinese characters. First students learn high-frequency words that are written using simple characters, and then they move on to more complicated character combinations. Understanding character structures and the meaning of radicals helps students recognize characters and use them in stress-free game situations. Learning basic stroke writing and character component patterns is essential for writing Chinese.[37]

Teachers and Teacher Education

Pre-service and in-service teacher education programs, at both non-degree and degree levels, are provided in Hong Kong SAR by tertiary institutions funded through the University Grants Committee. Since 2005, all new graduates from pre-service primary and secondary teacher education programs hold degrees.

As part of the government's comprehensive strategy to enhance student language proficiency, proficiency levels have been specified and benchmark requirements have been established for English and Chinese teachers. Since 2004, teachers who wish to teach English or Chinese have been asked to demonstrate basic language proficiency before being permitted to assume a language teaching position.

Requirements for Ongoing Professional Development in Reading for Teachers
EDB, universities, and other professional organizations in Hong Kong SAR offer in-service professional development courses as well as training programs

to enhance teachers' existing professional knowledge and ability to address students' learning needs. Such programs help teachers keep abreast of new teaching techniques and curriculum innovations. The Advisory Committee on Teacher Education and Qualifications recommends 150 hours of professional development over a three-year period. This period should include time spent on structured learning and other professional development activities that contribute to school development.[38] EDB also organizes various training courses for teachers throughout the year on topics such as curriculum development and implementation and teaching children with specific learning difficulties in reading and writing.[39]

Monitoring Student Progress in Reading

Reading comprehension is routinely tested as part of language instruction in the classroom. The Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority organizes yearly public examinations. Standard-referenced reporting has been adopted since 2007 in the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination for Chinese and English Language (reading, writing, listening, speaking, and integrated language skills).

The three standardized tests administered by the government are the following: the Basic Competence Test, the English Language Proficiency Test, and the Chinese Language Proficiency Test. The first of these assessments, the Basic Competence Test, has two parts: the Student Assessment and the Territory System Assessment. The Student Assessment is an online assessment program implemented to help teachers better understand students' learning needs in the subjects of Chinese, English, and mathematics. The Territory System Assessment provides school administrators with useful information on student achievement at the end of each key learning stage: Grades 3, 6, and 9 (Primary 3 and 6, and Secondary 3) in the three subjects mentioned above. This assessment provides feedback to schools on teaching and learning, curriculum enrichment, and the quality of teaching. The government also provides support to schools that need guidance in responding to the results of these assessments.

Impact and Use of PIRLS

In 2004 and 2007, Hong Kong SAR conducted large-scale assessments that followed the frameworks established for PIRLS 2001 and 2006. The 2004 study investigated the current state of Chinese and English reading literacy at Grade 4 and the impact of strategies that schools were using to improve the teaching

and learning of reading. This study was based upon and extended PIRLS 2001, which investigated the Chinese and English reading proficiency of Grade 4 students as well as factors influencing literacy attainment. The 2007 study took place one year after PIRLS 2006. This follow-up to the 2004 Hong Kong study assessed the progress that Grade 4 students had made with respect to bilingual reading (English and Chinese). In addition, the Territory System Assessment has adopted the PIRLS framework as its Chinese reading comprehension assessment framework.

PIRLS 2001 revealed that 97 percent of Hong Kong literacy teachers relied on textbooks when teaching reading and spent most reading lessons explaining text, vocabulary, and author style. These findings were considered too important for a response to be left to schools and the public alone; a concerted effort was called for, and the Hong Kong PIRLS research team made several submissions to the government.[40] One of the team's strongest recommendations was that parents should be encouraged to play a more active role in teaching children to read, both for learning and for pleasure. The team stressed that such encouragement should begin well before children enter kindergarten or primary school.

The Hong Kong PIRLS team also warned that because Hong Kong students had done so well in PIRLS 2006, many school principals and teachers had relaxed their reading-based efforts and shifted their attention to other subjects. The PIRLS team advised that many schools still need to devise ways to enlist parental cooperation and then collaborate with parents to create supportive home reading environments and foster positive reading attitudes and habits. Recognizing the success of the Reading to Learn project, EDB has agreed that schools should continue emphasizing school-based strategies for building a reading culture—a key component of the reading curriculum. EDC also has decided to devote more resources in primary schools to promoting the concepts of reading across the curriculum and taking a whole-school approach to building a reading culture.

Lastly, in addition to a focus on improving curriculum, pre-service and in-service professional education courses for Chinese and English teachers have been modified in light of lessons learned through Hong Kong's involvement in international comparative surveys of student achievement, such as PIRLS.[41]

Suggested Readings

Education Bureau, the Government of Hong Kong Special Administration Region. (2012). Retrieved from http://www.edb.gov.hk/

Information Services Department, the Government of Hong Kong Special Administration Region. (2010). *Hong Kong yearbook 2010–Education.* Hong Kong: Author. Retrieved from http://www.yearbook.gov.hk/2010/en/pdf/E07.pdf

Tse, S.K. (2010). Chinese language education in Hong Kong: Twenty five years of educational research in Hong Kong. *Educational Research Journal, 24,* 231–256.

Tse, S.K., Lam, J.W.I., Loh, E.K.Y., & Lam, R.Y. (2007). The influence of the language that Hong Kong primary school students habitually speak at home on their Chinese reading ability in school. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development, 28*(5), 400–417.

Tse, S.K., Loh, E.K.Y., Lam, R.Y.H., & Lam, J.W.I. (2010*).* A comparison of English and Chinese reading proficiency of primary school Chinese students. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development, 31*(2), 181–99.

References

1   Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department. (2007). *2006 population by-census.* Retrieved from http://www.censtatd.gov.hk/hong_kong_statistics/statistical_tables/index.jsp?subjectID=1&tableID=140

2   Education Bureau, the Government of Hong Kong Special Administration Region. (2011). *The background of MOI policy: What are the arrangements?* Retrieved from http://www.edb.gov.hk/index.aspx?nodeID=1906&langno=1

3   Education Bureau, the Government of Hong Kong Special Administration Region. (2011). *Medium of instruction: What's new.* Retrieved from http://www.edb.gov.hk/index.aspx?nodeID=8321&langno=1

4   Education Bureau, the Government of Hong Kong Special Administration Region. (2011). *Four key tasks: Reading to learn.* Retrieved from http://www.edb.gov.hk/index.aspx?nodeID=2398&langno=1

5   Ibid.

6   Education Bureau, the Government of Hong Kong Special Administration Region. (2011). *Reading to learn: What's new.* Retrieved from http://www.edb.gov.hk/FileManager/EN/Content_2761/edbcm11164e.pdf

7   Quality Education Fund. (n.d.). *Collaborate for pedagogic innovation; Cultivate for quality education.* Retrieved from http://qef.org.hk/eng/index.htm

8   Education Bureau, the Government of Hong Kong Special Administration Region. (2011). *About us: Our work.* Retrieved from http://www.edb.gov.hk/index.aspx?nodeID=128&langno=1

9   Education Commission. (2000). *Reform proposals for the education system in Hong Kong.* Hong Kong: Author.

10 Information Services Department, the Government of Hong Kong Special Administration Region. (2010). Education, in *Hong Kong yearbook 2010–Education.* Hong Kong: Author. Retrieved from http://www.yearbook.gov.hk/2010/en/pdf/E07.pdf

11 Education Bureau, the Government of Hong Kong Special Administration Region. (2011). *Press releases and publications: Figures and statistics.* Retrieved from http://www.edb.gov.hk/index.aspx?nodeID=92&langno=1

12 Information Services Department, the Government of Hong Kong Special Administration Region. (2010). *Hong Kong yearbook 2010–Education.* Hong Kong: Author. Retrieved from http://www.yearbook.gov.hk/2010/en/pdf/E07.pdf

13 Education Bureau, the Government of Hong Kong Special Administration Region. (2011). *Press releases and publications: Figures and statistics.* Retrieved from http://www.edb.gov.hk/index.aspx?nodeID=92&langno=1

14 Ibid.

15 Education Bureau, the Government of Hong Kong Special Administration Region. (2011). *Press releases and publications: Student enrolment by level of education.* Retrieved from http://www.edb.gov.hk/index.aspx?nodeID=6497&langno=1

16 Legislative Council Panel on Education. (2010). *Legislative council panel on education: Report of the study on small class teaching* (LC Paper No. CB[2]1484/09-10[06]). Hong Kong: Author. Retrieved from http://legco.gov.hk/yr09-10/english/panels/ed/papers/ed0513cb2-1484-6-e.pdf

17 Education Bureau, the Government of Hong Kong Special Administration Region. (2011). *Press releases and publications: Figures and statistics.* Retrieved from http://www.edb.gov.hk/index.aspx?nodeID=92&langno=1

18 Education Bureau, the Government of Hong Kong Special Administration Region. (2011). *Senior secondary education and higher education: New academic structure web bulletin.* Retrieved from http://334.edb.hkedcity.net/EN/intro.php

19 Education Bureau, the Government of Hong Kong Special Administration Region. (2011). *Post-secondary education: Institutions.* Retrieved

from http://www.edb.gov.hk/index.aspx?nodeID=7001&langno=1

20 Education Bureau, the Government of Hong Kong Special Administration Region. (2011). *Kindergarten, primary and secondary school: Information for schools.* Retrieved from http://www.edb.gov.hk/index.aspx?nodeID=1475&langno=1

21 Information Services Department, the Government of Hong Kong Special Administration Region. (2010). *Hong Kong yearbook 2010–Education.* Hong Kong: Author. Retrieved from http://www.yearbook.gov.hk/2010/en/pdf/E07.pdf

22 International Baccalaureate. (n.d.). *Diploma programme curriculum.* Retrieved from http://ibo.org/diploma/curriculum/

23 Curriculum Development Institute. (2002). *Reading to learn: The promotion of a reading culture at school.* Hong Kong: HKSAR Government.

24 Education Bureau, the Government of Hong Kong Special Administration Region. (2011). *Reading to learn: School development and training programmes.* Retrieved from http://www.edb.gov.hk/index.aspx?nodeID=3710&langno=1

25 Education Bureau, the Government of Hong Kong Special Administration Region. (2011). *Resource banks: Reading across the curriculum.* Retrieved from http://www.edb.gov.hk/index.aspx?nodeID=6546&langno=1

26 Education Bureau, the Government of Hong Kong Special Administration Region. (2011). *Chinese language education: Extensive reading.* Retrieved from http://www.edb.gov.hk/index.aspx?nodeID=2989&langno=2

27 Curriculum Development Council. (2008). *Suggested key learning area for primary Chinese language.* Retrieved from http://www.edb.gov.hk/

FileManager/TC/Content_2810/pri_chi_ lang_lo_web_version.pdf

28 Education Bureau. (2004). *Chinese language curriculum guideline (primary 1–6).* Retrieved from http://www.edb.gov. hk/index.aspx?nodeID=4278&langno=2

29 Curriculum Development Council. (2008). *Suggested key learning area for primary Chinese language.* Retrieved from http://www.edb.gov.hk/ FileManager/TC/Content_2810/pri_chi_ lang_lo_web_version.pdf

30 Education Bureau, the Government of Hong Kong Special Administration Region. (2004). *Chinese language curriculum guideline (primary 1–6).* Retrieved from http://www.edb.gov.hk/ index.aspx?nodeID=4278&langno=2

31 Ibid.

32 Hong Kong Education City. (2011). *HK reading city.* Retrieved from http://www. hkreadingcity.net/

33 Education Bureau, the Government of Hong Kong Special Administration Region. (2008). *Supplementary guide to the Chinese language curriculum for non-Chinese speaking students.* Hong Kong: Curriculum Development Council. Retrieved from http://www.edb.gov.hk/ FileManager/TC/Content_2810/sg%20 to%20chi%20lang%20curr%20ncs%20 proper%20eng%20upload.pdf

34 Education Bureau, Department of Health, Hospital Authority, the Government of Hong Kong Special Administration Region. (2009). *Government assessment services for school-aged children suspected to have developmental disorders.* Hong Kong: Government Logistics Department. Retrieved from http://www.edb.gov.hk/ FileManager/EN/Content_2555/dev%20 disorder%20leaflet-eng.pdf

35 Hong Kong Specific Learning Difficulties Research Team. (2011). *Publications: Assessment tools.* Retrieved from http:// web.hku.hk/~hksld/index.html

36 Education Department. (2002). *Understanding and help students with special educational needs: A guide to teaching.* Hong Kong: Author. Retrieved from http://www.edb.gov.hk/ UtilityManager/Publication/upload/ sen_guide_e.pdf

37 Ibid.

38 Education Bureau, the Government of Hong Kong Special Administration Region. (2009). *Continuing professional development of teachers.* Retrieved from http://www.edb.gov.hk/index. aspx?nodeID=1308&langno=1

39 Education Bureau, the Government of Hong Kong Special Administration Region. (2011). *Training calendar.* Retrieved from https://tcs.edb.gov.hk/ tcs/publicCalendar/start.htm

40 Tse, S.K. & Loh, E.K.Y. (in press). The impact of PIRLS in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of China. In K. Schwippert & J. Lenkeit (Eds.), *Progress in reading literacy. The impact of PIRLS 2006 in 12 countries. Studies in international comparative and multicultural education.* Munster: Waxmann.

41 Ibid.

Hungary

Péter Balkányi
László Ostorics
Educational Authority,
Department of Educational Assessment and Evaluation

Language and Literacy

In Hungary, Hungarian is the official language as well as the language of instruction. However, some minorities, such as Croatians, Germans, Romanians, Serbs, Slovaks, and Slovenes, have their own educational institutions within the system. In 2010, 4.6 percent of students attended minority-operated mother tongue, bilingual, or language-teaching schools and kindergartens.

Since 1999, additional minority education classes have been organized when requested by at least eight parents of the same minority group in a community with a non-Hungarian mother tongue. If the number of children is insufficient, parents may request that the local government organize mother tongue and culture classes in connection with school education. These classes are operated as a department of the school or as a separate language school; alternatively, traveling teachers may be hired. Since 2004, classes have been offered in Bulgarian, Greek, Polish, Armenian, Ruthenian, and Ukrainian. The largest minority in Hungary is the Roma community; their institutions of cultural education cater to 3.8 percent of children.[1]

A major literacy initiative in Hungary is *Book Week*, organized by the National Committee of the Hungarian Publishers and Circulators. Held annually in the first week of June, the primary goal of *Book Week* is to promote contemporary literature. Since its inception in 1927, this initiative has turned into a series of events nationwide.

Because people now spend less time reading than in the past, and in response to disappointing results from the 2000 cycle of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), new literacy initiatives have been developed. These include a series of events promoting 2001–02 as the Year of Reading, as well as the annual Days of Children's Literature event, which encourages reading.[2]

In 2005, a survey about books, The Big Read, began in Hungary. This survey aims to identify the nation's best-loved novel of all time and to popularize

reading, using TV programs in which celebrities and students discuss their favorite books.

Overview of the Education System

Hungary is an independent, democratic nation in the Carpathian Basin in Central Eastern Europe. The country has 9,967,000 inhabitants, with a population density of 107 persons per square kilometer, though the population is decreasing at a rate of 0.25 percent per year. According to OECD analyses, Hungary's educational expenditure of 4.9 percent of GDP in 2007 was below the average OECD expenditure (5.7% of GDP). However, the estimated average expenditure per student from the first grade of primary to the end of secondary schooling was US$52,433, just 55 percent of the OECD average.
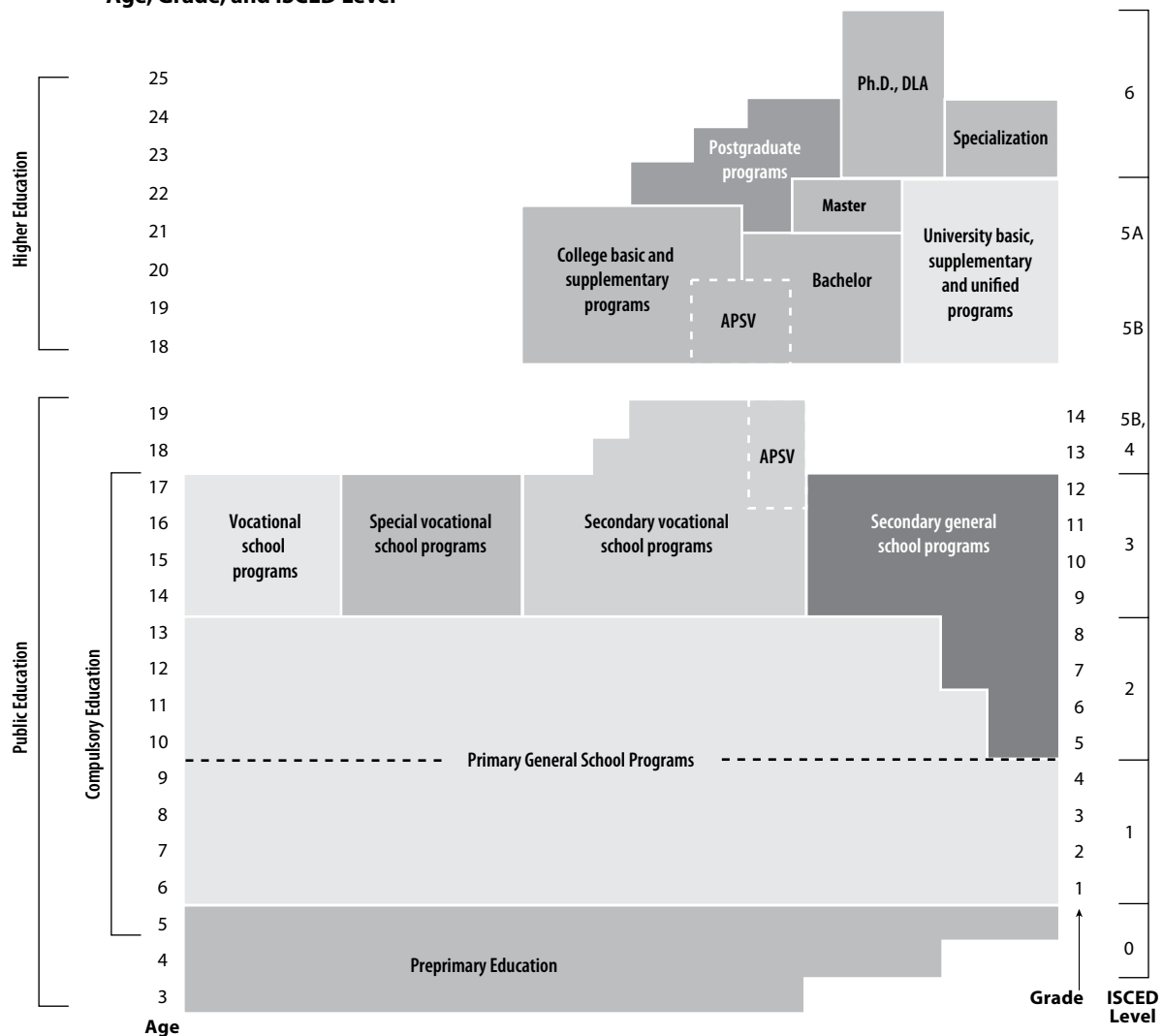
The Public Education Act LXXXIX of 1993 specifies who can open and operate institutes of public education.[3] Included are the following: state, regional, and national minority self-governments; registered religious legal entities; nationally founded economic organizations; foundations; fellowships; and native-born individuals.

The largest organizer of schools in Hungary is the government itself, and most federally-operated schools and student residence facilities are maintained by local governments. Some special vocational training institutions (e.g., police, military) are operated by ministries or nationally budgeted organizations. Religious institutions maintain another substantial proportion of schools. Foundation schools, or private non-denominational schools, comprise the smallest group.

The Hungarian government finances the public education system and the institutions related to it. The Ministry of Education distributes the primary source of this funding through a monthly subsidy to those responsible for school management. Each school's subsidy is based on the number of children attending the school, and the organization responsible for administering the school pays the remaining operational costs. Religious institutions may obtain additional government financing if they perform duties in the public education system.[4]

From 1998 to 2011, education in Hungary was compulsory for children up to age 18. As of the 2012–13 school year, education will be compulsory to age 16, according to the new Public Education Act. Education consists of three levels: preprimary, primary, and secondary. Exhibit 1 presents the typical age and length of full-time education programs in Hungary. Preprimary, primary and secondary school programs (both general and vocational) also include programs for pupils with special educational needs.

APSV = Accredited post-secondary vocational school.

Practically all children ages 5–14 attend preprimary or primary general schools programs, with an enrollment rate of 98.9 percent in 2009.[5] Although children are generally enrolled in preprimary education at age three, enrollment is mandatory at age five. Preprimary education includes character development, preparation for integration into the community, differentiated development for socially disadvantaged children, guidelines for a healthy lifestyle, emotional education, and overall development of skills and competencies. Instructors are required to have a bachelor's degree. The educational program for Kindergarten is published by the Ministry of Education and contains preprimary educational goals and tasks, as well as pedagogical methods.

Primary education is mandatory for eight years and is free. The Public Education Act divides these eight grades into four two-year phases: introductory (Grades 1–2), beginner (Grades 3–4), basic (Grades 5–6), and developmental (Grades 7–8). Although primary school does not have a leaving examination, secondary general schools and secondary vocational schools have the choice to require written entrance exams in mathematics and language arts. Schools without entrance exams must administer the test booklets developed and published by the ministry.

Secondary education features three types of schools: general, vocational, and secondary vocational schools. General schools have a program lasting four years. These schools teach basic subjects with a concentration on those included in the final leaving exam and pursued in tertiary studies, while simultaneously preparing students to enter the workforce. The two-level (intermediate and advanced) final exam determines eligibility for entrance to tertiary studies. About two-thirds of these schools include Grades 9–12, but the number of schools that enroll students for six or eight years is increasing. Students can enter these schools after the fourth or sixth grade of primary school.

Vocational schools also have a four-year program. These schools devote up to 40 percent of instruction at Grades 9 and 10 to career-oriented and vocational training, in addition to the basic subjects. Later grades prepare students for vocational examinations listed in the National Vocational Qualification List; however, students leaving this school type do not take a final leaving examination (*matura*) and cannot advance to tertiary education without additional study. Special vocational programs also are available for students with special educational needs at ISCED levels 2 and 3. These vocational programs do not require a final leaving exam.

Secondary vocational schools have programs ranging from five to seven years. These schools feature characteristics of both general and vocational schools. Students spend the first four years studying basic subjects and gaining the knowledge necessary for later training. At the end of the fourth year, students take the final leaving examination; upon passing the exam, students can go to college or university, or spend the next one to three years preparing for a technical exam in their chosen profession.

Some general and vocational secondary schools offer a preparatory first year in which students focus on foreign language learning, supplemented with some mother tongue and mathematics lessons, before starting the actual four-year program. In 2010, 25 percent of students studied in vocational schools and 75 percent studied in general schools or secondary vocational schools.

Tertiary education consists of colleges, university, and unified programs. Bachelor and master's programs follow the Bologna Process.[6] Postgraduate specialization programs at the ISCED 5A level require graduation from college or university with special attainments. These programs do not bestow a higher attainment level, but give a special qualification.

In the summer of 2010, the newly elected government started a large-scale conceptualization and codification process to write a completely new educational law to replace the Public Education Act LXXXIX of 1993. This new act will likely initiate significant changes in the educational system.

Language/Reading Curriculum in the Fourth Grade

Reading Policy

Reading instruction is regulated by the National Core Curriculum, which outlines goals and tasks, and the Curriculum Framework, which contains the actual educational components or activities. According to these documents, the primary goal of reading instruction in the introductory and beginning phases of education (Grades 1–4) is to make reading a basic skill that enables students to comprehend the text and instructions in schoolbooks while reading silently. At this stage, students should learn to retrieve information and use it in new tasks. In addition, students learn to read aloud expressively and form a basis for analytical, critical, and creative reading.

Summary of National Curriculum

In the curriculum, the introductory phase (Grades 1–2) serves developmental purposes, and there are no set goals for the end of the first year. However, at the end of this phase, students are expected to be able to read a known text aloud without breaks. Goals for the beginner phase (Grades 3–4) are more discrete. By the end of third grade, students are expected to be able to read and understand a half page of literary or expository text. By the end of fourth grade, students are expected to be able to read a known text out loud after some preparation and to read age-appropriate texts silently, understand their meaning, and communicate their central ideas.

Preparing students to read and write are the first tasks in the introductory phase (Grades 1–2). During this phase, students practice speech recognition and comprehension by identifying and naming sounds and noises, role-playing, and imitating movements. They must become familiar with the usage of the following terms: sentence, word, sound, and letter. Students also must be able to detect the sequence of sounds within a word and develop hand-eye

coordination. Lastly, students must be able to break words into syllables and sounds, as well as perform synthesizing exercises to form syllables, words, and sentences before breaking up these elements again.[7]

To prepare for reading and writing, students clap, draw rhythmic lines, and develop gross and fine motor skills. In the final preparatory stage, students learn to use words, reproduce stories, navigate a textbook, recognize similarities and differences among shapes, and accustom themselves to correct physical positioning for reading and writing.

In first grade, 80 hours are allocated for teaching the system of signs for reading. During this period, students learn the alphabet as well as the following grammatical terms: vowel, consonant, sentence, word, and long and short sounds. Students observe the usage of capital letters and punctuation. Other lessons include articulating vowels correctly, learning small and capital printed letters, combining letters, reading words, learning syntax, and saying sentences aloud and explaining their meaning. Students also practice reading aloud and use exercises and texts to learn the basics for silent reading. The goal of this phase is to prevent and correct any serious mistakes in reading technique.

There are no set skills that a student must possess before entering the second grade. However, the curriculum assumes that second grade students have acquired the reading skills taught in the first grade. In second grade, proper pronunciation, tone, and rhythm are considered the most basic reading skills to develop. The goals are for students to achieve an oral reading speed that matches the natural speed of their spoken speech and to practice silent reading through exercises and increasingly independent work. The second grade also emphasizes literary reading and comprehension development, and students must prepare short oral presentations about what they have read. They must be able to name the topic and plot elements, identify characters, evaluate and summarize the story line, and recognize word usage in the text.

The third grade initiates the beginner phase, which carries through the fourth grade. Skills developed in the third grade specifically include reading comprehension and the evaluation of characters' actions and traits. Students start to familiarize themselves with the basics of creating outlines and highlighting central ideas. To advance to the next grade, students also must be able to differentiate between poetry and prose, respond to basic questions, and perform composition tasks pertaining to texts.

The second half of the beginner phase, fourth grade, focuses primarily on developing tools for general comprehension. New elements include the

following: structure, space, and time; highlighting connections; and condensing and expanding sections. By the end of fourth grade, students are expected to be able to write about their own view of a story and their reading experiences.[8]

Reading Instruction in the Primary Grades

According to the National Core Curriculum, students in Grades 1–4 should spend 32–42 percent of instructional time learning literature and grammar, which are both taught in Hungarian classes. Schools decide on the number of Hungarian classes students must take each week—ranging from seven to ten—according to their own local curriculum, which is based on one of the ministry-approved curriculum frameworks.

Instructional Materials

The Ministry of Education creates a list of approved publications from which teachers can select their textbooks and teaching aids. To help students learn the system of signs for reading, teachers are required to use flash cards, play dough (to develop fine motor skills), colorful letter cards, reading puzzles, and projected reading sheets.[9] During Grades 2–4, teachers also are required to use recordings that instruct students in the following: how to practice breaks, rhythm, emphasis, and tone; how to use phonetics; and how to break up compound sentences.

The textbook series used in the first four grades consist mainly of alphabet books, practice books, workbooks, and storybooks (in the higher grades). The Ministry of Education does not recommend one particular reading method over another, although the four most commonly used textbook series all use the sounding-analyzing method and, in early instruction, focus on teaching the system of signs used for reading. Some publishers provide differentiated workbooks for students who progress faster or slower in their reading, while other publishers place great importance on developing a subset of skills or on remediating dyslexia.[10]

Use of Technology

Although the numbers of students using personal computers and teachers using the Internet for teaching purposes have been increasing, information technology only appears as a supplemental tool in the process of reading instruction.

Role of Reading Specialists

Classroom teachers are responsible for all pedagogical tasks related to reading instruction, and reading specialists are usually not available. However, in

the majority of schools, teachers have some special assistance available (e.g., speech therapist, school psychologist, special education teacher). Students with special educational needs, whose work follows a specific curriculum, have 20 Hungarian classes each week in the first term and only nine in the second term. Specific reading instruction, practice, and reading-skill development constitute 40–64 percent of special education instructional time.

Second-language Instruction

In addition to Hungarian classes, the National Core Curriculum allots 2–6 percent of total class time to the teaching of a modern foreign language, the most popular being English, followed by German and French.

Students with Reading Difficulties

In Hungary, the pedagogical expert service system supports parents and teachers of students with learning disabilities. The most notable support services are training and counseling centers and speech therapy centers run by local governments. Training and counseling centers diagnose and treat the educational and psychological impediments to student learning. These centers also offer advice and family counseling and conduct school readiness exams for children who are about to start schooling but have not attended kindergarten.

Diagnostic Testing

Hungary has no national diagnostic assessment of reading or learning disabilities. However, parents must report if any family members have learning disabilities. In addition, pediatricians are required to examine children at the age of five to assess school readiness and can recommend further testing or developmental training. Preprimary and primary school teachers also have evaluation tools to assess subsets of abilities (e.g., speech, hearing, fine motor skills). Although not mandatory, these assessments are becoming more widespread.[11]

Instruction for Children with Reading Difficulties

If parents suspect that their child suffers from dyslexia or dysgraphia, they may ask for an expert evaluation. Schools or child-protection agencies also can request this testing after notifying parents. Once a student has been diagnosed with dyslexia, a small percentage of parents choose to have their child attend classes offered by training and counseling or speech therapy centers. Students also may attend a public school offering either an integrated program or a

special education needs-based curriculum that prioritizes instruction for students with speech impairments or dyslexia. The ministerial act concerning students with special education needs (SEN) recommends schools that offer integrated instruction, suggesting special education schools or classes only for intensive remediation.

In the 2009–10 academic year, 52,572 SEN students studied in the Hungarian primary schools, and 31,762 of them were integrated into non-SEN classes. To improve the chances that students with dyslexia will enter tertiary education, Hungarian education policy allows for exemptions from the written part of the final secondary school exam if an expert has confirmed a student's difficulties within the previous two years.[12]

Teachers and Teacher Education

In primary schools, one teacher is responsible for teaching all subjects to a single cohort of students (known as a class) from first through fourth grade, although many schools have specialist teachers for mathematics, science, and other subjects. By fifth grade, students must have specialist teachers for mathematics and science and often have them for other subjects (e.g., Hungarian literature and grammar). The overwhelming majority (87%) of primary school teachers are female. Teachers working at state-funded institutions are public servants whose salaries are regulated by civil service pay grades.

Following the adoption of the Bologna Process in 2006, lower primary teachers are now required to have a bachelor's degree, which can be earned in eight semesters (240 credits) at teacher training colleges that are independent institutions or parts of universities. During current teacher education in Hungary, students take courses in the following five basic domains:

♦ Basic knowledge—Social sciences, pedagogy, psychology, and information technology;

♦ Professional subject modules—Hungarian grammar and literature, mathematics, science, music, visual arts and crafts, life skills, physical education, and the methodology for each;

♦ Differentiated professional knowledge—Foreign language; special needs education; child safety; domain-specific knowledge; family, child, and youth protection; and public communication;

♦ Compulsory specialization module—Hungarian grammar and literature, mathematics, science, music, visual arts, crafts and life skills, physical

education, foreign language, people and society, nature and science, or information technology skills; and

♦ Practical teaching—Internship, microteaching, and 8–10 weeks of professional practice outside the institution.

Teacher education ends with an in-classroom teaching examination and a state examination. Teachers who have earned a bachelor's degree can teach all subjects in Grades 1–4 but teach only the subject of their specialization in Grades 5–6.

Requirements for Ongoing Professional Development in Reading for Teachers
Schools must create a professional development plan for every five-year period, and teachers can apply for courses listed in these plans. Teachers are required to participate in at least 120 hours of professional development every seven years. Teachers who participate in professional development receive a salary increase, while those who do not participate risk losing their jobs.

School principals have the choice to reduce teachers' workload if teachers are currently involved in in-service training programs. Furthermore, the employer may cover the total cost of professional development. Generally, schools cover 80 percent of professional development costs; coverage of the additional costs (e.g., travel, accommodations) can vary.

Subject exam preparatory courses are the most common form of professional development. These classes usually cover education management, pedagogy, and professional services. However, assessment and evaluation courses are becoming increasingly popular. After completing a subject exam preparatory course, teachers advance a step on the pay scale, can request inclusion in the national listing of experts, and can undertake specialized public education tasks.[13]

Monitoring Student Progress in Reading

Since the 2001–02 academic year, Hungary has administered its National Assessment of Basic Competencies (NABC) nine times to examine student performance in mathematics and reading. Since 2004, all students in Grades 6, 8, and 10 have taken part in the testing. The assessment measures students' ability to use their skills and knowledge to solve problems modelling everyday situations, and does not focus on textbook knowledge. The NABC provides benchmarks for student performance in seven levels of competency. School level results are published on a public website nine months after

the assessment, while schools and the organizations responsible for them receive additional data-analysis software that enables them to study student performance in more detail. Since 2008, the implementation of assessment IDs has made it possible to track individual student development from Grade 6 through Grade 10.[14]

Parallel to NABC, testing fourth-grade students' basic reading, math, problem-solving, and writing skills began during the 2005–06 academic year. The Public Education Act guarantees the annual administration of these tests and requires schools to monitor their performance as part of their quality-control programs.

To reduce disadvantages caused when children develop at different rates, the mandatory testing of first-grade students' basic competencies began during the 2006–07 academic year. The Ministry of Education provides all educational institutions with a free evaluation kit, called the *Diagnostic Development System*. This evaluation kit measures student social development and skills, elementary arithmetic, fine motor coordination for writing, and comprehension of and vocabulary for relationships. At the beginning of the 2009–10 academic year, 31.4 percent of first grade students were evaluated with this assessment.

In addition to assessments, student performance and progress are regularly evaluated through grades. Teachers use interim grades as the basis for mid-term and end-of-term grades. The class teacher notes a grade for student conduct and diligence after consulting with other teachers who also work with that student. In upper primary and secondary schools, grades range from excellent (5) to insufficient (1). In evaluations of conduct and diligence, grades range from exemplary (5) to poor (2).

Schools inform parents about student performance on a regular basis. Students keep their grades and school notices in a notebook that their parents and class teachers sign every month. Additionally, the school sends notices to parents at mid-term and the end of the school year. In Grades 1–3 and midterm in Grade 4, teachers present a written evaluation of student progress, describing it as excellent, good, or adequate and noting if the student requires tutoring. Teachers also must give a detailed evaluation of student performance in the basic domains, speech, oral expressiveness, and attitude. If a student needs tutoring, schools evaluate student performance with the parents, note the factors impeding progress, and suggest further measures.

Grade-retention policy has been subject to change in recent years. Schools do not usually recommend that students in the lower primary grades repeat

a year, although parents may make that request. In 2007, it was argued that parents should have a greater say on this issue, and the Public Education Act was amended so that grade retention in Grades 1–4 required parental consent. However, this amendment was revoked in 2010 based on the argument that grade retention should be a purely professional decision made by teachers.

Impact and Use of PIRLS

Hungary has participated in every cycle of PIRLS and was a top performer in PIRLS 2001 and PIRLS 2006.[15] Despite this success, PIRLS is not widely known in Hungary, and media attention is usually limited to educational press. This media reaction might be due to Hungary's unsatisfactory results in PISA 2000, the first major large-scale study that Hungary participated in. These results somewhat shocked the public. As a possible consequence, PIRLS has been discussed less often, and the majority of articles and publications on PIRLS results have limited themselves to praising the performance of Hungarian 10-year-olds.[16]

The Educational Authority's Department of Educational Assessment and Evaluation published a national report both in Hungarian and English, as well as a study in one of the prominent educational reviews, *Hungarian Educational Review* (*Magyar Pedagógiai Szemle*), on Hungarian PIRLS results and the possible explanations of differences with other large-scale study results, namely PISA.

The main concern of both the general public and educators is the performance gap between the Hungarian PIRLS and PISA populations. The results of these studies show that the reading literacy abilities of Hungarian students do not develop as they generally seem to do in several other countries that participate in PIRLS and PISA. This performance gap leads to the following questions: What strategies work in lower grades but stop working later? What measures should be taken to improve reading literacy development?[17]

Partly as a result of the impact of large-scale international studies, Hungary has implemented an assessment system and experimented with competency-based educational programs. It became commonly understood that the development of reading literacy is vital to further education and success in the labor market. Personal growth and the understanding of teaching and learning have undergone a paradigm shift so that, instead of encyclopedic knowledge, a growing set of personal abilities and competencies is regarded as the aim of education.

During the 2008–09 academic year, some legal changes were implemented to promote the development of key competencies. In Grades 5 and 6, the Public Education Act mandated that 20 percent of class time be dedicated to key competency development, but this practice lasted only two years. Since the passage of the 2010 amendments to the act, there are no legal obligations to devote any proportion of class time to key competency development, although the law does permit 50 percent of class time to be used for this purpose.[18]

Suggested Readings

Adamikné Jászó, A. (2001). *A magyar olvasástanítás története* [The history of the Hungarian pedagogy of reading]. Budapest: Osiris.

Hungary Office of Education. (n.d.). *National competence measurement.* Retrieved from http://www.oh.gov.hu/kompetenciameres-6-8-10/orszagos-kompetenciameres

References

1   Balázs, E., Kocsis, M., & Vágó, I. (2011). *Jelentés a magyar közoktatásról 2010* [Report on the Hungarian public education]. Budapest: Oktatáskutató és Fejlesztő Intézet.

2   Csoma, G. & Lada, L. (March, 2003). Az olvasás éve és a funkcionális analfabetizmus [The year of reading and the functional illiteracy]. *Új Pedagógiai Szemle.* Retrieved from: http://www.ofi.hu/tudastar/olvasas-eve

3   1993 évi LXXIX. törvény A közoktatásról [Public Education Act LXXXIX of 1993] (1993). Retrieved from http://net.jogtar.hu/jr/gen/hjegy_doc.cgi?docid=99300079.TV

4   Ministry of Education and Culture. (2003). *Nemzeti alaptanterv* [National curriculum]. Budapest: Oktatási Minisztérium. Retrieved from http://net.jogtar.hu/jr/gen/hjegy_doc.cgi?docid=a0300243.kor

5   Hungarian Central Statistical Office. (n.d.). Retrieved from http://www.ksh.hu

6   Ministry of National Resources. (2010). *Közoktatás-statisztikai kézikönyv* 2009/2010 [Statistical yearbook of education 2009/2010]. Retrieved from http://www.nefmi.gov.hu/letolt/statisztika/okt_evkonyv_2009_2010_100907.pdf

7   OKM rendelet a 2009/2010. tanév rendjéről [Ministry of Education Regulation 2009/2010–Order of the School Year] (2009). Retrieved from http://www.nefmi.gov.hu/kozoktatas/2009/okm-2009-2010-tanev

8   OM rendelet a kerettantervek kiadásának és jóváhagyásának rendjéről, valamint egyes oktatási jogszabályok módosításáról [Regulation of the Ministry of Education curriculum Framework for Issuing and Approving the Order, and Certain Amendments to the Law of Education] (2004). *Hungarian Official Gazette.* Retrieved from http://www.okm.gov.hu/letolt/kozokt/kerettanterv/MK68_2.pdf

9   Ministry of National Resources. (n.d.). *A magyar nyelv és irodalom tantárgy taneszközeire vonatkozó szakmai ajánlás* [Professional recommendations for Hungarian language and literature course]. Retrieved from https://www.okm.gov.hu/letolt/kozokt/szakeszk/magyalalpal.doc

10 Balogh, K. & Honti, M. (2004). *Az általános iskolai olvasástanításban*

leggyakrabban használt négy tankönyvcsalád feldolgozása és elemzése fejlődéslélektani szempontból. Retrieved from http://www.okm.gov.hu/letolt/kozokt/tankonyvkutatasok/cd2_balogh_honti/vegleges.pdf

11 Balázs, E., Kocsis, M., & Vágó, I. (2011). *Jelentés a magyar közoktatásról 2010* [Report on the Hungarian public education 2010]. Budapest: Oktatáskutató és Fejlesztő Intézet.

12 OM rendelet a Sajátos nevelési igényű gyermekek óvodai nevelésének irányelve és a Sajátos nevelési igényű tanulók iskolai oktatásának irányelve kiadásáról [Regulation of Preschool Education of Children with Special Educational Needs and Guidelines for Students with Special Educational Needs, School Education Guidelines Issued] (2005). Retrieved from http://net.jogtar.hu/jr/gen/getdoc.cgi?docid=a0500002.om

13 Kormányrendelet a pedagógus-továbbképzésről, a pedagógus-szakvizsgáról, valamint a továbbképzésben részt vevők juttatásairól és kedvezményeiről [Decree of In-service Teacher Training, Teacher-examination, and the Training of Participants and Beneficiaries] (1996). Retrieved from http://net.jogtar.hu/jr/gen/getdoc.cgi?docid=99700277.kor

14 Balázsi, I., Felvégi, E., Rábainé Szabó, A., & Szepesi, I. (2006). *Országos kompetenciamérés 2006–Tartalmi keret* [National assessment of basic competencies, 2006–Framework]. Budapest: suliNova Kht.

15 Balázsi, I., Balkányi, P., Felvégi, E., & Szabó, V. (2007). *PIRLS 2006, Összefoglaló jelentés a 10 éves tanulók szövegértési képességeiről* [National report about reading performance of 10-year-old students]. Oktatási: Hivatal.

16 Balázsi, I. & Balkányi, P. (2008). PIRLS 2006: A negyedik osztályosok szövegértése [PIRLS 2006: Reading comprehension of fourth graders]. *Pedagógiai Szemle, 1*, 3–11.

17 Balázsi, I., & Balkányi, P. (2008). A PIRLS- és a PISA-vizsgálat eredményeinek összehasonlítása [Comparing the results of PIRLS and PISA]. *Pedagógiai Szemle, 4*, 3–11.

18 Balkányi, P. (2009). *PIRLS- Nemzetközi tanulói szövegértési képességmérés* [PIRLS–An international reading study]. Budapest: OFI.

Indonesia

Ministry of Education and Culture

Language and Literacy

Bahasa Indonesia is the official language of Indonesia, although English also is widely understood among the educated population. Bahasa Indonesia also is the primary language of instruction in schools, though primary teachers in some districts, especially those in remote areas, provide instruction in Bahasa Indonesia and the students' mother-tongue language. There are over 700 regional languages used in Indonesia, such as Minangkabau, Acehenese, and Javanese.[1] In some international schools (e.g., for children of diplomats) and Islamic schools, English and Arabic are common languages.
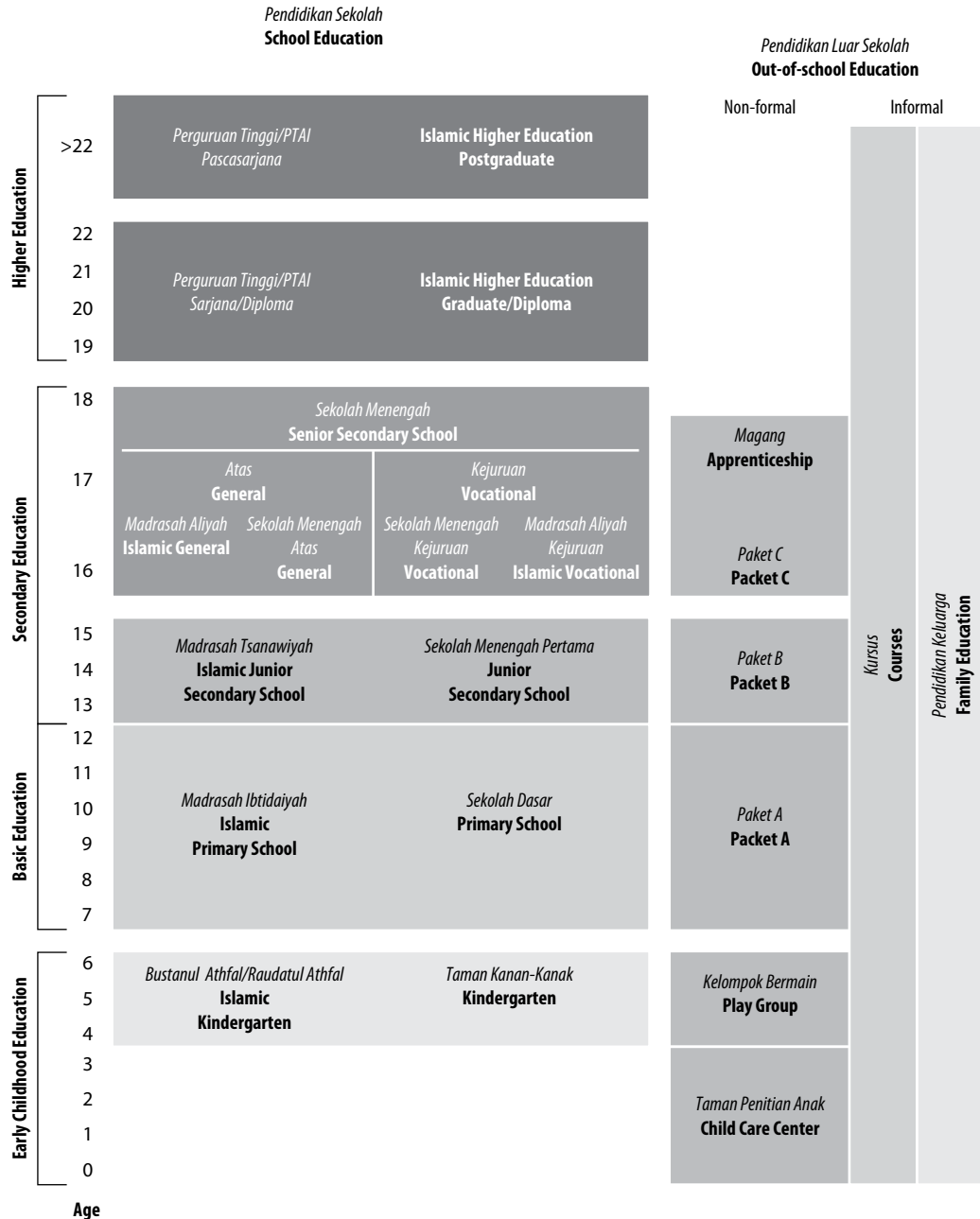
Overview of the Education System

National education in Indonesia is based on Pancasila—the philosophical foundation of the Indonesian state set forth in the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia and enacted June 2003 with respect to national education in Law Number 20.[2] The goal of national education is to develop the nation's capability, character, and civilization by enhancing its intellectual capacity and developing students' human values: being faithful and pious to one and only one God; possessing a moral and noble character; being healthy, knowledgeable, competent, creative, and independent; and acting as democratic and responsible citizens.

The Indonesian education system has traditionally been highly centralized. Since 1999, however, the Ministry of Education has begun implementing a decentralized system throughout the country's 33 provinces. This system is gradually shifting management and curriculum decisions to the school level.

In Indonesia, the educational structure consists of three streams—formal, non-formal, and informal education—and Exhibit 1 presents the relationship between these streams.[3]

Exhibit 1: **Formal, Non-formal, and Informal Education Streams, According to Law No. 20, 2003[4]**

		Pendidikan Sekolah **School Education**	Pendidikan Luar Sekolah **Out-of-school Education**	
			Non-formal	Informal

Higher Education	>22	*Perguruan Tinggi/PTAI* *Pascasarjana* — **Islamic Higher Education** **Postgraduate**		
	22 21 20 19	*Perguruan Tinggi/PTAI* *Sarjana/Diploma* — **Islamic Higher Education** **Graduate/Diploma**		
Secondary Education	18 17 16	*Sekolah Menengah* **Senior Secondary School**	*Magang* **Apprenticeship**	
		Atas **General**	*Kejuruan* **Vocational**	*Paket C* **Packet C**
		Madrasah Aliyah **Islamic General**	*Sekolah Menengah Atas* **General**	*Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan* **Vocational**	*Madrasah Aliyah Kejuruan* **Islamic Vocational**
	15 14 13	*Madrasah Tsanawiyah* **Islamic Junior Secondary School**	*Sekolah Menengah Pertama* **Junior Secondary School**	*Paket B* **Packet B**
Basic Education	12 11 10 9 8 7	*Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* **Islamic Primary School**	*Sekolah Dasar* **Primary School**	*Paket A* **Packet A**
Early Childhood Education	6 5 4	*Bustanul Athfal/Raudatul Athfal* **Islamic Kindergarten**	*Taman Kanan-Kanak* **Kindergarten**	*Kelompok Bermain* **Play Group**
	3 2 1 0			*Taman Penitian Anak* **Child Care Center**

Age

Kursus **Courses**

Pendidikan Keluarga **Family Education**

The formal education stream includes three levels—basic, secondary, and higher education—as well as various types—general, vocational, professional, vocational-technical, religious, and special education. Each type of education complements and enriches the others. Education is provided in face-to-face classroom settings and through distance learning. All streams, levels, and types

of education are educational units organized by the national government, local government, and the community.

Early childhood education is provided prior to basic education in all streams (formal, non-formal, and informal education). In the formal education stream, early childhood education is available through general or Islamic kindergartens (*Taman Kanak-Kanak*, or *Bustanul Athfal/Raudatul Athfal*, respectively). In non-formal education, early childhood education takes place in play groups (*Kelompok Bermain*), child care centers (*Taman Penitipan Anak*), or other similar settings. In informal education, early childhood education takes the form of family education or education in the community.

According to a law passed in 2003, preprimary education is for children from birth through age six and is intended to prepare them for primary school. Ultimately, the goal of preprimary education is to increase the quality of life as an Indonesian. Philosophically, preprimary education uses the concepts of learning by playing, doing, and stimulating; such environmental stimulation is necessary to develop children's intellectual and individual potential. Specifically, the curriculum content intends to develop children's potential for art, beauty, and harmony with the aim of helping children enjoy their individual culture.

Basic education is student-centered and mandatory beginning at age seven. The goal of this level is to achieve optimal growth for children, recognizing that each child has different talents, culture, religion, environment, and background. Basic education is the foundation for secondary education and takes place in two stages: primary, Grades 1–6 (ages 7–12); and junior secondary, Grades 7–9 (ages 13–15). Primary education is provided at general or Islamic primary schools (*Sekolah Dasar* or *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah*, respectively), or other schools of the same level. Junior secondary education is provided at general or Islamic junior secondary schools (*Sekolah Menengah Pertama* or *Madrasah Tsanawiyah*, respectively), or other schools of this level.

Secondary education (Grades 10–12, ages 16–18) is the continuation of basic education and comprises general secondary and vocational secondary education. This level of education is provided at general and Islamic senior secondary schools (*Sekolah Menengah Atas* or *Madrasah Aliyah*, respectively) in addition to vocational senior secondary schools (*Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan*), and Islamic vocational senior secondary schools (*Madrasah Aliyah Kejuruan*), or other schools of this level.

Higher education is the level of education following secondary education. Students in higher education obtain a bachelor's (*sarjana*), master's, or

specialized postgraduate and doctorate degrees. A higher education institution can be an academy, polytechnic, school of higher learning or specialization (*sekolah tinggi*), institute, or university. Higher education institutions provide education, research, and community services and offer academic, professional, and vocational and technical programs.

The structure of Indonesia's formal education system, from preprimary through higher education, is presented in Exhibit 2.

Non-formal education is provided for community members as a replacement, complement, or supplement to formal education to support lifelong learning.[6] Non-formal education aims to develop student potential with an emphasis on acquiring knowledge and functional skills, as well as personal and professional attitudes. This type of education includes the following: life skills; early childhood, youth, and women's empowerment and literacy education; vocational training and internships; equivalency programs; and other kinds of education aimed at developing student abilities.

Families and communities provide informal education in place of formal education. Upon completion of informal education, students have the opportunity to take an assessment measuring their achievement according to the national education standards. If students are successful, their informal education is recognized as equivalent to formal and non-formal education.
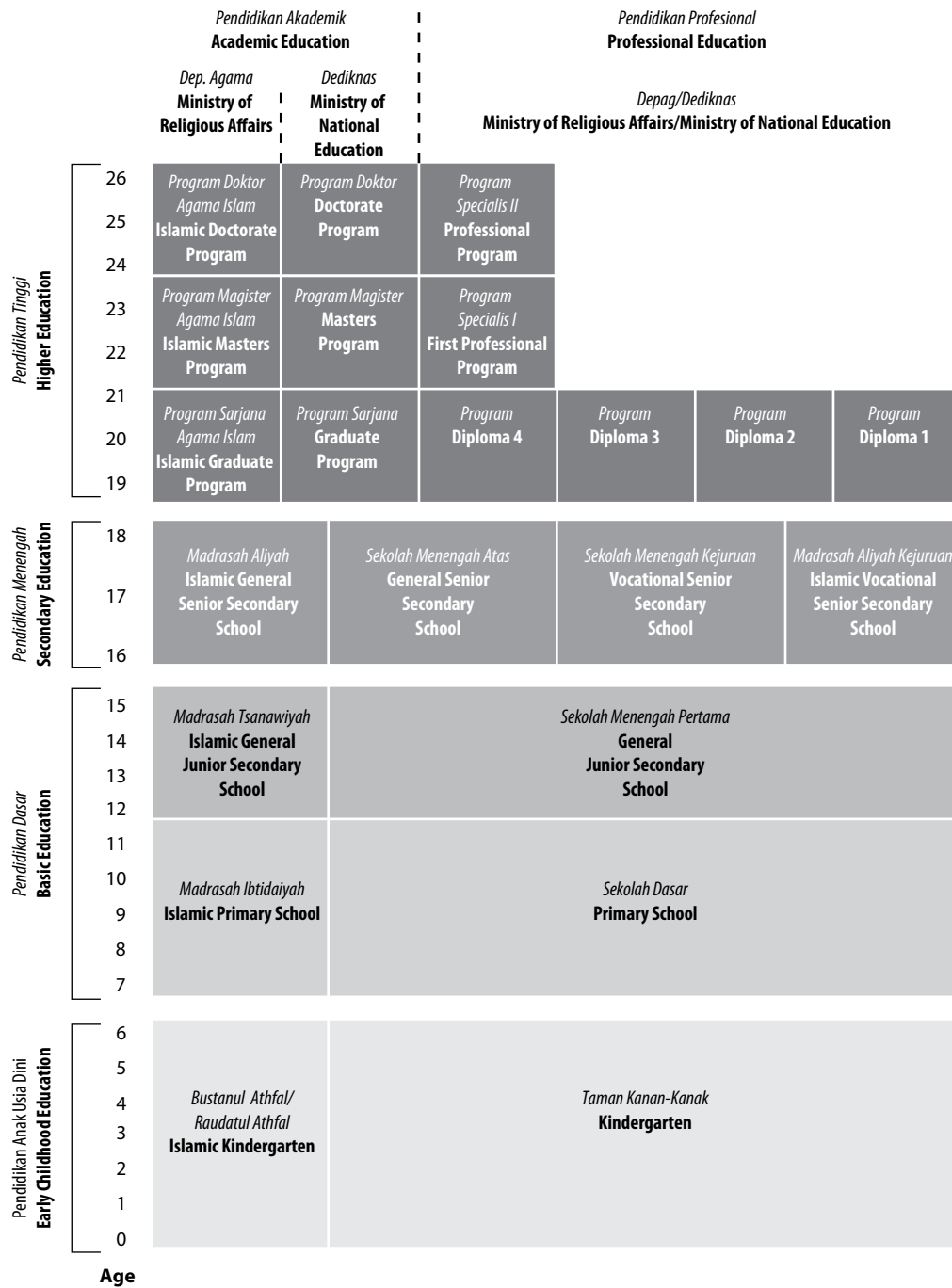
Language/Reading Curriculum in the Fourth Grade

Reading Policy

The study of Bahasa Indonesia intends to develop students' abilities to communicate properly in spoken and written language. Specific policies for reading instruction are as follows:

♦ Government Law PP No. 19 Tahun 2005—This law outlines the expected reading and writing competencies of Bahasa Indonesia;

♦ Minister Law No. 23 Tahun 2006—This law mandates that primary school graduates should be able to read aloud and understand the substance of a text;[7] and

♦ Minister Law No. 22 Tahun 2006—This law mandates that, as a prerequisite for Grade 4, students must be able to read and understand a 150–200 word text in Grade 3.[8]

Exhibit 2: Formal Education System, According to Law No. 20, 2003[5]

	Pendidikan Akademik **Academic Education**			*Pendidikan Profesional* **Professional Education**			
	Dep. Agama **Ministry of Religious Affairs**	*Dediknas* **Ministry of National Education**		*Depag/Dediknas* **Ministry of Religious Affairs/Ministry of National Education**			

Age							
Pendidikan Tinggi **Higher Education**	26 / 25 / 24	*Program Doktor Agama Islam* **Islamic Doctorate Program**	*Program Doktor* **Doctorate Program**	*Program Specialis II* **Professional Program**				
	23 / 22	*Program Magister Agama Islam* **Islamic Masters Program**	*Program Magister* **Masters Program**	*Program Specialis I* **First Professional Program**				
	21 / 20 / 19	*Program Sarjana Agama Islam* **Islamic Graduate Program**	*Program Sarjana* **Graduate Program**	*Program* **Diploma 4**	*Program* **Diploma 3**	*Program* **Diploma 2**	*Program* **Diploma 1**

Pendidikan Menengah **Secondary Education**	18 / 17 / 16	*Madrasah Aliyah* **Islamic General Senior Secondary School**	*Sekolah Menengah Atas* **General Senior Secondary School**	*Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan* **Vocational Senior Secondary School**	*Madrasah Aliyah Kejuruan* **Islamic Vocational Senior Secondary School**

Pendidikan Dasar **Basic Education**	15 / 14 / 13 / 12	*Madrasah Tsanawiyah* **Islamic General Junior Secondary School**	*Sekolah Menengah Pertama* **General Junior Secondary School**
	11 / 10 / 9 / 8 / 7	*Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* **Islamic Primary School**	*Sekolah Dasar* **Primary School**

Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini **Early Childhood Education**	6 / 5 / 4 / 3 / 2 / 1 / 0	*Bustanul Athfal/ Raudatul Athfal* **Islamic Kindergarten**	*Taman Kanan-Kanak* **Kindergarten**

Age

Summary of National Curriculum

The *Standard Content for Reading Matter of Elementary School* states that students graduating from primary school should be able to read a 150–200 word text, understand the content of a text, compare texts, understand implicit ideas of the text, and read other special types of text (e.g., a dictionary, an encyclopedia, a telephone book, and a travel itinerary).[9]

Reading Instruction in the Primary Grades

Approaches to reading instruction vary by grade level. For Grades 1–3 of primary school, full reading instruction uses communicative and contextual approaches to teaching and learning. In these grades, Bahasa Indonesia instruction is taught across the curriculum. Reading explicitly becomes part of Bahasa Indonesia instruction beginning in Grade 4 of primary school.

The practices used to help students develop Indonesian language skills begin with reading aloud with correct intonation, while also emphasizing spelling. Once students master these skills, they should be able to draw a conclusion from a short text or poem. After that, students learn how to retell a story and to read a poem aloud with correct intonation and expression. Eventually, students learn to find ideas, meanings, or information mentioned explicitly or implicitly in the text.

Each classroom session is one lesson hour unit, which lasts 35 minutes. In primary school, there are 26–32 lesson hours per week, depending on the grade. Students in each grade are in school for 34–38 weeks per year. Therefore, each school year includes a range of 884–1216 lesson hours, which is equivalent to 516–709 total hours per year devoted to instruction.

Exhibit 3: Instructional Time, Primary Education

Grades	One Lesson Hour (Minutes)	Total Lesson Hours per Week	Weeks per Year	Lesson Hours per Year	Total Hours of Instruction per Year
1–3	35	26–28	34–38	884–1064	516–621
4–6	35	32	34–38	1088–1216	635–709

Instructional Materials

Instructional materials are used to enrich and explain the curriculum, and all mandatory books must be approved by content specialists. The Ministry of Education chooses the textbooks used in reading instruction. To develop the components of linguistic ability (listening, speaking, reading, and writing)

included in the Bahasa Indonesia curriculum, reading instruction includes the use of resources such as fictional texts, nonfiction texts, poetry, and telephone books.

Use of Technology
Some schools are well equipped with computer laboratories that have Internet access. The Ministry of Education is working to provide these facilities in all schools.

Role of Reading Specialists
There are no reading specialists in general primary schools, apart from the classroom teachers who are responsible for teaching Bahasa Indonesia.

Second-language Instruction
International schools teach Bahasa Indonesia as a second language and Islamic schools teach Arabic as a second language. Each school located in an urban or suburban area bases its own second-language instruction on the local language because few students speak Bahasa Indonesia as their mother tongue.

Students with Reading Difficulties

Diagnostic testing for reading disabilities is common in Indonesia, especially in the best urban schools. However, although special education is provided for students with other disabilities, there are no special education programs available for students with reading disabilities. Consequently, the classroom teacher usually provides instruction for students with reading disabilities in the form of a remedial program.

Teachers and Teacher Education

Teacher Education Specific to Reading
Currently, primary teachers (Grades 1–6) are required to have a two-year diploma (certificate D-2) in order to teach. However, under the updated teacher education requirements passed in 2005, by the year 2015 all teachers will be required to complete a four-year university degree and obtain teacher certification.[10] There are no specific requirements for teaching reading. In general, teachers receive formal education provided by the Institute for Educational Quality Assurance, which is part of the Ministry of Education. This education is not just in reading, but in Bahasa Indonesia as a whole.

Requirements for Ongoing Professional Development in Reading for Teachers

Most teachers receive in-service education in their province, although it is not mandatory. The Ministry of Education usually conducts this in-service education as a regional or national program.

Monitoring Student Progress in Reading

Teachers and schools monitor the progress of individual students through grades and report cards. Every six months (i.e., each semester), parents receive school reports about their child's progress that they must sign and return to the school. In Grades 1–6, there are no examinations for promotion; rather, teacher evaluations through the form of report cards are used to make decisions about grade promotion.

Students take national and regional examinations throughout their formal schooling, although there is no national examination for students in Grades 1–6. Regional examinations are developed by a team of teachers and are administered at the district level. These examinations test reading skills as part of the Bahasa Indonesia language. Beginning in junior secondary school (Grades 7–9), students take national examinations, which are used together with report cards for promotion (based on 60% exam scores, 40% report cards). Every semester in Grades 7–12, students take formative or summative regional examinations; the formative examinations monitor learning, while the summative examinations determine student promotion to the next grade.

National high-stakes examinations are taken at the end of Grades 6, 9, and 12 for entry to the next level of education (junior secondary, senior secondary, and university). At Grade 9, subjects tested are mathematics, Bahasa Indonesia, English, and science. At Grade 12, subjects tested are mathematics, Bahasa Indonesia, English, science, and social science. Passing the national examination is required for continuation to a university or higher education program, and pass-fail decisions are based on the results from the national examination, as well as the results from some subject matter examinations conducted by the district.

Impact and Use of PIRLS

Recently, PIRLS has become a new issue of discussion among the Ministry of Education and Culture, education stakeholders, and the Indonesia House of Representatives, and has prompted a review of education policy.

TIMSS & PIRLS
International Study Center
Lynch School of Education, Boston College

Suggested Readings

Research and Development Bureau, Secretariat of Research and Development Ministry of Education. (2010). Retrieved from http://litbang.kemdiknas.go.id/

Indonesia Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia. (2012). Retrieved from http://www.kemdiknas.go.id/kemdikbud/

Indonesia Center for National Curriculum. (n.d.). Retrieved from http://www.puskur.go.id

References

1   Merdekawaty, E. (2006). *Bahasa Indonesia and languages of Indonesia*. Retrieved from http://www.languagestudies.unibz.it/Bahasa%20Indonesia_Merdekawaty.pdf

2   UU no.20 Tahun 2003 [Law of the Republic of Indonesia no. 20 of 2003 on the national education system] (2003). Jakarta: Republic of Indonesia. Retrieved from http://www.inherent-dikti.net/files/sisdiknas.pdf

3   Ibid.

4   Indonesia Ministry of Education. (n.d.). *Indonesia educational statistics in brief 2005–06*. Jakarta: Author.

5   Ibid.

6   Peraturan Pemerintah no. 19 Tahun 2005 tentang standar nasional pendidikan [Regulation 19 of 2005 on national education standards] (2005). Jakarta: Republic of Indonesia.

7   Peraturan Pemerintah no. 23 Tahun 2006 tentang standar kompetensi lulusan [Government Peraturan no. 23 of 2006 on graduate competency standards] (2006). Jakarta: Republic of Indonesia.

8   Peraturan Menteri no. 22 Tahun 2006 tentang standar isi untuk mata pelajaran bahasa Indonesia [Ministerial Decree no. 22 of 2006 on the content standard for Indonesian language] (2006). Jakarta: Republic of Indonesia.

9   Directorate General of Primary Education. (2010). Retrieved from http://dikdas.kemdikbud.go.id/

10 United National Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. (2010). *World data on education VII* (Ed. 2010/11). Retrieved from http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0019/001931/193181e.pdf

Islamic Republic of Iran

Abdol'azim Karimi
Shahrnaz Bakhshalizadeh
Ministry of Education, Research Institute for Education

Language and Literacy

Article 15 of the Iranian constitution states that the "Official language (of Iran)… is Persian…[and]…the use of regional and tribal languages in the press and mass media, as well as for teaching of their literature in schools, is allowed in addition to Persian." [1] The population of Iran is approximately 75.8 million with a literacy rate of 83 percent, with Persian being the mother tongue of at least 65 percent of the population and spoken by a large proportion of the remaining 35 percent.[2, 3] Iran is a diverse country consisting of people with many ethnic backgrounds: Persians (65%); Azerbaijanis (16%); Kurds (7%); Lurs (6%); Arabs (2%); Baluchis (2%); Turkmens (1%); Turkic tribal groups, such as the Qashqai (1%); and non-Iranian, non-Turkic groups, such as Armenians, Assyrians, and Georgians (less than 1%).[4] Languages other than Persian spoken in Iran include Turkish, Azeri, Kurdish, Luri, and Mazandarani.

Established in 1979, the Literacy Movement Organization is an organization affiliated with the Ministry of Education. The organization's tasks and goals are to teach reading, writing, and simple calculation skills to the country's illiterate citizens and to promote Islamic culture among participants.[5] To attain these goals, the Literacy Movement Organization coordinates activities that strengthen literacy skills, promote cultural standards, increase new reader knowledge, expand the writing culture among different groups of society, produce textbooks for those learning to read, and train teachers for adult education. More specifically, the activities of the organization include the following: [6]

♦ Providing continuous, instructional programs, both in-class and through long distance education, via multimedia;

♦ Furnishing books to rural and urban public libraries, mobile libraries, and prisons;

♦ Organizing and supplying books for book fairs;

♦ Conducting reading games for individuals ages 10–49;

- ♦ Publishing monthly magazines for new readers;

- ♦ Providing community learning centers with posters, bulletins, and magazines;

- ♦ Developing and preparing multimedia packages to empower rural mothers to foster creativity in children (Research Institute for Children of the World in cooperation with UNICEF); and

- ♦ Creating a continuing education literacy program.[7]

Through these activities, the Literacy Movement Organization has been able to increase the literacy rate, decrease the gender disparity in the literate population, decrease the literacy rate disparity between rural and urban areas, promote learners into the formal education system, and introduce continued educational activities to the public.

Overview of the Education System

Islamic principles and precepts form the basis of the Islamic Republic of Iran's constitution, which attributes great importance to education.[8] According to Article 3 of the constitution, the government is responsible for providing free education and strengthening the spirit of inquiry and investigation in all areas of science, technology, culture, and Islamic studies through secondary school.[9] Religious minority groups, including Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians, are free to teach, perform their religious rites, and act according to their own canons in matters of personal affairs and religious education.

The structure of Iran's education through the upper secondary level is highly centralized. The Ministry of Education administers and finances schools at the primary and secondary levels (Grades 1–12) and is responsible for teacher education, grading, and examinations. The Ministry of Education is composed of several deputy ministries with specific educational administrative responsibilities, including developing and planning goals, conducting and supervising educational activities, developing curricula and textbooks, publishing and distributing educational materials, planning and conducting professional development for teachers, and defining human resource policies within the ministry. The Supreme Educational Council, an autonomous legislative body, approves all policies and regulations related to formal pre-tertiary education, and sets the educational goals for Grades 1–12 according to Islamic principles.

PIRLS 2011 ENCYCLOPEDIA
326 **ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN**

IEA

TIMSS & PIRLS
International Study Center
Lynch School of Education, Boston College

At the tertiary level, the Ministry of Science, Research, and Technology is responsible for universities offering nonmedical degrees; the Ministry of Health and Medical Education is responsible for medical schools and paramedical degrees; and the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs is responsible for non-formal vocational education.

The formal education system in Iran includes one year of preprimary education, which children begin when they are age five, followed by five years of primary education. At age eleven, children begin three years of lower-secondary education, followed by three years of upper-secondary education and one year of pre-university education (see Exhibit 1). Education is only compulsory through the first year of upper-secondary school, after which students are able to choose the track of their studies.

Exhibit 1: Education System in the Islamic Republic of Iran

	Age
Pre-university (1 year)	17
Upper Secondary (3 years)	14 –16
Lower Secondary (3 years)	11 –13
Primary (5 years)	6 –10
Preprimary (1 year)	

Compulsory: 6 – 16

Age

Iran has both public and private schools at all levels, from elementary school through university. Approximately 9 percent of upper-secondary institutions are private.[10] These schools must conform to the regulations of the Ministry of Education, though they are financed primarily through tuition fees received from students. Public schools in Iran are free to all citizens.

The preprimary year prepares children for the formal primary stage of education. A course in Farsi is required in bilingual areas of the country where Farsi is not the mother tongue. In these communities, Farsi is taught in addition to regular preprimary activities. The Organization for Educational Research

and Planning is responsible for the supervision and educational preparation of preschool centers. Preschools may be public or private and may cater to only boys or girls, although many admit both. With no examination at the end of this stage, children are automatically promoted to the next stage.

The main objectives of preprimary education are the following:

♦ Contribute to the physical, mental, emotional, and social growth of children;

♦ Develop children's abilities and talents;

♦ Prepare children to comprehend scientific concepts;

♦ Promote the Farsi language; and

♦ Prepare children for social relationships and cooperation.

Primary education, the first stage of formal education, lasts five years (Grades 1–5) for students ages 6–10. The main objectives of this stage are to:

♦ Create an atmosphere for moral and religious development;

♦ Develop literacy and numeracy skills;

♦ Develop social skills;

♦ Instruct students about personal hygiene; and

♦ Develop students' talents, abilities, and physical strength.

The subjects taught in primary school include Holy Quran, Farsi (reading, writing, and dictation), mathematics, science, religious education, social studies (e.g., history, geography), art, and physical education. One teacher typically is responsible for teaching all subjects except religion, art, and physical education.

The lower-secondary stage of education lasts three years (Grades 6–8) for students ages 11–13. At this stage, students become familiar with various subjects in the physical and social sciences, as well as humanities and art. In addition to the subjects taught at the primary level, students in lower secondary receive second-language instruction of their choosing (English, French, or German), vocational education, and defense education (for boys only).

Upper-secondary education is three years (Grades 9–11) for students ages 14–16. The first year of this stage is the same for all programs of study. In the second year, students choose among academic (theoretical), technical and vocational, or *Kar-Danesh* (Skill-Knowledge) tracks of study. These programs have different objectives and are intended for students with different abilities and interests. Academic programs prepare students to enter university, and

students who select these programs focus on mathematics, natural science, or social science, based on their education and career interests. Technical and vocational and *Kar-Danesh* programs both prepare students for participation in the labor market after finishing high school and lead to either a Post-Diploma degree or a Skill Certificate, respectively. Students who complete either of these programs have the opportunity to continue their education through vocational colleges, where students choose a program based on their capabilities and interest. Alternately, graduates of these programs may also take the Pre-university examination. Three components comprise the curriculum of each program: common subjects, which are common courses for all programs of study regardless of the track (i.e., Holy Quran, religious education, Farsi literature, statistics, Arabic, foreign language, and physical education); elective subjects (e.g., art of problem solving, mathematics, physics); and specialized subjects that are program-specific.[11] At the end of the upper-secondary stage, a final examination is administered nationwide.

Pre-university is a one-year program (Grade 12) for upper-secondary graduates that would like to participate in university entrance examinations in order to further their education.[12]

Language/Reading Curriculum in the Fourth Grade

The current, fully centralized national curriculum for the Farsi language at the primary school level was introduced in 2000. Farsi curriculum in Iran is an integrated curriculum, thus reading instruction and its goals are incorporated with other components of language instruction. The main objective of reading education is the development of accuracy, reflection, reasoning, and judgment skills. According to this curriculum, students should be able to do the following by the end of the fifth year:

♦ Read and understand texts in Farsi;

♦ Enjoy and appreciate reading as a way to acquire knowledge and information;

♦ Have specific purposes for reading; and

♦ Appreciate reading and what is learned through reading.[13]

The Organization for Educational Research and Planning developed the national curriculum with the cooperation of school districts and teachers. The curriculum guide prescribes goals and objectives, processes, methods, and materials for all students. The current curriculum, including any necessary

revision, is available in the following official publications: the curriculum guide, ministry notes, mandated textbooks, and recommended instructional activities. Parents are informed about the reading curriculum through teacher-parent meetings, school administration, public awareness campaigns, the Ministry website, and parents' associations and organizations. Visiting inspectors, research programs, and national and regional assessments evaluate the implementation of the curriculum.

The reading curriculum focuses primarily on the following:

♦   Identifying ideas and defining words;

♦   Developing skills in generalizing, summarizing, and evaluating text components; and

♦   Developing, interpreting, and integrating ideas.

In Grade 1, these skills are developed by reading simple sentences about family members, daily activities, bodily organs, health and nutrition, animals and pets, religion, and the environment, as well as children's poetry. By the end of Grade 3, stories about families, animals, social and historical events and ceremonies, religion, occupations, and simple scientific texts are introduced, as well as simple poetry about nature and animals. Principles of grammar such as punctuation, sentence structure, verbs, tenses, subjects and objects, singular and plural nouns, synonyms and antonyms, and adjectives also are discussed. By the end of Grade 5, reading materials include stories about family and society, human endeavors, rural life, biographies of famous men and women, and great inventions and inventors.

Reading Instruction in the Primary Grades

For all grade levels, the school year is approximately nine months long. It begins on September 21 of each year and ends on June 21 of the subsequent year. Schools operate Saturday through Thursday. Total instructional time at the primary level is 24 periods per week of 40–45 minutes each. Reading and other language instruction receives twelve periods per week in Grades 1–3 and eleven periods per week in Grades 4–5.

Instructional Materials

The Organization for Educational Research and Planning develops the curriculum and textbooks, which are the primary teaching materials, and distributes these to primary schools free of charge. The books provided for primary school are *Let Us Read* and *Let Us Write*. In addition, the Office of

Instructional Aid Materials within the Ministry of Education publishes two monthly children's magazines aimed at primary school students as well as magazines for primary school teachers, though these are not compulsory.

Teachers also receive videotaped teacher guides that include teaching notes and explanations, audiocassettes of songs and music used to teach different concepts and develop student listening skills, and tables to post in classrooms as supplementary educational resources. In addition, students and their parents receive videotapes of exemplary lessons.

Use of Technology

The use of information communications technology for instruction is not compulsory and Iran has no national policy regarding the use of technology in reading instruction. However, some private and public schools integrate technology into the teaching process according to their own individual policies and the availability of technology resources. Some CDs are prepared, mostly in the private sector in accordance with the ministry curriculum, for teachers and students to practice reading objectives.

Second-language Instruction

Because Farsi is the official and instructional language, it is not considered a second language. Students with mother languages other than Farsi complete a special instruction course prior to starting Grade 1 and then continue with schooling in Farsi.

Students with Reading Difficulties

Before beginning primary school, all children are subject to school readiness evaluations intended to diagnose learning disabilities. Students with recognized disabilities who are still able to participate in regular school are included in regular classrooms, though they may engage in special learning and rehabilitation programs. Students with more severe disabilities are placed in special education schools with their own programs of study.

Teachers and Teacher Education

Prior to 2002, the majority of teachers and educational staff in Iran received qualifications from the Ministry of Education's Higher In-Service Education Center. Since 2002, universities and higher education institutes have offered in-service, long-term degree programs.

Teachers complete one of two long-term teacher education courses or programs. These courses are offered at the associate, bachelor's, and master's degree levels: [14]

1. Teacher education centers affiliated with the Ministry of Education's Bureau of Scientific Promotion of Human Resources—These post-secondary institutions offer two-year programs leading to an associate degree. Programs are available to high school graduates who have passed the national higher education entrance examination. Enrolled students receive housing for the duration of their program. Programs offered include mathematics, science, physical education, social studies, primary education, Persian language and literature, internal affairs (i.e., graduates of this program provide pedagogical advice, plan leisure time and school activities, and work in student affairs), Islamic and Arabic language, art, and special education (i.e., graduates of this program learn to teach students with mental or physical disabilities). Graduates from these courses can teach in primary or lower-secondary schools.

2. Teacher education programs at universities and higher education institutions—These institutions offer four-year preparation programs leading to a bachelor's degree. Eligible candidates are high school graduates who have passed the national higher education entrance examination. Once admitted, students are required to take courses in pedagogy and educational psychology, along with specialized courses in their subject area. Graduates from these programs teach all subjects at the primary or secondary levels, except physical education, art, and the Quran.

Requirements for Ongoing Professional Development in Reading for Teachers

To improve teacher knowledge and skills, the Ministry of Education's Bureau for the Scientific Promotion of Human Resources has developed short-term courses and workshops providing both general and specific education content. These courses are offered in different institutes for all ministry staff, including teachers. The goal of short-term training courses is to improve specific teacher and educational staff competencies. Some of these courses are compulsory, such as those for pre-employment training, training for promotion, and teacher education about newly implemented policies.[15]

Monitoring Student Progress in Reading

Educational evaluation up to fourth grade involves continuous formative assessment, including observation of students' in-class activities, in-class

oral or written exams, and homework. Schools issue descriptive report cards for each individual student in October and June. Students who do not attain the satisfactory level for promotion to the next grade must participate in compensatory sessions and complete further enrichment activities by September.[16]

After Grade 4, educational evaluation includes both formative and summative assessments. Teachers develop examinations that are administered twice each year to determine grade promotion. At the end of Grade 5, students take a regional examination developed by the Office for Assessment in the Ministry of Education in each province. Those who pass the examinations receive elementary school-leaving certificates, while those who fail have the opportunity to retake the examination in September. Students who fail a second time have the opportunity to retake the examination the following year. The grading system at this stage uses points earned through continuous assessment and criterion-referenced written and oral examinations. Ten points (out of 20) are required for promotion.

The system of promotion in lower-secondary school is similar to that used in the primary stage. At the end of the lower-secondary stage, students in each province take a regional examination, and those who pass receive certificates of general education. At the end of upper-secondary education, a national final examination leads to a high school diploma.[17]

Impact and Use of PIRLS

The PIRLS results have impacted planning, schools, and research. Objectives for language teaching were evaluated following the publication of prior PIRLS outcomes and analysis of factors contributing to the results. Based on updated objectives, revision of specific curriculum components has been considered. Informational texts also have been added to primary school language textbooks, and the PIRLS framework and its objectives were introduced to teachers through the teachers' edition.

At the school level, PIRLS released items have been disseminated to teachers to incorporate into their teaching. Professional development sessions have been conducted in order to introduce the PIRLS framework and its goals and objectives to teachers.

Finally, research opportunities and potential research topics using PIRLS results have been introduced to masters and doctoral students majoring in reading education and curriculum planning.

References

1   Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran (2012). Retrieved from http://www.iranchamber.com/government/laws/constitution.php

2   Statistical Centre of Iran. (2010). *Country's population estimation by urban and rural areas, 2006–2010*. Retrieved from http://www.amar.org.ir/default-386.aspx

3   Library of Congress, Federal Research Division. (2008). *Country profile: Iran* (Library of Congress Call Number DS254.5 .I742 1989). Washington, DC: GPO for the Library of Congress. Retrieved from http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Iran.pdf

4   Ibid.

5   Ibid.

6   Ministry of Education, Literacy Movement Organization. (2007). *Report of literacy movement organization*. Tehran: Author.

7   Hakimi, A. (2005). *A general overview of education in Islamic Republic of Iran*. Tehran: Ministry of Education, Institute for Educational Research and Planning.

8   Ibid.

9   Ibid.

10 Ministry of Education, Development Deputy. (2008). *Statistics of the ministry of education*. Tehran: Author.

11 Hakimi, A. (2005). *A general overview of education in Islamic Republic of Iran*. Tehran: Ministry of Education, Institute for Educational Research and Planning.

12 Ibid.

13 Ministry of Education, Organization for Educational Research and Planning, Farsi Language Department. (2000). *Farsi language and literature curriculum for primary education*. Tehran: Author.

14 Hakimi, A. (2005). *A general overview of education in Islamic Republic of Iran*. Tehran: Ministry of Education, Institute for Educational Research and Planning.

15 Ibid.

16 Supreme Council of Education. (n.d.). Retrieved from http://www.sce.ir

17 Ministry of Education. (2006). *Statistics of the ministry of education*. Tehran: Author.

Ireland

Department of Education and Skills
National Council for Curriculum and Assessment

Eemer Eivers
Educational Research Centre

Language and Literacy

Ireland is officially a bilingual state; Irish is the national and first official language, and English is recognized as a second official language.[1] In practice, almost all people speak English on a daily basis, while the most recent census data available (2006) indicate that approximately 41 percent of the population are able to speak Irish.[2] Irish is the community language in pockets of *Gaeltacht* (Irish-speaking) areas and is used daily by some people outside the *Gaeltacht*. The Government aims to ensure that as many citizens as possible are bilingual (Irish and English) and is committed to providing the option of Irish-medium education, both in *Gaeltacht* and non-*Gaeltacht* areas. Thus, in addition to English-medium schools, Ireland has Irish-medium primary and post-primary schools in *Gaeltacht* areas, and a network of Irish-medium schools in non-*Gaeltacht* areas (*scoileanna lán-Ghaeilge*). Because fluency in Irish is not a requirement for enrolment at Irish-medium schools, Irish is often not the mother tongue of students attending these schools. Two additional major national policy initiatives promote literacy. First, learning support teaching (supplemental teaching for children experiencing learning difficulties, particularly in the core areas of literacy and numeracy) is generally available in all primary schools.[3] Second, the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) program addresses educational disadvantage through improved student-teacher ratios in participating schools, special grants and extra support for students.[4]

Other initiatives to promote reading and literacy include the "Write a Book" project and the annual Children's Books Festival.[a, b] Many schools hold an annual Book Week to celebrate literature and further promote a love of reading among children. Many public libraries also provide a range of services to schools to promote reading and literacy, including supporting "One Town, One

---

a   For more information on the "Write a Book" project, visit http://www.writeabookireland.com/index.asp

b   For more information on the Children's Books Festival, visit http://www.childrensbooksireland.ie

Book" initiatives (community-based literacy projects that promote networks of children and adult readers).

Overview of the Education System

Ireland's education system is largely centralized. Overall responsibility for education lies with the Minister for Education and Skills, who is a member of the Irish Government and responsible to the national parliament. In practice, the Department of Education and Skills (DES), together with a number of bodies under its aegis, is responsible for running the Irish education system. Almost all primary and post-primary schools are state-funded, and are required to operate under both the Education Act (1998)[5] and the curriculum, assessment, and evaluation framework established by the DES, based on advice from the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA). The NCCA is a statutory body with responsibility for advising the Education Minister on curriculum and assessment for early childhood education and for primary and post-primary schools. The inspectorate division of the DES has responsibility for evaluating and reporting on educational provision in all primary and post-primary schools and centers of education that are supported by the Department. Although state-funded, the majority of schools are owned and managed by private organizations, mainly church authorities or religious orders. Individual boards of management govern each school, which are expected to operate in accordance with centrally agreed-upon procedures.

The Irish education system comprises primary, post-primary, third-level, and further education. In addition, parents can send their children to one year of early childhood care and education, prior to starting primary school. Primary schools operate an eight-year program, consisting of two pre-primary years (Junior Infants and Senior Infants), followed by Grades (Classes) 1–6. A child must be four years old at the start of the school year (September) to enroll in primary school. Most children start school as Junior Infants, at either four or five years of age.

The Irish primary education sector comprises state-funded primary schools, special schools, and private primary schools. The 3,165 state-funded primary schools include religious schools, non-denominational schools, multi-denominational schools, and *scoileanna lán-Ghaeilge* (Irish-medium schools). All state-funded schools follow the Primary School Curriculum[6] and private schools offer a broadly similar curriculum.

Ireland has some variation in post-primary school types (e.g., vocational schools, comprehensive schools, and privately-owned and managed secondary schools). However, the curriculum offered in all is substantially the same. Second-level education consists of a three-year junior cycle followed by a two-year senior cycle. Senior cycle can extend to three years if students opt to complete a "Transition Year" (a year free from formal examinations that allows students to experience a range of educational inputs, including work experience) following completion of junior cycle. Senior cycle students follow one of three programs, each leading to a terminal State examination: the Leaving Certificate, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme, or the Leaving Certificate Applied.

Language/Reading Curriculum in the Fourth Grade

Reading Policy

While Ireland's Primary School Curriculum covers a broad range of subjects, literacy and numeracy are considered central to learning in all areas of the curriculum and to children's lives outside of school. Reading is formally taught under the language curriculum area (covering English and Irish). Two principles inform how reading is addressed for all class levels, including children at fourth grade. First, language learning is an integrated process. The three strands used to structure the curriculum—oral language, reading, and writing—are seen as intimately related because they interact with one another in language learning development. Second, language learning and learning through language are of equal importance. As such, the curriculum is concerned with the cultivation of the child's language skills and ability to use language. Language and reading are developed gradually. Initially, phonemic and phonological awareness are developed, followed by an introduction to sound-letter relationships and the eventual development of higher-order skills through reading and responding to a wide variety of texts in a print-rich environment.

In 2011, DES launched Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life,[7] a comprehensive national strategy to improve literacy and numeracy standards among children and young people in the education system. The strategy sets broad national targets for literacy (e.g., increasing the percentage of primary school students attaining the highest proficiency levels in the National Assessment of English Reading by five percentage points by 2020). The targets are to be achieved through a coordinated approach, ranging from pedagogical

improvements in early childhood education, to curriculum reform, to improving awareness of the importance of home environment, to changes in teacher initial education and continuing professional development, and improved use of assessment (at individual, school, and system levels).

Summary of National Curriculum

Ireland's Primary School Curriculum includes the content for language development and describes the approaches and methodologies that teachers may use in their language work with children. The English curriculum describes literacy as the ability to read and write. The ability to read effectively is recognized as an essential requirement if children are to benefit fully from the educational process, to develop their potential, and to participate as citizens in society.

The curriculum presents learning content for all subjects in four levels, each consisting of a two-year grade band. The content for fourth grade falls under Level 3 (third and fourth grade). Planning at individual school and classroom levels indicates what is to be learned in third and fourth grades, when, and how.

As with the oral language and writing strands, the reading strand of the curriculum is divided into four strand units:

1. Receptiveness to Language—This strand unit includes the development of literacy and incorporates acquiring an appreciation of the conventions of text, knowledge of the terminology and conventions of books, and the ability to use a range of reading and comprehension skills. From the beginning of reading, children will recall and retell details of what they read and predict possible future outcomes. However, at the third and fourth grade, the curriculum identifies the development of skills such as analysis, synthesis, inference, deduction, summarization, evaluation, and correlation.

2. Competence and Confidence in Using Language—This strand unit includes enhancing children's abilities to use their developing awareness of language as readers as part of their overall language development. Building on a growing mastery of reading and comprehension skills, third and fourth grade children are expected to develop an appreciation for the usefulness of reading, and to develop personal tastes and interests (supported by exposure to a range of texts, regular silent reading, and by choice in selection of reading material). Independent reading is fostered by enabling children to use more than one strategy when

reading unfamiliar words, and by promoting the self-correction of reading errors.

3.   Developing Cognitive Abilities Through Language—This strand unit focuses on using language to learn. The curriculum recognizes that reading is an increasingly important context for the development of children's cognitive abilities at third and fourth grade. Children are expected to engage with a range of expository and representational texts (e.g., forms, menus, recipes, timetables, newspapers, magazines, and text on screen). Fourth grade students are expected to develop their cognitive abilities through reading and responding to fiction and poetry, with the development of information retrieval skills becoming more central to reading.

4.   Emotional and Imaginative Development Through Language—This strand unit is concerned with developing children's ability to explore everyday experiences and feelings. Children at third and fourth grade will extend and develop how they respond to increasingly challenging reading material.

The first two strand units are focused specifically on language learning, while the third and fourth contribute to more general aspects of children's development. Strand units contain detailed elements of the curriculum content. This content is presented in the form of content objectives, which include suggested learning experiences and activities. In keeping with the spiral nature of the curriculum, the breadth and complexity of the reading strands are developed as children move through primary school.

Approaches to English Reading

The English curriculum sets out a non-exhaustive range of reading approaches and methodologies presented in three key categories: learning to read, comprehension, and responding to text.[c, 8] Teachers, however, have professional autonomy in making decisions about what approaches they use to promote the learning of reading. The following descriptions outline the teaching approaches specific to the third and fourth grades that are currently identified under the three key categories:

♦   Learning to Read—The curriculum envisages that children will have developed competence in word recognition skills by the beginning of the third and fourth grade level. Structured reading schemes and class readers are expected to be complemented by a wide range of

---

c   As part of the development of an integrated language curriculum, the English curriculum is being revised. From 2016, fourth grade children will experience a revised English curriculum in which learning outcomes and exemplification of standards will be key.

other reading material encompassing narrative, expository, and representational text to ensure continuing promotion of children's comprehension skills and interest in reading. Classroom libraries are expected to contain materials covering various levels of interest and ability so that all children can experience success and enjoyment in reading.

♦ Comprehension—The curriculum states that children's comprehension skills will be developed mainly through oral language activity. It highlights the need for third and fourth grade children to have a consistent and structured experience of questioning, discussing, and probing the text when developing higher-order comprehension skills. The curriculum advocates teacher modelling of comprehension skills (e.g., thinking aloud), supplemented by activities that include sequencing tasks, prediction assignments, and cloze procedures. While the use of written responses is greater from the third and fourth grade level onward, this approach is used as follow-up to discussion and other forms of oral response. The potential for developing children's comprehension skills through integration with other areas of the curriculum is also highlighted at this level.

♦ Responding to Text—The curriculum identifies the serial reading of a class novel at the third and fourth grade level as a particularly important means by which children can experience a shared response to fiction. The importance of giving children ample opportunities to respond orally to what they read also is emphasized. Children are encouraged to discuss individual choices of books and other reading materials with others. Children at the third and fourth grade level are expected to respond to their reading in a greater range of ways that include more opportunities for expression through personal writing, drama, visual arts, movement, and dance.

Reading Instruction in the Primary Grades

Instructional Materials

The English curriculum and the accompanying English Language Teacher Guidelines identify a number of instructional materials to support reading development in the primary school. These include graded reading schemes, class novels, and a broad range of reading materials in class and school libraries. Also, teachers can access the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment's (NCCA) website (http://action.ncca.ie/), which demonstrates features of

effective teaching and learning in different settings and includes some materials that support the teaching of reading. In addition, the NCCA provides publishers with general principles and considerations, as well as detailed specifications for reading and activity materials for children at all class levels. However, no specific instructional materials for the teaching of English reading are prescribed. Schools make their own selections from the range of commercially published instructional materials and literature for children.

Use of Technology

Gradual investment in ICT in primary schools has increased provision of computers for students and interactive whiteboards for teachers. Also, teachers can access digital resources from a number of approved national educational websites. However, a recent study found that use of technology was a regular feature in only a minority of classrooms.[9] Reading instruction is mainly carried out in the traditional manner. Where technology is used, typical uses include interactive whiteboards to access online interactive resources, and visualizers, blogs, digital video, and presentation tools to explore language and to encourage children to express their thoughts in other formats.

Role of Reading Specialists

The class teacher normally provides reading instruction as part of the language curriculum. Also, within each school, a teacher usually has additional responsibility for the coordination of literacy instruction, including resource management and sharing good practice. While specialist posts such as learning support teachers may have a role in coordinating literacy instruction within schools, they primarily deal with small, selected groups of students with identified difficulties. Nationally, the Department of Education and Skills provides additional specialist advice through a regional network of professional development organizations led by the Professional Development Service for Teachers—providing support in all curricular areas, but with a strong emphasis on the core areas of literacy and numeracy.

Additional-language Instruction

As noted, Ireland has two official languages. The issue of additional-language applies largely to English-medium schools; few students attending Irish-medium schools speak a language other than Irish or English.

Schools with significant numbers of children for whom English is an additional language (EAL) can apply to have additional EAL Support teachers appointed. The numbers of eligible students and their English-language

proficiency determines the level of extra teaching support allocated. In collaboration with parents and class teachers, EAL Support teachers identify students who require additional support, assess their English language competence, devise and deliver appropriate language programs, and record and monitor their progress. However, EAL students remain the responsibility of the mainstream class teacher. Resources for EAL support teachers and for the whole school team are distributed to all primary schools.

Students with Reading Difficulties

Diagnostic Testing

Class teachers initially identify students at risk of reading difficulties through informal observation. Teacher observations are then complemented by screening measures (up to the middle of first grade) or by the results of standardized, norm-referenced tests (first grade onwards). Learning support teachers have access to a range of diagnostic tests and guidelines on interpreting the results. Educational psychologists may also be involved in the diagnostic process. The particular set of diagnostic tests administered depends on the student's stage of reading development.

Instruction for Children with Reading Difficulties

The DES promotes an inclusive approach and early intervention for students with reading difficulties. Class teachers have primary responsibility for the progress of all students in their classes; and, where appropriate, support teachers provide supplementary teaching. After initial diagnostic testing, the support teacher, in conjunction with the class teacher and usually the parents, produces an Individual Profile and Learning Program (IPLP). The IPLP includes specific learning targets to guide teaching for the 13–20 week instructional term. Instruction usually takes the form of small-group teaching (2–4 students) in the classroom or in a withdrawal setting, the latter being more common.[10] A program of activities in a reading session might include familiar reading, revision of reading strategies, the learning of new reading strategies, and the opportunity to read a new text.

A number of primary schools have specialist reading units, where one or more teachers teach students with specific reading difficulties. There are also four special reading schools for children with specific learning difficulties that follow the Primary School Curriculum with the exception of Irish. Children usually attend for one to two years only and then return to their original mainstream school. The usual admission criteria to a special reading school are average or

above average intelligence and a significant discrepancy between intellectual ability and literacy levels. Visually impaired students have the assistance of a DES visiting teacher service that advises on service provision, including assistive technology, to accommodate their learning needs. Those who have deteriorating minimal residual vision or who are totally blind may need to read and write through the medium of Braille.

Teachers and Teacher Education

Teaching in Ireland is an all-graduate profession. Primary teachers complete their initial teacher education either through a concurrent (3-year, full-time Bachelor of Education degree) or a consecutive (18-month, post-graduate diploma in education) model. It has been proposed that the length of initial teacher education be increased to four years for the concurrent model and two years for the consecutive model. For post-primary teachers, the concurrent route to a teaching qualification is offered for a broad range of programs, typically those with practical, workshop, and laboratory elements. The post-primary consecutive route is a one-year post-graduate professional diploma in education which has been proposed to increase to a minimum of two years.

Teacher Education Specific to Reading

At the primary level, the same teacher generally teaches all subjects to his or her class, and all primary school mainstream teachers are teachers of reading. As such, the teaching of reading is a key element of initial teacher education programs. However, prior to 2011, standard requirements specific to the teaching of reading were not established at any stage of the continuum of teacher education.[11] At the primary school level, specific targeted training has been provided to teachers in the implementation of the Primary School Curriculum, including the teaching of reading. Many teachers of students with special education needs hold post-graduate certificates or diplomas in learning support or special needs education. These programs, which are funded by the Teacher Education Section of the Department of Education and Skills, are provided by third level institutions. Specific targeted training has also been provided to teachers in interventions such as Reading Recovery and First Steps (listening and speaking, reading and writing) to support primary teachers in schools participating in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools program.

Requirements for Ongoing Professional Development in Reading for Teachers

Although teachers are expected to participate regularly in professional development, doing so is not currently compulsory. From September 2012,

all newly-qualified teachers will need to complete a national induction program that will include specific components on the teaching of literacy and on assessment.

The Professional Development Service for Teachers and the Special Education Support Service are lead agencies for professional development at both primary and post-primary levels. Other sources include a national network of Education Centres and appropriate groups, bodies, and institutions that offer professional development programs from which teachers can select courses appropriate to their needs. Recent reports have highlighted that a significant minority of teachers had not completed any recent professional development related to literacy or numeracy.[12, 13] Consequently, national support services are currently directing considerable attention to these areas.

Monitoring Student Progress in Reading

Section 22 of the Education Act requires schools "to regularly evaluate students and periodically report the results of the evaluation to the students and their parents." [14] More recent guidelines advise that schools report feedback to parents at least twice annually, including one written report.[15] There is evidence that a significant minority of schools do not provide adequate feedback to parents on a regular basis.[16, 17] At the primary level, school assessment approaches include the use of teacher questioning and observation, conferencing, and student self-assessment. Changes made in 2007 require schools to administer standardized tests in English and mathematics to students at two points: the end of first grade or the start of second grade, and at the end of fourth grade or the start of fifth grade. In practice, annual administration of standardized reading tests to all students from first through to sixth grade is almost universal. Individual schools choose their own assessment instruments, with the proviso that standardized tests have been normed for an Irish population and are consistent with the Primary School Curriculum. The *National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy* (published in 2011) proposes improved reporting to parents and requires that, from 2012, all primary schools report annually to the Department of Education and Skills the aggregated standardized test results of students at three points of the primary school cycle—second, fourth, and sixth grades. There is no intention to publish data from individual schools or to make it possible for the data to be used for the compilation of league tables.

Although Ireland does not operate a national mandatory system of assessment for primary schools, it monitors standards through the regular assessment of reading and mathematics performance of students in a representative sample of schools. Every five years, the Educational Research Centre conducts national assessments of reading and mathematics on behalf of the Department of Education and Skills. The main functions of the national assessments are to assess national standards, identify factors related to performance on the tests, and inform policy. Almost 8,000 students from second and sixth class took part in the most recent survey in 2009.

Impact and Use of PIRLS

PIRLS 2011 is the first time that Ireland has participated in PIRLS. As such, PIRLS has not had a significant impact on educational policies. However, Ireland participated in a precursor to PIRLS—IEA's International Reading Literacy Study (RLS), conducted in 1991. The performance of Irish nine-year-olds was in the average range (12th of 27 participating countries and 10th of 19 OECD countries in the study), while the performance of Irish 14-year-olds was slightly poorer (20th of 31 participating countries, and 16th of 19 OECD countries).

There have been no formal studies of the impact of participation in RLS; but, it is likely that certain changes can be attributed, at least partially, to participation. The RLS contributed to the thinking behind the current primary school English curriculum, on which work began in the early 1990s. For example, developers of the English curriculum were influenced by the categorization of text types used in RLS (narrative, expository, and documents) and by the range of comprehension processes assessed.

Although Ireland has not participated in PIRLS, both PIRLS and the RLS strongly influenced the three most recent national assessments of English reading conducted at the primary level in Ireland.[18, 19, 20] The influence is apparent in the frameworks used to underpin the assessments, the style of test items, and the range of questionnaires administered. Further, the methodologies used by the IEA in both PIRLS and the RLS have influenced how statistical analyses were conducted and results reported.

Suggested Readings

Coolahan, J. (2003). *Attracting, developing and retaining effective teachers: Country background report for Ireland.* Paris: OECD.

Department of Education and Skills. (2009). *Annual output statement 2009.* Retrieved from http://www.education.ie/servlet/blobservlet/dept_annual_output_2009.pdf?language=EN

Department of Education and Skills. (2010). *Annual output statement 2010.* Retrieved from http://www.education.ie/servlet/blobservlet/dept_annual_output_2010.pdf?language=EN

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment. (2005) *Primary curriculum review: Phase 1.* Dublin: Author. Retrieved from http://www.ncca.ie/uploadedfiles/Publications/PrimaryCurriculumReview.pdf

In addition, a range of documents and reports can be accessed on the website of the Department of Education and Skills: http://www.education.ie/servlet/blobservlet/des_publication_listing.htm?language=EN

References

1   Article 8 of the Constitution of Ireland (1937). Retrieved from http://www.taoiseach.gov.ie/attached_files/Pdf%20files/Constitution%20of%20Ireland.pdf

2   Central Statistics Office. (n.d.). *Table 01B. Irish speakers and non-Irish speakers in each province at each census since 1926.* Cork: Author. Retrieved from http://www.cso.ie/en/census/census2006reports/census2006-volume9-irishlanguage/

3   Department of Education and Science. (2000). *Learning-support guidelines.* Dublin: Stationery Office.

4   Department of Education and Science. (2005). *DEIS (Delivering equality of opportunity in schools): An action plan for educational inclusion.* Dublin: Author.

5   Education Act (1998). Retrieved from http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/1998/en/act/pub/0051/index.html

6   Department of Education and Science/National Council for Curriculum and Assessment. (1999). *Primary school curriculum. Introduction.* Dublin: Stationery Office.

7   Department of Education and Skills. (2011). *Literacy and numeracy: Learning for life: The national strategy to improve literacy and numeracy among children and young people.* Dublin: Author. Retrieved from http://www.education.ie/admin/servlet/blobservlet/lit_num_strat.pdf

8   Department of Education and Science/National Council for Curriculum and Assessment. (1999). *English language: Teacher guidelines.* Dublin: Stationery Office.

9   Eivers, E., Close, S., Shiel, G., Millar, D., Clerkin, A., Gilleece, L., & Kiniry, J. (2010). *The 2009 national assessments of mathematics and English reading.* Dublin: Stationery Office.

10 Ibid.

11 Teaching Council. (2011*). Initial teacher education: Criteria and guidelines for programme providers.* Maynooth: Author.

12 Department of Education and Skills. (2011). *Literacy and numeracy: Learning for life: The national strategy to improve literacy and numeracy among children and young people.* Dublin: Author. Retrieved from http://www.education.ie/admin/servlet/blobservlet/lit_num_strat.pdf

13 Eivers, E., Close, S., Shiel, G., Millar, D., Clerkin, A., Gilleece., L., & Kiniry, J.

(2010). *The 2009 national assessments of mathematics and English reading.* Dublin: Stationery Office.

14 Education Act (p. 23) (1998). Retrieved from http://www.irishstatutebook. ie/1998/en/act/pub/0051/index.html

15 National Council for Curriculum and Assessment. (2007). *Assessment in the primary school curriculum: Guidelines for schools.* Dublin: Author. Retrieved from http://www.ncca.ie/en/ Curriculum_and_Assessment/Early_ Childhood_and_Primary_Education/ Primary_School_Curriculum/ Assessment/Primary_assessment_gl.pdf

16 Hall, K., Conway, P., Rath, A., Murphy, R., & McKeon, J. (2008*). Reporting to parents in primary school: Communication, meaning and learning: Final report.* Dublin: National Council for Curriculum and Assessment. Retrieved from http://www.ncca. ie/uploadedfiles/Primary/UCC_ researchReporting.pdf

17 Eivers, E., Close, S., Shiel, G., Millar, D., Clerkin, A., Gilleece, L., & Kiniry, J. (2010). *The 2009 national assessments of mathematics and English reading.* Dublin: Stationery Office.

18 Cosgrove, J., Kellaghan, T., Forde, P., & Morgan, M. (2000). *The 1998 national assessment of English reading.* Dublin: Educational Research Centre.

19 Eivers, E., Shiel, G., Perkins, R., & Cosgrove, J. (2005). *The 2004 national assessment of English reading.* Dublin: Educational Research Centre.

20 Eivers, E., Close, S., Shiel, G., Millar, D., Clerkin, A., Gilleece, L., & Kiniry, J. (2010). *The 2009 national assessments of mathematics and English reading.* Dublin: Stationery Office.

Israel

Hadas Gelbart

National Authority for Measurement and Evaluation in Education (RAMA)

Language and Literacy

Hebrew and Arabic are the two official languages of Israel. Hebrew is the main spoken language, widely used in business, government, academia, and media. Other languages associated with recent waves of immigration, such as Russian and Amharic, also are spoken in Israel.

In Jewish-sector schools, Hebrew is the language of instruction and English is studied as a second language, usually from the third or fourth grade. Arabic is studied in lower secondary school as a third language, and is an elective major in high school. In Arab-sector schools, Arabic is the language of instruction, Hebrew is studied as a second language, and English is studied as a foreign language, usually from the third or fourth grade.

Overview of the Education System

The education system in Israel is centralized under the supervision of the Ministry of Education, which determines national curricula, including a compulsory core curriculum, and implements national and international educational testing policies. The K–12 education system consists of schools grouped into three levels: preprimary education (ages 3–6), primary (elementary) education (Grades K–6 for students ages 6–12), and secondary education including lower secondary (Grades 7–9 for students ages 12–15) and upper secondary (senior-high) education (Grades 10–12 for students ages 15–18).[1] Education is compulsory for students ages 3–18, but this requirement is being implemented gradually and is currently fully implemented only for ages 5–16.

Almost all schools are public. A small percentage of schools, particularly at the primary level, are special education schools, but most special education classes are integrated into regular schools. Schools in the Jewish and Arab sectors are divided first by language (Hebrew and Arabic) and then into different supervision frameworks representing different cultural and religious sub-sectors in Israel. For the Jewish sector, this includes secular supervision, religious

supervision, and ultra-orthodox supervision, with separate supervisory bodies for the Arab, the Bedouin, and the Druze populations. Each of the supervision frameworks comprises different content and a different proportion of religious and cultural studies. Hebrew and Arabic language supervision is centralized.

Among the supervision frameworks, the ultra-orthodox supervision in the Jewish sector is the most autonomous, with its own curriculum that includes a particularly large proportion of religious studies. These schools are usually not open to external intervention and evaluation. The percentage of ultra-orthodox students among the Israeli student population is continuously growing, mainly due to the high birth rate in the ultra-orthodox community.

In 2009, a national educational and professional reform for primary and a portion of the lower secondary schools, named New Horizon (*Ofek Hadash*), was initiated.[2] Four main interrelated and complementary goals were set within the framework of the reform:

♦　Strengthening the status of teachers and raising their salaries;

♦　Providing equal educational opportunities for every student, raising student achievement, and narrowing education gaps;

♦　Improving school climate; and

♦　Empowering principals while extending their authority in schools.

The reforms follow the trend of increasing school accountability for improving the quality of instruction and the level of student achievement, among other things, by increasing principals' responsibility for teacher evaluation and improved performance. For the first time in Israel, within the framework of New Horizon, there is a scale of professional promotion for teachers and principals. The process of teacher evaluation was designed to reflect the complexity of teachers' work, and introduced a common language for ministry personnel and inspectors, principals, teachers, and other academics to be used when considering teacher performance in their various roles within the school system. The concept of "no child left behind" is strongly reflected in these reforms through teachers dedicating time in their daily schedules to help students with learning difficulties and to encourage exceptional students.

Language/Reading Curriculum in the Fourth Grade

Israel is known for having many lifelong readers, and one of the country's main educational goals is to develop reading literacy. There are separate reading curricula for Hebrew-speaking students[3] and for Arabic-speaking students.[4]

The reading curricula are part of the Linguistic Education curriculum for native speakers of each language (*Linguistic Education: language, literature, and culture*). In general, both curricula employ a similar approach and adopt similar benchmarks and standards.

Reading is presented and taught as the foundation for student learning. The focus is on teaching the language instead of teaching about language, placing more emphasis on self-experience and communication in contrast to theoretical knowledge of the language. In this view, both Hebrew and Arabic curricula emphasize the importance of reading a variety of text genres—such as expository, descriptive, argumentative, procedural, and narrative—to expand the types of written and spoken discourse that students are exposed to in classrooms. Classical and contemporary literature as well as traditional texts are selected and integrated to suit the cognitive level of students within each grade and aim at introducing students to their culture. Development of students' literacy and linguistic skills continues throughout primary school, and encompasses all fields of study and subjects.

The Hebrew reading curriculum describes three complementary and interrelated components of linguistic education: linguistic knowledge; reading, speaking, listening, and writing practices; and the spoken and written discourse represented by a variety of text genres. All three components are believed to support the development of a "literate discourse," the discourse required to study different subject areas and communicate appropriately in daily life as active, responsible, and critical participants. The Arabic reading curriculum approaches linguistic education in the same way.

Reading readiness is an important goal of the preprimary literacy curriculum, and students are expected to master the orthographic code, whether Hebrew or Arabic. Initial reading instruction begins in the first grade using a phoneme-grapheme correspondence approach in a rich spoken-language environment to support language development in all areas of use and communication. Assessment is emphasized as an integral part of the reading curriculum, and each first-grade teacher can use nationally developed reading tests for different diagnostic purposes and for developing individualized remedial programs for students who face difficulties. Based on the results of these assessments, schools may decide to divide large classes into two smaller ones for up to three hours per week, or to work with certain students individually, to promote their reading competency.

Following initial reading ability development, the curriculum emphasizes the importance of providing students with opportunities to experience both written and spoken language. Texts are selected according to their relevance to student life in and out of school, and adapted to the cognitive level of the students in each grade. The learning program uses two interrelated frameworks to classify the types of texts for students: discourse and genre. The term "worlds of discourse" is used to describe the knowledge, values, perspectives, and patterns of discourse that are typical to a given discipline or community of practice. The curriculum differentiates among five worlds of discourse: expository or academic; interpersonal; mass media; literature; and traditional, heritage resources.

The genre framework refers to the following major text genres: texts intended to provide information and knowledge (expository/descriptive genre), texts intended to persuade or present arguments (argumentative texts), procedural texts, and narratives. Each genre includes sub-genres that share social goals and have similar structural elements.

Classroom lessons are organized around theme contexts, and texts from different worlds of discourse and genres are utilized as contexts for teaching a particular theme. For example, "water" is one of the themes that uses expository texts, while Jewish holiday themes use narrative texts. In this way, specific themes that are classified into different worlds of discourse are used to enhance student linguistic knowledge; practice reciprocal interactions among reading, writing, listening, and speaking; and increase student awareness of different genres.

The curriculum defines expected achievements (standards) at three milestones: toward the end of Grades 2, 4, and 6. Toward the end of Grade 4, when using selected texts adapted to their cognitive level, students are expected to be able to do the following:

♦ Listen and speak for different purposes—Tracking the sequence of events; locating ideas; interpreting, evaluating, and taking a stance about ideas; participating in a discussion; presenting an established idea in a lecture; choosing the correct register and using appropriate language; giving a practical report; telling a story following a personal experience; and presenting an argument and supporting it with logical structures.

♦ Write texts for different purposes and for different recipients— Writing a story; writing reports; writing to describe and explain;

writing instructions; expressing a reasoned opinion; and writing to communicate reflections.

♦ Produce written texts that are linguistically correct and appropriate for communication—Using correct spelling and legible writing; writing sentences that are grammatically correct; using proper punctuation; using appropriate vocabulary; creating titles and dividing paragraphs; writing subject-focused work; organizing ideas in appropriate structures; and using conjunctions.

♦ Read various kinds of texts for different purposes—Reading continuously, fluently, and accurately; mastering the alphabetic code; understanding the overt meaning (understanding words in context and chronological sequences; identifying logical conjunctions, lingual components, and modes of organization and design; and linking to disciplinary content knowledge); understanding hidden meanings (detection of the relationship between the structure and content of the text, and drawing conclusions); and interpreting, evaluating, and taking a stance.

♦ Retrieve information and knowledge from various types of texts and from different subject domains—Retrieving information from textbooks on various subjects; using digital information, dictionaries, encyclopedias, and children's magazines; accessing verbal and visual information (illustrations, photographs, maps, and charts); retrieving information relevant to topics being studied from various information sources; and evaluating information credibility by type of source, author characteristics, and publication date.

♦ Read literary works from different periods and from various genres— Independent reading of 20 or more books; familiarity with the works of 10 authors from different periods, and from Hebrew literature as well as from translated literature; reading aloud a given literary work that is age-level appropriate fluently, accurately, and with proper use of accents; identifying characters, their description, and expressing a personal stance toward them; understanding connections among various events in a plot; identifying supernatural elements in the plot (in legends, tales, allegories, and imaginary stories); identifying the main characteristics of a poem (rhyme, rhythm, and tonality); and expressing a personal opinion on a literary work.

- Read texts from Jewish sources—Reading fluently, accurately, and with proper use of accents; understanding the issues, ideas, and messages; and mastering idioms, idiomatic phrases, and expressions.

- Recognize and understand the linguistic system—Recognizing letters (their sounds, names, and order); understanding basic vowel use; searching the dictionary; understanding word format; understanding extensions for male and female, and singular and plural; using terms that refer to pronouns; identifying and using verbs in different tenses and different persons; using prepositions correctly; recognizing conjunctions; perceiving relationships between synonyms and antonyms; and recognizing and using expressions, idioms, and common proverbs (vocabulary).

This curriculum has been in use since 2003 and, in 2007, the benchmarks were evaluated in light of its implementation to date. As part of this curriculum, schools have been encouraged to tailor a school-based curriculum that fits the needs of their specific student population.

The curriculum also points to the importance of initiating "reading communities" at schools, to encourage social interaction among readers. It is believed that nurturing the social aspect of reading, including regular visits to the library and reading-themed events, promotes student involvement in reading for personal growth and enjoyment.

The linguistic education curriculum for Arabic-speaking elementary schools has been in use since 2009. In general, the curriculum employs an approach to reading that is similar to the Hebrew reading curriculum, and has adopted similar benchmarks and standards. The curriculum takes into account the unique characteristics of the Arabic language, especially the fact that native Arabic-speaking children are born in a unique linguistic context called diglossia.[5] In this context, children grow up speaking a Spoken Arabic Vernacular (SAV), which is a spoken language, but later learn to read another linguistically related form, Modern Standard Arabic (MSA). The curriculum defines expected achievements (standards) for elementary school similar to the standards defined in the Hebrew curriculum.

The Arabic curriculum dedicates a special chapter to independent reading. It highlights objectives, criteria for choosing books, adapting texts for age and level, and a number of actions that encourage the love of and interest in reading as well as access to reading outside of school.

Reading Instruction in the Primary Grades

Instructional Materials

Instructional materials in Israel are produced and published by not-for-profit organizations and universities, as well as commercial agencies and publishers, but all must be approved by the Ministry of Education. In 2009, the Ministry of Education published criteria for approving instructional materials for the Hebrew and Arabic curricula.[6] The process of approval of instructional materials involves review by anonymous experts of pre-published versions to evaluate the compatibility of the content of the instructional material to the discipline at hand, the pedagogical and didactical aspects, the syllabus, and the curriculum policy. Although the criteria are curriculum-based, the approved materials are quite varied, and teachers can choose their own textbooks. In order to help teachers and principals make choices suitable for their classes, in accordance with the specific student populations and teaching styles, the Ministry of Education conducts teacher workshops for in-service teachers throughout the country at centers for teacher professional development. The ultra-orthodox schools are an exception, having their own instructional materials that are neither written according to the national curriculum nor approved by the Ministry.

In line with the new Hebrew (2003) and Arabic (2009) curricula, and with the aim of helping teachers become more proficient and confident in choosing suitable instructional materials for their classes, the Department of Curriculum Development of the Ministry of Education has prepared teaching materials for reading in primary schools. The materials have been sent to primary schools throughout the country and have been made available on the Internet. The main objective of these materials is to provide teachers with suggested reading activities that align with the prospective curriculum to promote the development of effective teaching strategies. A variety of text genres within the context of the different worlds of discourse are demonstrated in these teaching materials. A teachers' guide accompanying each activity explains the activity and classifies it according to the expected level of understanding outlined in the curriculum.

Use of Technology

Most schools have computer laboratories, but the systematic use of computers in classrooms is still not common and typical lessons in primary and lower secondary schools are not computer-supported. Nevertheless, most students are computer literate due to the wide use of personal computers at home. Students

also are expected to use their personal computers at home to communicate with their teachers and peers and to prepare assignments.

As part of professional development in ICT, teachers are able to participate in a variety of courses to acquire computer and technology skills. However, most teachers do not integrate the use of computers into their teaching; they use computers for communication purposes only.

Although there is no systematic use of computers in the teaching of reading, a national program initiated in 2011, Adapting the Educational System to the 21st Century, aims to create learning environments in which technology supports innovative pedagogy and 21st century skills. In addition, professional development workshops have been created to promote teachers' technological pedagogical content knowledge to enable them to implement computer-based learning environments, to use instructional materials effectively, and to create a learning continuum from the classroom to the home.

Role of Reading Specialists

Reading specialists from various universities in Israel are active on curriculum committees and teams developing and defining standards and benchmarks. They also act as consultants for new program and material development.

Recently, the Ministry of Education has employed reading instructors for Hebrew and Arabic to provide professional development to all primary school teachers throughout the country. The reading instructors are experienced teachers who have undergone extensive professional development led by reading specialists. Each instructor works with teachers of all grades in five primary schools. The instructor's role is to help teachers catch up and stay up to date with the latest innovations in the reading and writing programs.

Second-language Instruction

In Israel, Hebrew as a second language plays an important role in the education system. Hebrew is taught as a second language in Arabic-speaking schools, usually from the third or fourth grade. In addition, being a country of immigrants, Hebrew is taught as a second language to new immigrant students when they join a Hebrew-speaking school, where they receive special instruction in Hebrew as a second language for approximately four years. Furthermore, English is taught as a foreign language in all schools from the third or fourth grade, and Arabic is taught as a foreign language in the Jewish sector in lower-secondary schools. In this context, in most cases, instruction is provided in

a combination of the students' primary language and the foreign language being learned.

In 2006, an experimental version of the curriculum for Hebrew as a second language for Arabic-speaking students was published.[7] The underlying approach of this curriculum is the need to teach a second language for purposes of oral and written communication, and the curriculum generally takes the same approach to literacy as taken by the linguistic education curriculum for Hebrew-speaking students.

Every new immigrant student receives special instruction in Hebrew as a second language for approximately four years. Beyond this period, students receive further assistance according to their individual needs, with a focus on their integration into regular classroom study, using the linguistic education curriculum for Hebrew speakers. In 2009, a new curriculum for Hebrew as a second language for new immigrants in Grades 1–12 was published. The new version emphasizes the need to facilitate the immigrant students' acquisition of the new language in a way that allows them to integrate gradually into a regular classroom. The interaction between the first and second languages should therefore be carefully planned, and the curriculum generally takes the same approach to literacy as taken by the regular curriculum for Hebrew-speaking students.

Finally, Arabic is taught as a foreign language in Hebrew-speaking schools, beginning in the seventh grade. The curriculum for Arabic as a foreign language for Hebrew speakers was introduced in 1995 and was ratified in 2009.[8] Its main objectives are to do the following:

♦ Promote interest in the Arabic language, nurture communication skills, including comprehension (listening and reading) and production (speaking and writing);

♦ Become familiar with the Arab world; and

♦ Develop sensitivity to people from different cultural backgrounds.

The curriculum includes acquisition of words, vowels, signs, numbers, vocabulary, grammar, interpersonal discourse, knowledge of religion and culture, and use of a dictionary.

Students with Reading Difficulties

Diagnostic Testing

In recent years, early identification of reading disabilities in both Hebrew and Arabic has been emphasized in order to provide appropriate intervention. Diagnostic tests have been developed in each language according to the benchmarks defined in the curriculum, and are used by teachers to identify reading difficulties among students. In addition, teachers have various diagnostic tools, including a special diagnostic kit, to help identify reading disabilities. The regular classroom teacher carries out the diagnostic process and develops individual activities for each student within a planned remedial program. The teacher receives special training for this process and sample materials, with a focus on inclusion of all students in the classroom reading program. In addition, a school internal diagnostic test (*Amit Test*[9]) aimed at mapping students' learning skills is carried out in many lower-secondary schools in the beginning of Grade 7. The results of the tests are used to identify students with learning difficulties and to provide them with appropriate intervention programs to support learning.

Instruction for Children with Reading Difficulties

The policy for students with reading difficulties is to create a sequence of stages that enable the teacher to retain them in the regular classroom. For example, three weekly hours of instruction may be added to enhance the reading skills of disadvantaged students, though generally students are directed to special education only as a last resort. Currently, special courses are being given to future reading evaluators who will work with the classroom teacher in an attempt to ensure that students who can benefit from remedial work in their regular class will not be placed in a special education program.

Teachers and Teacher Education

Initial teacher education takes place in schools of education at universities and in colleges of education. Teacher education programs combine disciplinary and pedagogical content, typically comprise a four-year program plus a one-year supervised induction program, and result in a bachelor's degree in education. The pedagogical component of teacher education includes educational studies, research methodology, and pedagogical studies which include a supervised practicum. Since 2006, 24–30 credit hours per year of pedagogical studies are required to complement the 60 credit hours per year of disciplinary studies.[10]

The requirements for obtaining a teaching license include earning a teaching certificate and an academic degree as well as successfully completing the induction year.

Also, university graduates who did not study education, but wish to acquire a teaching certificate, can enroll in a one- or two-year course with an additional induction year. For teachers who are currently certified and wish to earn advanced certification, there is a two- or three-year program, currently operating only in ultra-orthodox colleges.

Requirements for Ongoing Professional Development in Reading for Teachers

The organizational bodies responsible for professional development are located at institutions of higher education, universities, teachers' colleges, and in professional development centers. All professional development courses currently offer credits that translate into salary increases for teachers. There are four types of professional development: Ministry-of-Education-initiated group professional development intended to facilitate policy implementation; task-oriented professional development that prepares staff for certain positions (e.g., principals, coordinators, and leaders); school-based professional development aimed at responding to school needs; and personal professional development that provides professional enrichment and further education.

Since 2009, in accordance with the New Horizon educational and professional national reforms, all primary and lower secondary school teachers are required to participate in professional development for 60 hours a year with at least half of the time dedicated to their subject domain. In addition, monthly institutional-professional development training is provided for each school (28 hours per month), with the principal and management staff deciding the content and type of training. This institutional professional development includes between two and five subject areas for each school and two to three subject areas for each teacher.

Monitoring Student Progress in Reading

Reading assessment is carried out using school-based and external tests. School-based assessments consist of specific formative and summative tasks chosen by teachers.

There is also a national feedback-monitoring mechanism that conducts regular external examinations of a national sample of students, which tests different subject areas of the curriculum in depth. The National Authority

for Measurement and Assessment in Education (known by its Hebrew acronym, RAMA) was founded in 2005 to addresses the need for professional measurement, evaluation and assessment in the education system.[11] The ideology at the heart of RAMA's activities rests on two principles: an assessment of learning and a mixture of professional solutions that integrates different components of measurement and assessment.

The first Israeli national assessment (*Meitzav,* a Hebrew acronym for Growth and Efficiency Measures of Schools) was introduced in 2002.[12] In 2007, a new format was designed by RAMA in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, and in consultation with school principals and teachers. The new format integrates internal and external assessment and promotes the implementation of a culture of measurement for learning—measurement that is intended to support the continual improvement of learning through the alignment of learning goals with the school vision, and based on the understanding that tests are not a goal in and of themselves but rather an instrument for learning.

Meitzav includes student achievement tests and questionnaires about school climate and the pedagogical setting (administered to principals, teachers and students). Schools are tested (External *Meitzav*) once every two years in mathematics, first language (Hebrew or Arabic), English, and science and technology. The External Meitzav provides a picture of student achievement in these four subjects at the system level, and informs professional bodies in the ministry and other decision-makers about educational policy issues, including issues related to school climate and pedagogical settings. The Internal *Meitzav* is administered in the intervening years and provides information to principals and teachers about education at the individual school level as a tool for planning and allocating resources, realizing student potential, improving the pedagogical climate, and enhancing the school instructional system.

The *Meitzav* assessments in mathematics, first language (Hebrew or Arabic), English, and science and technology are administered to students in the fifth and eighth grades. There also is a test of native language (Hebrew or Arabic) in the second grade. The assessments are designed to align with subject curricula and aim to examine the extent to which students in primary and lower secondary schools have achieved the level required of them according to the outcomes described in the curricula.

The matriculation examinations (*Bagrut*) are regarded as the official tests to measure the results of the 13 years of compulsory schooling in Israel.[13] The

examination process is governed by the Ministry of Education and creates a standard measure of student knowledge throughout the country. Every high school student has the option of taking the matriculation exams. These high-stakes examinations, taken in three stages at Grades 10–12, cover all subject areas taught in secondary school, and are usually used to determine access to higher education.

The *Bagrut* tests reflect the subject matter studied in Grades 10–12. The subjects studied in these grades are divided into core subjects and elective subjects, both of which are compulsory. Core subjects include mathematics and English as a foreign language. In the Hebrew sector, Hebrew (grammar and writing), literature, bible studies, history, and civics are mandatory. In the Arab sector the equivalent mandatory subjects are Arabic (grammar and literature) and history, civics, and Hebrew. Students have over 50 elective subjects to choose from, drawn from the disciplines of science, the humanities, social sciences, and the arts. Students also can choose to specialize in any compulsory core subject and be tested at the highest level of learning in that subject. This includes Hebrew and literature for the Jewish sector and Arabic and Hebrew for the Arab sector.

The final score obtained in a subject is a combination of a student's average grade on his or her school examination (upon which the yearly grade is based) and the grade obtained on the state examination. Students whose combination of subjects does not render them eligible for a matriculation certificate are awarded a School Completion Certificate; however, students may complete the required examinations to acquire a Matriculation Certificate even after graduation.

Impact and Use of PIRLS

Israel has participated in PIRLS since its inception in 2001. PIRLS results impact the continuous process of consolidating reading measures of student achievement in Grades 2 and 5, in order to better align the national *Meitzav* assessments and PIRLS. PIRLS provides clear evidence for the necessity of Hebrew and Arabic lingual knowledge. The curriculum for each language contains principles and practical aspects that are relevant to the enhancement of writing processes and for spoken discourse. The majority of these are reflected in the *Meitzav* assessments.

Although Israel integrated the conceptual framework for reading comprehension of PIRLS into its curricula, the Hebrew and Arabic curricula also focus on writing, vocabulary, speaking, and grammar; and all the assessment

measures are based on these skills. In addition, the curricula for both Hebrew and Arabic for primary education encompass texts of original literature and the traditional, heritage resources of each religion. For example, the primary education Hebrew curriculum includes texts of original literature that have Jewish social and cultural characteristics, and includes typical Jewish texts like blessings, prayers, and texts from the bible. The curriculum for Arabic language encompasses typical Muslim and Christian realms. However, the adoption of national and international assessment standards for reading comprehension contributed to the development of instructional materials that help students gain experience in reading texts from both the literary and informational realms. Further goals in language teaching include:

♦ Completion of the reading acquisition process for disadvantaged students by Grades 3–4 by providing additional and small-group instruction;

♦ Emphasis on reading for pleasure to provide students with the aesthetic experience of reading books;

♦ Expansion of students' primary language vocabulary, based on the premise that this is the necessary foundation for enhancing written and spoken language skills; and

♦ Improvement of writing processes, so students will be able to use writing wisely for their academic and social needs.

The Ministry of Education also places special emphasis on verbal expression, developing linguistic meta-knowledge, incorporating literary proficiency in other subject areas, and gaining personal experience in performing literacy tasks in class and at home. For achieving these aims, instructional materials and assessment means have been developed and published.

References

1 Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports. (2004). *Facts and figures* (p. 20). Jerusalem: State of Israel, Ministry of Education, Economics & Budgeting Administration.

2 New Horizon. (2009). *Once in a lifetime opportunity for education*. Retrieved from http://www.ofek-hadash.org.il/

3 The Curriculum Department of the Ministry of Education. (2003). *Language education, Hebrew language, literature and culture for the elementary school curriculum*. Jerusalem: Author.

4 The Curriculum Department of the Ministry of Education. (2009). *Language education, Arabic language, literature and culture for the elementary school curriculum.* Jerusalem: Author.

5 Saiegh-Haddad, E. (2004). The impact of phonemic and lexical distance on the phonological analysis of words and pseudowords in a diglossic context. *Applied Psychlinguistics*, 25, 495–512.

6 Ministry of Education, Department of Textbooks (in Hebrew). (1996). Jerusalem: Author. Retrieved from http://cms.education.gov.il/EducationCMS/Units/Mazkirut_Pedagogit/sifreilimud/Tfasim/

7 The Curriculum Department of the Ministry of Education. (2007). *Hebrew as a second language, curriculum for Arab schools.* Jerusalem: Author.

8 The Curriculum Department of the Ministry of Education. (2009). *Arabic for Hebrew-speaking students curriculum for Hebrew-speaking schools* (in Hebrew). Jerusalem: Author. Retrieved from http://cms.education.gov.il/EducationCMS/Units/Tochniyot_Limudim/LashonAravit/AlHatochnit/MismachTocnit.htm

9 Ministry of Education. (n.d.). *Amit test* (in Hebrew). Retrieved from http://www.mchp.gov.il/School/tal

10 Ariav Committee Report. (2006). *Guidelines for teacher education in higher education institutions in Israel* (in Hebrew). Jerusalem: Council for Higher Education.

11 Ministry of Education, the National Authority for Educational Measurement and Evaluation (RAMA). (2006) *Publications*. Retrieved from http://cms.education.gov.il/EducationCMS/Units/Rama/MaagareyYeda/Publication_English.htm

12 Beller, M. (2004). *Assessment for learning: From theory to practice.* Jerusalem: The National Authority for Measurement and Evaluation in Education (Rama) publications. Retrieved from http://cms.education.gov.il/EducationCMS/Units/Rama/MaagareyYeda/Publication_English.htm

13 Ministry of Education, Examinations Administration. (2008). *The matriculation examinations* (in Hebrew). Retrieved from http://cms.education.gov.il/EducationCMS/Units/Exams/BchinotBagrut

Italy

PIRLS 2011

Fabio Alivernini
Ines Di Leo
Sara Manganelli

INVALSI—National Institute for the Educational Evaluation of Instruction and Training

Language and Literacy

The official language of Italy is Italian, which is used for education and training. In some areas of the country, however, the local language is officially authorized for use in education. There are also twelve minority languages that are recognized and safeguarded by the state: Albanian, Catalan, German, Greek, Slovenian, Croatian, French, Provencal, Occitan, Friulan, Ladin, and Sardinian.[1,2] To ensure the learning of these minority languages, Italian schools have the autonomy to determine their own approaches to teaching the language and cultural traditions of local communities, though this also depends on requests from students' parents. In addition, some particular safeguards exist in regions with a special status, such as Trentino-Alto Adige, and Valle d'Aosta. The Statute of Trentino-Alto Adige (D.P.R. of August 31st 1972, number 670), for example, requires that instruction in schools in the province of Bolzano be conducted in German for students who have German as their mother tongue, by teachers whose mother tongue also is German.[3] Furthermore, in primary schools, starting from the second or the third year, second language instruction is mandatory and is taught by teachers who are native speakers. In state-funded schools in the region of Valle d'Aosta, the Statute of the Valle d'Aosta (Constitutional Law of February 26th 1948, number 4, article 39) provides that the number of hours per week dedicated to French instruction be equal to those dedicated to teaching Italian, and that certain other subjects also may be taught in French.[4]

The number of non-Italian students enrolled in Italy's school system has been steadily increasing over the years. This increased enrollment has meant an increasing commitment by educational institutions towards using extracurricular activities to teach the Italian language to these students.

TIMSS & PIRLS
International Study Center
Lynch School of Education, Boston College

IEA

PIRLS 2011 ENCYCLOPEDIA
ITALY

Overview of the Education System

In recent years, the Italian school system has undergone a number of reforms that have led to its current structure and organization.

In 1999, the School Autonomy Reform introduced a degree of decentralization that delegated a number of important administrative and management functions to schools.[5] Importantly, it gave schools a high level of responsibility in broadening the range of teaching courses and extracurricular activities offered, defining curricula, organizing school timetables, and placing students into groups with similar ability levels, according to the general national guidelines. Currently, Italian schools have organizational autonomy for improving staff and quality of teaching services, and for establishing teaching methodologies, academic programs, courses, and extracurricular activities. Schools also have a degree of autonomy for research and development, with the aim of making schools laboratories for the continuous advancement of teaching. Thus, Italian schools may expand their educational offerings to account for the local cultural, social, and economic context and to ensure that education corresponds to the real needs of students, families, and the local area. To guide this local decision-making, various school governing bodies contribute to school's individual Annual Education Plans.

The *Curriculum Guidelines for the Preprimary School and the First Cycle of Education* provides guidelines for planning and implementing teaching activities, and outlines the curriculum-planning framework to which schools must adhere.[6] A complement to this document (for students ages 14–19) is the *Cultural and Educational Reference Points and Standards and Basic Citizenship Skills Specific to Upper-secondary School.*[7]

The most recent school reform, starting from 2008, has reorganized the education system, which currently is as follows: [8, 9, 10]

♦ Preprimary education—This stage is offered for children ages 3–6, but is not compulsory.

♦ First cycle of education—This cycle lasts eight years and is divided into two levels: primary education (lasting five years) for students ages 6–11; and lower secondary education (lasting three years) for students ages 11–14.

♦ Second cycle of education—This cycle includes two possible types: upper secondary and initial vocational training. Upper secondary education is under the jurisdiction of the Ministry for Education, Universities and Research (MIUR), lasts five years, and is for students ages 14–19. These

schools include lyceums, technical institutes, and vocational training institutes. There are six different types of lyceum, eleven different types of technical institutes, and six types of vocational training institutes. Initial vocational training, financed by regional authorities in regional and private vocational training centers, lasts three years and is for young people (ages 14–16) who have completed the first cycle of education.

Compulsory education in Italy lasts ten years, from ages 6–16, and covers the first cycle of education (primary school and lower secondary school) and the first two years of the second cycle of education. The last two years of compulsory education (from ages 14–16) can either take place in an upper-secondary school or a regional vocational training center. In addition, everyone in Italy has the right and duty to study for at least twelve years within a school or vocational training institute before age 18, until they gain at least a three-year vocational education qualification, which allow students access to second-level vocational courses.

Passing the upper secondary school state examination is required for access to higher education in universities and courses of AFAM (Higher Education in Art and Music). MIUR determines specific admissions criteria for individual universities and AFAM institutions.

Language/Reading Curriculum in the Fourth Grade

Each school uses the *Curriculum Guidelines for the Preprimary School and the First Cycle of Education* to plan a teaching program that will be as responsive as possible to the needs of individual students and that will pay particular attention to the continuity of education from ages 3–14.[11] These curriculum guidelines provide the framework for instruction, evaluation, and implementation of programs appropriate to school and student needs.

Reading Policy

Curriculum guidelines emphasize the importance of learning the Italian language with a particular emphasis on reading. They provide objectives for developing autonomy in comprehension and the use of texts with varied themes, aims, and levels of complexity. The guidelines specify reading as having a dual function—it provides opportunities for socialization and exchange of ideas and opinions, as well as personal opportunities for reflection, research, and maturation. The strategic objective of reading, especially in primary school, is the development of the cognitive processes underlying comprehension in

addition to reading rules and techniques. From this perspective, reading is both a part of learning and linked to personal pleasure and individual needs.

Summary of National Curriculum

In primary school (Grades 1–5) and lower secondary school (Grades 6–8), basics are established and necessary skills are developed for learning, both in school and throughout life. The main goals of primary school are the following:

♦ Promoting the development of individual personality, while respecting individual differences;

♦ Allowing the acquisition and development of basic knowledge and skills;

♦ Encouraging acquisition of communication skills in Italian and in another European Union language;

♦ Providing the basic skills for applying a scientific approach to observing nature, its phenomena, and its laws;

♦ Enhancing interpersonal and orientation skills; and

♦ Educating young citizens to respect social conventions.

The role of the school in the first cycle of education is to guide students in attributing meaning to their experience, promoting a conscious practice of active citizenship, and acquiring the most basic elements of Italian language and culture. The primary school curriculum (as well as that for lower secondary school) includes various disciplines grouped into three main areas:

♦ The linguistic/artistic/expressive area—This area includes Italian, another European Union language, music, physical education, sports, and art;

♦ The mathematical/scientific/technological area—This area includes mathematics, natural and experimental sciences, and technology; and

♦ The historical/geographical area—This area includes history and geography.

The curriculum guidelines for each discipline identify the skills that should be developed by the end of primary school, ideally leading to the integral development of the student. The following objectives in Italian language are what students should be able to achieve throughout primary school (Grades 1–5):

♦ Participate in communicative exchanges with classmates and teachers (conversation, discussion, and written correspondence) by means

of simple, clear, and relevant messages and with a tone that is as contextually appropriate as possible;

♦ Understand various kinds of texts and their purposes (e.g., functional, entertainment, and academic), identify a text's overall meaning or principal information, and employ specific reading strategies according to different purposes;

♦ Read various kinds of children's books aloud expressively, or silently and independently, and be able to formulate simple personal opinions concerning these books;

♦ Write texts (e.g., imaginative, academic, and informational) at school and be able to elaborate on texts by manipulating, paraphrasing, completing, and transforming them (i.e., by editing and rewriting);

♦ Gradually develop study skills by extrapolating information from written texts on a topic and memorizing and presenting it orally; and acquire the basics of specific terminology, gather personal and collective impressions, and account for opinions (one's own or others); and

♦ Engage in linguistic reflection on the written and spoken word, both by reading and listening; and understand the ongoing operations in communication and the different choices involved in the variety of contexts in which language is used.

For each discipline, learning goals also are defined contextually at the end of the fifth year of primary school. These goals are essential for developing the skills and objectives specified by the curriculum guidelines. There are four goals for teaching the Italian language: listening and speaking, reading, writing, and reflecting upon language. Specifically, the following goals for reading are what students should be able to achieve throughout primary school:

♦ Read narrative and descriptive texts, both realistic and fantasy, and distinguishing literary fiction from reality;

♦ Use information from illustrations, images, and captions to learn about the text before reading;

♦ Read and compare information from different texts to learn about a certain topic and find interesting points about which to speak or write;

♦ Search for information in texts of different nature and origin for practical or cognitive purposes, while applying simple techniques to aid comprehension (e.g., highlighting, annotating information, and making maps and diagrams);

♦ Follow written instructions in order to regulate one's behavior, accomplish a task, or to create a procedure;

♦ Read short and simple literary, narrative, and poetic texts, identify the essential characteristics that distinguish them (e.g., verses, rhyme, repetition of sounds, or particular use of words and their meanings), and express simple personal opinions on them; and

♦ Read a well-known text aloud and, in the case of dialogues read with other pupils, and learn to speak at the right moment, respecting pauses and varying the tone of one's voice.

Using these goals, each school prepares its curriculum within its Annual Education Plan, in accordance with the aims and objectives for the development of skills and learning specified by the curriculum guidelines. The curriculum guidelines also propose some fundamental methodological criteria for constructing the learning environment. These criteria emphasize active learning methods based on exploration, discovery, cooperative learning, and learning by doing, as well as teaching in a laboratory and implementing appropriate policies regarding diversity.

Reading Instruction in the Primary Grades

Instructional Materials

Currently in Italian schools, the textbook is the most widely used teaching tool through which students embark upon their path of knowledge and learning. Textbooks are chosen by the teachers' council, following consultation with the class council. As with every other instructional tool, the choice of textbooks must be consistent and coherent with the Annual Education Plan (Article 4 of the School Autonomy Reform).[12]

Primary school textbooks usually are divided into interdisciplinary learning units, which include sections with exercise cards and additional learning activities, in addition to reading and writing worksheets for reinforcing linguistic capacities and skills. Textbooks often specify learning objectives and the appropriate criteria for measuring and testing student progress. Teaching materials on specific themes and issues also are used frequently in primary schools. These materials are predominantly multidisciplinary and are useful for supplementing, updating, and customizing textbooks. In addition, teachers use other tools to teach reading, such as posters, charts (mind maps), pre-made illustrations, or illustrations created by students on display in the classroom.

Almost every school in Italy has its own library and, in some cases, there is even a library for each class. Libraries are managed and organized by teachers, volunteers (often parents), and librarians employed by various institutions.

Use of Technology

In recent years, significant investments have been made in the Italian school system to promote and develop technology use in education. There have been various information and communication technology (ICT) interventions at the national level that aim to promote and disseminate "best practices" for using technology. These interventions have included students, but mostly have involved teachers (e.g., ICT teacher training organized nationally).

In 2009, the Digital School Plan was launched to provide funding to state primary and secondary schools for purchasing technology kits to aid classroom instruction.[13] These kits include a digital whiteboard, a video projector, and a computer. Many Italian schools have a computer room, often with an Internet connection and sometimes a portable or installed Interactive Multimedia Whiteboard (IMW). The IMW is a white panel the size of a normal blackboard that is connected to a video projector and a computer. Any writing or drawing on the whiteboard can be saved on a computer, printed, placed on the school website, or sent by e-mail to colleagues or students unable to attend class. The technology stores all writing, making it easy to keep track of past lessons and their sequence, including all interventions, additions, and comments made by teachers and students. The IMW is particularly useful for students with specific learning disorders and for the integration of non-EU students, hospitalized students, and students with restricted freedom of movement. Because CD-ROMs accompany textbooks, almost all are compatible with modern technologies and often supply interactive games that can be used in conjunction with the IMW.

Role of Reading Specialists

Although reading specialists usually do not play an important role in ordinary instructional activities, they may be employed to help students with disabilities.

Second-language Instruction

An important reality in Italian schools is that non-native Italian citizens are increasingly common and widespread. In the 2010–11 school year, non-native Italian students comprised 9 percent of all students—the highest percentage to date—although 52.9 percent of students with foreign citizenship enrolled in primary school that year had been born in Italy.[14]

The law provides that schools may exercise their autonomy to employ specific individualized interventions for groups of students to help them learn the Italian language.[15] Wherever possible, this should be done using the school's professional resources to provide additional intensive Italian language courses or to implement intensive Italian language instruction through specific projects, including additional teaching activities to enrich educational offerings.

Students with Reading Difficulties

Diagnostic Testing

The Law of October 8, 2010, number 170, recognizes dyslexia as a specific learning disorder, and schools of all types and levels are responsible for identifying suspected cases of dyslexia and notifying the student's family.[16] This notification does not, however, constitute a diagnosis; an official diagnosis must be made by a specialist from the National Health Service or by similarly accredited organizations, and must be communicated by the family to the student's school.

Instruction for Children with Reading Difficulties

Within the limits of financial resources, Law of October 8, 2010, number 170 provides for specific educational interventions and teaching support activities for students with dyslexia.[17] These primarily include individual and personalized tutoring, compensatory measures such as alternative means and tools for learning (e.g., information technology), and the possibility of exemption from some tasks that are not essential to quality learning of the concepts.

Teachers and Teacher Education

Teacher Education Specific to Reading

From 2001–09, a degree in Primary Education Sciences was required for primary school teachers. Any type of upper secondary school degree, along with passing an admissions test, was required to gain access to this university program, which lasted for four years and covered about 20 different subjects. The first two years of these programs comprised common subjects, upon completion of which trainee teachers could choose between a preprimary and primary school specialization.

In 2009, substantial changes were made to initial teacher education for teachers in all school types and levels. Entering the Primary Education Sciences program still requires passing an admissions test, and a limited number of students are accepted. However, since 2009, a five-year one-cycle degree in

Primary Education Sciences is now mandatory to become a primary school teacher. Students also must participate in an "active training internship," which is a compulsory training period (lasting 600 hours and corresponding to 24 university credits) starting from the second year of the program that must be completed in accredited schools. The internship is a critical part of pre-service teacher education and aims to help students acquire professional skills. The degree program also includes specialized courses for acquiring English language skills, and computer skills (e.g., the ability to use new multimedia technologies). In addition, for the first time, the 2009 reform has focused specific attention on the needs of students with disabilities, and all future teachers receive basic training in teaching and integrating students with special needs.

Requirements for Ongoing Professional Development in Reading for Teachers
Primary school teachers are not required to take a specialized course for teaching reading, and a specialization in teaching reading does not exist. Very often, however, universities, MIUR, and other accredited bodies offer master's degree or training courses, and specific professional development courses to develop teachers' skills and provide them with innovative and specialized methods for teaching reading.

Monitoring Student Progress in Reading

Students' knowledge of Italian language currently is being evaluated in national assessments at the second and fifth years of primary school (Grades 2 and 5), the first and third grades of lower secondary school (Grades 6 and 8), and the second and fifth years of upper secondary school (Grades 10 and 13). This examination assesses reading in terms of comprehension, interpretation, reflection, and written text evaluation skills, as well as the knowledge and grammatical skills dictated by the curriculum guidelines for each school level.[18] The Italian language test includes two components: the first evaluates reading skills, and the second evaluates grammatical skills (with the exception of the test for the second year of primary school).

Impact and Use of PIRLS

Italy has participated in all the three cycles of PIRLS (2001, 2006, and 2011), and Italian students' average score on the literacy scale in PIRLS 2001 and 2006 was significantly above the international average. Compared to the PISA 2006 outcome, which showed the achievement of 15-year-old Italian students to be significantly below the international average, the PIRLS results were surprising

for educational researchers and administrators.[19] However, despite these differing results, PIRLS 2006 findings have not been widely reported in the media. In order to promote dissemination, the *PIRLS 2011 Framework* has been translated into Italian, and a national report based on PIRLS 2006 data was produced.

Suggested Readings

Alivernini, F., Manganelli, S., Vinci, E., & Di Leo, I. (2010). An evaluation of factors influencing reading literacy across Italian 4th grade students. *Journal of US-China Education Review 7*(5).

Cipollone, P., & Sestito, P. (2010). *Il capitale umano* [Human capital]. Bologna: Il Mulino.

Istituto Nazionale per la Valutazione del Sistema Educativo di Istruzione e di Formazione (INVALSI). (2011). *Gli esiti del Servizio nazionale di valutazione 2011 e della Prova nazionale 2011* [The outcomes of the national assessment of 2011 and the 2011 national trial]. Retrieved from http://www.invalsi.it/invalsi/istituto.php?page=rapporti

References

1   Costituzione della Repubblica Italiana, *Gazzetta Ufficiale n. 298* del 27 Dicembre 1947 (1947). Retrieved from http://www.governo.it/Governo/Costituzione/CostituzioneRepubblicaItaliana.pdf

2   Legge del 15 Dicembre 1999, n. 482, "*Norme in materia di tutela delle minoranze linguistiche storiche*" [Norms about the protection of linguistic minorities] (1999). *Gazzetta Ufficiale n. 297* del 20 Dicembre 1999. Retrieved from http://www.camera.it/parlam/leggi/99482l.htm

3   Decreto del Presidente della Repubblica del 31 Agosto 1972, n. 670, "*Approvazione del testo unico delle leggi costituzionali concernenti lo Statuto speciale per il Trentino-Alto Adige*" [Approbation of the text about the constitutional laws on the special status of Trentino-Alto Adige] (1972). *Gazzetta Ufficiale n. 301* del 20 Novembre 1972. Retrieved from http://www.giurcost.org/fonti/dpr67072.htm

4   Legge Costituzionale del 26 Febbraio 1948, n.4, Articolo 39, "Statuto speciale per la Valle d'Aosta" [Special status of Valle d'Aosta] (1948). *Gazzetta Ufficiale n. 62* del 13 Marzo 1948. Retrieved from http://www.consiglio.regione.vda.it/statuto/statuto_i.asp

5   Decreto del Presidente della Repubblica del 8 Marzo 1999, n. 275, "*Regolamento recante norme in materia di autonomia delle istituzioni scolastiche*" [Regulation on the school autonomy] (1999). *Gazzetta Ufficiale n. 186* del 10 Agosto 1999. Retrieved from http://archivio.pubblica.istruzione.it/normativa/1999/index99.shtml#dpr

6   Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione. (2007). Decreto Ministeriale del 31 Luglio 2007, "*Scuola dell'infanzia e primo ciclo di istruzione–Indicazioni per il curricolo: fase sperimentale*" [Curriculum guidelines for the pre-primary school and the first cycle of education]. *Gazzetta Ufficiale n. 228* del 1 Ottobre 2007. Retrieved from http://archivio.pubblica.istruzione.it/normativa/2007/dm_310707.shtml

7   Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione. (2007). Decreto Ministeriale del 22 Agosto 2007, n. 139, "*Regolamento recante norme in materia di adempimento dell'obbligo di istruzione*" [Regulation on compulsory education]. *Gazzetta Ufficiale n. 202* del 31 Agosto 2007. Retrieved from http://archivio.pubblica.istruzione.it/normativa/2007/dm139_07.shtml

TIMSS & PIRLS
International Study Center
Lynch School of Education, Boston College

8   Legge del 30 Ottobre 2008, n. 169, "*Disposizioni urgenti in materia di istruzione e università*" [Urgent measures about instruction and university] (2008). *Gazzetta Ufficiale n. 256* del 31 Ottobre 2008. Retrieved from http://www.camera.it/parlam/leggi/08169l.htm

9   Decreto del Presidente della Repubblica del 20 Marzo 2009, n. 89, "*Revisione dell'assetto ordinamentale, organizzativo e didattico della scuola dell'infanzia e del primo ciclo di istruzione*" [Reform of the organization of the pre-primary school and of the first cycle of education] (2009). *Gazzetta Ufficiale n. 162* del 15 Luglio 2009. Retrieved from http://www.istruzione.it/alfresco/d/d/workspace/SpacesStore/a406163b-a77d-49f5-9bb5-3851c781f2c1/dpr89_2009.pdf

10 Decreto del Presidente della Repubblica del 15 Marzo 2010, n. 87 e 88, "*Regolamenti di riordino dei licei, degli istituti tecnici e degli istituti professionali*" [Regulation about the reform of lyceums, technical institutes and vocational training institutes] (2010). *Gazzetta Ufficiale n. 137* del 15 Giugno 2010.

11   Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione. (2007). Decreto Ministeriale del 22 Agosto 2007, n. 139*, "Regolamento recante norme in materia di adempimento dell'obbligo di istruzione*" [Regulation on compulsory education]. *Gazzetta Ufficiale n. 202* del 31 Agosto 2007. Retrieved from http://archivio.pubblica.istruzione.it/normativa/2007/dm139_07.shtml

12 Decreto del Presidente della Repubblica del 8 Marzo 1999, n. 275, art. 4 *"Regolamento recante norme in materia di autonomia delle istituzioni scolastiche*" [Regulation on the school autonomy] (1999). *Gazzetta Ufficiale n. 186* del 10 Agosto 1999. Retrieved from http://archivio.pubblica.istruzione.it/normativa/1999/index99.shtml#dpr

13 Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione. (2009). *Piano scuola digitale* [Digital school plan]. Retrieved from http://www.istruzione.it/web/istruzione/piano_scuola_digitale

14 Fondazione ISMU. (2011). *Alunni con cittadinanza non italiana. Rapporto nazionale A.S. 2010/2011* [Pupils without Italian citizenship. National report 2010/2011]. Quaderni ISMU, 4. Retrieved from http://www.ismu.org/upload/files/4ed629805d6a2.pdf

15 Decreto del Presidente della Repubblica del 31 Agosto 1999, n. 394, *"Regolamento recante norme di attuazione del testo unico delle disposizioni concernenti la disciplina dell'immigrazione e norme sulla condizione dello straniero*" [Regulation about the discipline of immigration and norms about the status of the foreigner] (1999). *Gazzetta Ufficiale n. 258* del 3 Novembre 1999. Retrieved from http://www.istruzione.it/alfresco/d/d/workspace/SpacesStore/1ebac8e2-3ed5-49cd-8427-926c4e705122/dpr394_1999.pdf

16 Legge del 8 Ottobre 2010, n. 170, *"Nuove norme in materia di disturbi specifici di apprendimento in ambito scolastico*" [New norms about specific learning disorders in schools] (2010). *Gazzetta Ufficiale n. 244* del 18 Ottobre 2010. Retrieved from http://www.istruzione.it/alfresco/d/d/workspace/SpacesStore/34ca798c-2cac-4a6f-b360-13443c2ad456/legge170_10.pdf

17   Ibid.

18 Istituto Nazionale per la Valutazione del Sistema Educativo di Istruzione e di Formazione (INVALSI). (2011). *Quadro di riferimento della prova di Italiano* [Framework for the Italian language exam]. Unpublished manuscript. Retrieved from http://www.invalsi.it/snv2012/documenti/QDR/QdR_Italiano.pdf

19 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2007). *PISA 2006 science competencies for tomorrow's world.* Paris: Author.

Kuwait

Professor Nouriya Al Rumi
Professor Saad Masslouh
Kuwait University, Faculty of Arts

Professor M. Taher Alhemsy
Public Authority of Applied Education and Training

Mr. Abul Futuh Salman
Ministry of Education, Consultant, Minister's Bureau

Language and Literacy

According to a 2008 estimate, Kuwait's population is 3.3 million; Kuwaiti citizens number 1 million of the total, while different nationalities that came to Kuwait seeking employment opportunities account for all other residents.[1]

Arabic is the official language in Kuwait and the medium of instruction in all public and some private schools. In bilingual private schools, both Arabic and English are the languages of instruction.

Education in the State of Kuwait represents one of the top priorities for development. The 1962 Kuwaiti Constitution guarantees state education, reflecting the belief that education is a fundamental right for all citizens and is an important means of protecting youth from physical, moral, and spiritual neglect. Since the 1966–67 school year, the Compulsory Education Law has made general education compulsory and free for all Kuwaiti males and females between ages 6–15.[2] Public education also is provided free for some non-Kuwaiti children—for example, children of teachers or professors, Kuwaiti mothers, or Gulf State nationals. In 1981, the Illiteracy Eradication Act made the state responsible for providing continuing education for adults under the supervision of various governmental educational entities: [3] currently, the Ministry of Education supervises literacy and adult education in public schools; Kuwait University and the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training oversee their own Centers for Community Service and Continuing Education; and the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs supervises Arabic, religious, and Quranic studies.[4] Presently, the proportion of spending on education ranges

between 6.2 and 8.3 percent of GDP (in 2008, total GDP was approximately 38.731 billion Kuwaiti dinars).[5]

The State of Kuwait always has fostered and developed means for cultural advancement. In 1973, the National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters was established to promote and sponsor cultural events, activities, and art forms, such as the annual Al Qurain Festival and the Theatre Cultural Festival. The Council also has published several specialized periodicals on culture and arts, such as the World of Knowledge (*Aalam Al-Ma'rifa*) series, the Universal Culture Journal (*Majallat Al Thaqaafa Al Aalamiyyah*), the Universal Creativity (*Ibda'aat 'Aalamiyyah*) series, and the Universal Theater (*Al Masrah Al 'Aalamiy*) series, in addition to many other non-periodical publications. The National Council also is responsible for granting the annual State Incentive Award in the Arts, Literature, Social and Humanity Sciences.[6]

In 1976, the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS) was established by an Amiri decree to promote cultural and scientific development. H.H. the Amir of the State of Kuwait chairs the foundation, which provides financial support for scientific research, grants awards for researchers and scientists, and supervises the publication of *Majallat Al- 'Uloom*, the Arabic international edition of *Scientific American*. In its efforts to support cultural literacy, the Ministry of Information issues two prominent cultural magazines: *AL-Arabi* Magazine, published monthly, and *Kuwait Magazine*, in addition to dozens of specialized and general cultural magazines.

Overview of the Education System

Kuwait is located in the Middle East on the Arabian Gulf, in the northeastern part of the Arabian Peninsula, and has a total area of 17,818 sq. km. Kuwait borders the Arabian Gulf to the east, Saudi Arabia to the south and southwest, and Iraq to the north.

The Ministry of Education manages the centralized educational system in Kuwait. The Minister chairs the Supreme Council of Education, the supreme authority mandated to propose, create, and approve implementation strategies for all educational plans and policies (Amiri Decree No. 4 of 1987 and Amiri Decree No. 99 of 1988).[7] The Minister also heads the Kuwaiti National Committee for Education, Science and Culture. This committee is responsible for promoting cooperation with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in all aspects of education, science, and culture. The Committee fosters and supports UNESCO's educational programs

to promote human rights, peace, and international understanding, and to combat racism in all its forms.[8]

The Undersecretary of the Ministry of Education and ten assistant undersecretaries report to the Minister. Each assistant undersecretary is responsible of one of the following sectors: Planning and Information, Educational Development, General Education, Educational Research and Curricula, Private Education, Qualitative Education, Student Activities, Financial Affairs, Administrative Affairs, and Educational Establishments.

The Assistant Undersecretary for General Education supervises six educational districts (one for each administrative region in Kuwait). A general director heads each educational district, supervising the educational process in public schools and ensuring implementation of educational plans and curricula in the region. The Assistant Undersecretary for Private Education manages the General Administration of Private Education, which is led by a general director who monitors educational process and implementation of Ministry plans and programs in private schools. The Assistant Undersecretary for Qualitative Education supervises two other departments: the Administration of Religious Education, which manages education in religious institutes; and the Administration of Special Education, which supervises education in special education schools.[9]

There are three basic levels of education in Kuwait: primary (ages 6–10, Grades 1–5), intermediate (ages 11–14, Grades 6–9), and secondary (ages 15–17, Grades 10–12). Two years of preprimary education also are available.

The education system includes the following types of schooling: public government education, adult and literacy education, religious institutions, and special education schools. In addition, there are private Arabic schools and foreign schools (e.g., English, American, French, Indian, Pakistani, Armenian, Iranian, Filipino, and bilingual schools).

In the 2007–08 school year, the teacher-pupil ratio was 1:7 at the primary education level. During that same year, average school enrollment did not exceed 86 percent of the total population between the ages of 6 and 24, according to the Five Year Plan of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development (2009–14).[10]

Language/Reading Curriculum in the Fourth Grade[11]

Reading, writing, speaking, and listening are the four basic skills in the Arabic language curriculum. The methodology of Arabic language instruction strives

to achieve a balanced integration in teaching the four language skills. The instructional time devoted to Arabic language comprises ten 45-minute lessons per week in Grades 1–2, nine lessons per week in Grades 3–4, and six lessons per week in Grades 5–6. Of these lessons, nearly 25 percent are spent on reading instruction. Sixth grade Kuwaiti students participating in PIRLS 2011 had received five full years of Arabic language instruction at the time of assessment.

According to the General Education Plan, students acquire basic language skills in Grades 1–3. In these grades, attention is directed to reading and listening comprehension for understanding the contents of the texts read, and upon completion of Grade 3, students are able to read the assigned lessons in the class textbook and other similar texts. From Grade 4, one lesson per week is devoted to visiting the school library, and students are asked to read a text and then share what they have read with other students in the class.

The Ministry of Education encourages and supports free reading starting from Grade 3, as well as teaching reading skills and training students in listening comprehension. Accordingly, the Ministry adopted the establishment of class libraries with 200 titles in Arabic and 100 titles in English in each classroom for Grades 1–9 and began implementing this program in the 2010–11 school year.[12] These libraries contain numerous supplementary reading texts of high quality, in terms of content and artistic design, that cater to the needs of particular age groups. To date, the program has been limited to one library for each grade instead of one per each classroom.

Reading Instruction in the Primary Grades[13]

The first way to help students improve their reading skills is to provide topics with which they can interact and which suit their age and interests, thus introducing a distinct linguistic repertoire.

With this in mind, teachers can use several approaches to teach reading. The progressive synthetic approach starts with individual letters and then integrates them into syllables to form words and sentences.[14] Alternatively, the holistic-analytical method begins with teaching larger language units of familiar vocabulary strung in sentences, and students then extract words by correlating them with experience and prior knowledge. The integration method combines both synthetic and analytical approaches (i.e., the micro and the macro levels), and has been used with the textbook for the first grade.

Instructional Materials

The main objectives of reading instruction in general education are to develop text comprehension and appreciation of the author's values and principles, as well as to enable students to recognize strengths and weaknesses in the topic's presentation. It also aims to familiarize students with the culture and civilization of their homeland while acquainting them with the cultures of other nations in an objective manner free from intolerance or extremism.

The basic skill that students must achieve by the end of the primary school curriculum (Grade 5) is to apply analytical silent reading in understanding a text comprising four to five paragraphs (30 sentences). Students should be able to determine the text's main idea, supplemental ideas, and the author's intention. Further, students are required to conduct a critical analysis of the text by comparing the characters in order to select their favorite protagonist, express their opinions through supporting evidence, and appreciate new experiences gained from reading the text.

The curriculum provides approximately 30 literary topics relative to poetry and prose that teachers can discuss with students in class to promote comprehension by identifying main and supplementary ideas. Extracurricular activities can be encouraged by assigning supplementary reading.

Use of Technology

Teachers use computers, overhead projectors, audiotapes, drawings, pictures, and smart screens to provide some reading instruction, especially in Grades 1–4.

Role of Reading Specialists

There are no reading specialists in Kuwait; Arabic teachers are responsible for teaching reading skills and assisting struggling students in overcoming problems by providing technical supervision and guidance. The curriculum plan requires teachers to develop students' interests in free reading, offer incentives, and present models of reading.

Second-language Instruction

The native language of students in public schools is Arabic. There are local dialects that differ from the mother tongue and students use these dialects for speaking and listening in and outside of school.

Students with Reading Difficulties

In a recent study of the causes of reading difficulties among primary school students in the State of Kuwait, Al Ajmi recommends the following measures to improve reading skills among students at this stage: [15]

♦ Screening students' abilities and literacy skills at the beginning of primary school and throughout the following years in order to assess the level of their acquired skills;

♦ Changing teaching methods to suit students' age groups and language competence;

♦ Providing professional development for teachers in order to introduce modern methods of diagnosing students with reading difficulties;

♦ Designing special programs for the development of language skills in students with reading difficulties;

♦ Modifying the curriculum to be consistent with students' ages and interests;

♦ Using appropriate teaching aids in teaching Arabic language; and

♦ Raising awareness among parents regarding the importance of Arabic language and of monitoring their children's language level.

Moreover, it is equally important to identify the educational interests of students. According to the theory of multiple intelligences, teaching should account for the areas in which students excel, such as intelligence in sports, music, language or other types of intelligence discussed by Howard Gardner.

Diagnostic Testing

Reading difficulties are identified using teachers' notes about students, which are linked to student writing abilities and which often reflect student reading difficulties.

Instruction for Children with Reading Difficulties

Students with reading difficulties enroll in a remedial program administered by the class teacher in collaboration with the Head of Department and the Technical Supervisor of Arabic. Supplementary classes address language deficiencies and reading difficulties using supplementary reading materials and language exercises. The technical staff responsible for Arabic language instruction in the Ministry of Education conduct teacher education courses that focus on treating reading and writing difficulties, but there is not enough such

training to serve all teachers in Kuwait. Specialized organizations and programs also specifically provide support for students with dyslexia.

Teachers and Teacher Education

Teacher Education Specific to Reading

Before teachers begin working in schools, they must earn a bachelor's degree in education from the Department of Education at the University of Kuwait or from the College of Basic Education at the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training. Prospective teachers take courses on professional preparation in teaching techniques, taking into consideration modern methods in teaching the four Arabic language skills (reading, writing, speaking, and listening); however, teacher education courses do not focus solely on teaching reading skills, strategies, and their applications. Because of the need for Arabic language teachers, some teachers are employed after obtaining a bachelor's degree in Arabic Language and Literature from the University of Kuwait or other Arab universities, with no professional qualifications in education.

Requirements for Ongoing Professional Development in Reading for Teachers

There are many professional development requirements for Arabic teachers in a number of areas. For example, the Ministry of Education offers a two-week intensive professional development course for pre-service and in-service teachers. This course covers the basics of the curriculum and lesson preparation, among other topics. Specialized professional development courses also are offered in many areas including composition, presentation, and strategies for developing teaching methodologies. Priority in enrolling in these courses is given to teachers with no educational qualification.[16]

The ministry also has begun providing computer software and training programs to help teachers calculate student reading rates and detect reading errors in the classroom.

Monitoring Student Progress in Reading

As of 2008, the school year at the primary level is divided into four teaching periods (quarters). Throughout these periods, students are evaluated using ongoing assessment, including work papers, follow up quizzes, and classroom activities. Grades are given to students' responses to daily and written assessments. Report cards are provided to students at the end of each of the

four teaching periods, which include grades ranging from 1 (excellent) to 5 (weak, indicating below 50%).

A test of student skills is conducted at the end of each period. These tests are administered at the school level in the first and third periods, and at the educational zone level in the second and fourth periods.

Impact and Use of PIRLS

Kuwait's participation in PIRLS 2001 and 2006 has had a number of influences, including the following:

♦ New curricula have been developed for the primary stage based on topics of interest to students, in order to achieve greater enthusiasm for language learning;

♦ There has been growing interest in free reading and making books and stories available for students in classroom libraries in Grades 1–9;

♦ Students have been trained to understand and answer questions similar to those addressed by the PIRLS assessment;

♦ Teachers have been advised to focus on reading comprehension, taking into account the nature of the topics and questions to suit student skill levels; and

♦ The PIRLS team prepared an awareness plan underscoring the importance of understanding the material provided in the assessments. It has been noted that students do not show interest in reading the assessment and exerting effort in responding to the items. Likewise, parents and teachers do not show interest in encouraging students to participate in earnest in order to reflect students' true abilities.

Suggested Readings

Al-Jafar, A.A. (2007). A strategy to employ a child's imagination in teaching the alphabet. *Journal of Arab Children*, *32*(8), 8–28.

Shehab, A.J. (2007). The reality of free reading. *Journal of Social Sciences, 35(*4).

References

1   Kuwait Central Statistics Bureau. (2011). *Census history*. Kuwait City: Author. Retrieved from http://www. kuwaitcensus.com/index_en.html

2   Compulsory Education Law of 1965 (No. 11/1965).

3   Illiteracy Eradication Act (1981).

4   Secretary General of Kuwait, UNESCO. (2008). *The national report on higher education in Kuwait*. Kuwait City: Author. Retrieved from http://www.ibe. unesco.org/National_Reports/ICE_2008/ kuwait_NR08.pdf

5   Blair, T. (2009, September 27). Kuwait vision 2035. *al-Qabas Newspaper*, Issue no. 13050. Retrieved from http://www. alqabas.com.kw/

6   National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters. (2012). Retrieved from http:// www.nccal.gov.kw/

7   Ministry of Education. (2011). Retrieved from www.moe.edu.kw

8   Kuwait National UNESCO Committee. (2011). Retrieved from http://www. kwtnatcom.org/

9   Ministry of Education. (2009). *Organizational structure of the ministry of education*. Retrieved from http://www. moe.edu.kw/SitePages/str_min.aspx

10 Ministry of Education. (2009). *Draft plan for the ministry of education (2009–2014)*. Kuwait City: Ministry team, chaired by the Ministry's Undersecretary.

11 Kuwait Ministry of Education. (n.d.). *National document of the Arabic language curricula*. Kuwait City: Author.

12 Ministerial Decree no. 56 (2009).

13 Kuwait Ministry of Education. (n.d.). *Arabic language teachers guide, fifth grade*. Kuwait City: Author.

14 Rizk, S.M. (2006). *Methods of teaching Arabic language: Foundations, theory, applications*. Cairo: Faculty of Education, University of Al-Azhar.

15 Al-Ajmi, A.R. (2011). *Weakness of reading and its causes among primary school students as understood by teachers in the State of Kuwait*. Kuwait City: Faculty of Graduate Studies, Kuwait University.

16 Rateb, A. & Al-Hawamdeh, M. (2010). *Methods of teaching Arabic between theory and practice (ex. 3)*. Amman: Dar El Maseerah.

TIMSS & PIRLS
International Study Center
Lynch School of Education, Boston College

BOSTON
COLLEGE

PIRLS
2011

pirls.bc.edu