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European literacy challenges and the answers of ELINET

Paper presented at the International Symposium:
„Literacy in the 21st Century: Participation – Inclusion –
Equity“

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Structure of my Presentation

- 5 Literacy challenges (mainly based on PIRLS 2016 results)

- Answers of ELINET:
 - European Declaration of Literacy as a basic human right. 11 conditions for realization of the right to literacy
 - Need for new answers?
 - Need for new questions

1. Low literacy challenge

Low reading competence increases the risk of poverty and social exclusion and limits numerous opportunities for cultural participation, lifelong learning and personal growth.

- Trend from PIRLS 2001 to PIRLS 2016:

Proportion of children below level 3 has slightly increased: 11% (2001), 19% (2006), 15% (2011) 18% (2016)

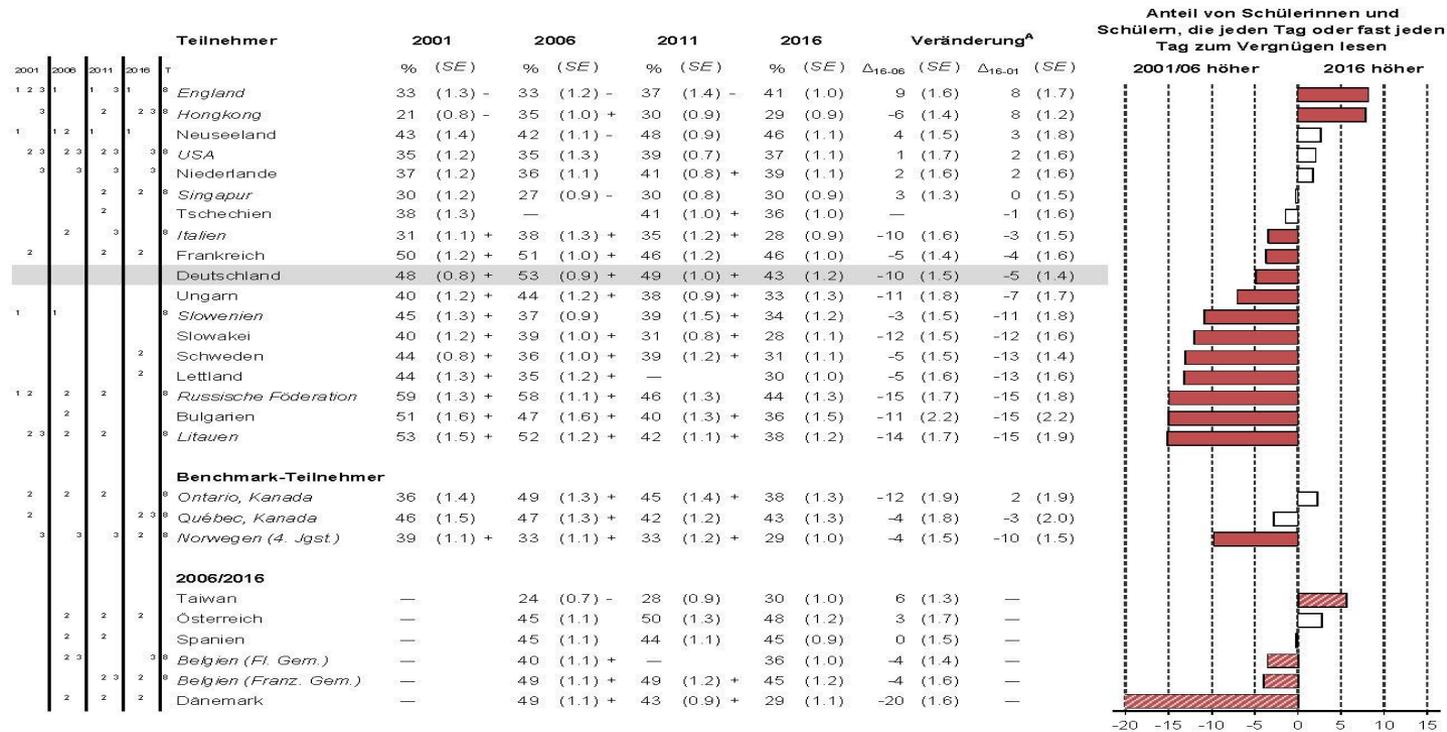
2. Motivation Challenge – Reading Behaviour

PIRLS trends 2001 – 2016

- Number of students who **read less than 30 minutes** a day outside school has increased significantly in all European countries (except Italy and Bulgaria)
- Proportion of students who never/almost never **borrow a book from a library** has increased significantly in most of the European countries (except Austria and Slovenia)

2. Motivation Challenge – Reading Behaviour

PIRLS trend: Percentage of students reading for pleasure outside school decreased from 2001 to 2016 (except in England, Netherlands)



■ Statistisch signifikante Veränderungen zwischen 2001 und 2016 ($p < .05$).

▨ Statistisch signifikante Veränderungen zwischen 2006 und 2016 ($p < .05$).

Kursiv gesetzt sind die Teilnehmer, für die von einer eingeschränkten Vergleichbarkeit der Ergebnisse zwischen den Studienzyklen ausgegangen werden muss.

1 = Die nationale Zielpopulation entspricht nicht oder nicht ausschließlich der vierten Jahrgangsstufe.

3 Teacher challenge

- **Recruitment**: Many countries are facing an ageing teaching workforce and having trouble attracting new recruits.
- Need of continuous renewal of teachers' **professional knowledge** (new "21st century skills", including digital knowledge, increasingly more diverse classrooms, expanding research-based scientific knowledge base on teaching and learning). However: PIRLS 2016: Teachers spent little time on professional development related to reading in the past two years 38% of the fourth grade students had teachers who had spent no time or less than 6 hours.

4 Digital challenge

The rise and spread of digital technologies have significantly altered what it means to be literate in the 21st-century. We still do not know enough how the digital revolution changed and will change the world (globalization, mass culture, big data, fake news), s. Yuval Noah Harari: *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow*

Digital gap - Lack of equity in:

- **Availability**: wide variation across the PIRLS countries in computer availability for use in reading lessons, from availability for most students (> 80%) in Denmark, Netherlands, and Sweden, to availability for only a few students (< 14 %) in Belgium (French), and Portugal.
- **Use** of digital devices
- **Lack of a digital curriculum**

5 Equity challenge

Gaps in EU (PIRLS 2016)

In all countries we find literacy performance gaps between different groups

- High and low performers
- Parental occupation (SES): 55
- Cultural capital of the family (books): 39
- Migrant background: n.a.
- Family language not language of the school: 32
- Sex: 6 (only gap that decreased from 20 in 2001)

The answers of ELINET

- Fostering literacy is not only an educational task but an issue in different political and societal fields, addressing multiple stakeholders: parents and grandparents, teachers in kindergarten and schools, teacher trainers at universities, researchers, librarians, social workers, psychologists, medical doctors, authors, editors, philologists, sociologists, politicians.
- European Declaration of Literacy as a basic human right (translated into 24 languages)
- ELINET has identified 11 conditions required to put the right to basic literacy into practice

Do we need new answers?

- The three key issues for literacy policies identified by the EU- High Level Group of Experts on Literacy, 2012 and on which ELINET work is based are still valid but in some instances may need a new focus.

Three key issues for literacy policies

(EU- High Level Group of Experts on Literacy, 2012)

- **Creating a literate environment** for children and adolescents, at home, in school, digital environment, libraries.
 - “Providing” is not enough, may strengthen the Matthew-effect
 - We need more efforts to reach out for those in need and give special support

Three key issues for literacy policies

(EU- High Level Group of Experts on Literacy, 2012)

- **Improving the quality of teaching:** quality of preschool, literacy curricula, reading instruction, identification of and support for struggling literacy learners, initial teacher education and continuous professional development
 - More research needed on what is going on in classrooms or educational settings
 - More emphasis on the importance of language as foundation for reading (language of instruction)
 - Need to develop standards for the preparation of literacy professionals (ILA 2017)

Three key issues for literacy policies

(EU- High Level Group of Experts on Literacy, 2012)

- **Increasing participation, inclusion and equity:**
supporting groups at risk (SES, migrants, pupils with special educational needs, boys)
 - This topic has the highest priority!
 - No simple answer possible.
 - Different measures for different countries are necessary and the political will to close the growing gap between the rich and the poor.

We need a new question: What is literacy in the future?

- Elaborating our definition of literacy to address the multitude of ways we read, write, communicate, and collaborate using print and digital technologies, taking into account multiple languages
- “To be literate tomorrow will be defined by even newer technologies that have yet to appear and the new skills, strategies, and social practices these will require” (Mullis, Martin, Foy & Hooper: ePirls 2016, IEA 2017)

Thank you.

6 Knowledge - action - discrepancy challenge

We have a vast body of research about literacy learning and teaching. Literacy is a cumulative process, dependent on a variety of interrelated factors – sometimes resulting in vicious circles

- Individual (sex, language, motivation, self-concept)
- Home background (parental role models, cultural capital...)
- Importance of elementary education for emergent literacy
- School factors (resources, teachers knowledge, beliefs and support, availability of specialists for slow learners)
- Out of school activities (reading for pleasure, tv, digital media, peers)

Basic Literacy Right of European Citizens

Every European citizen has the right to acquire literacy. EU Member States should ensure that citizens of all ages, regardless of social class, religion, ethnicity, origin and gender, are provided with the necessary resources and opportunities to develop sufficient and sustainable literacy skills in order to effectively understand and use written communication be in handwritten, in print or digital form.

ELINET has identified 11 conditions required to put the right to basic literacy into practice

1. **Young children** are encouraged at home in their literacy acquisition.
2. **Parents** receive support in helping their children's language and literacy acquisition.
3. **Affordable high-quality preschool or kindergarten** fosters children's language and emergent literacy development.
4. **High-quality literacy instruction** for children, adolescents and adults is regarded as a core task of all educational institutions.

11 conditions required to put the right to basic literacy into practice

- 5. All teachers receive effective initial teacher education and professional development in literacy teaching** in order to be well prepared for their demanding tasks.
- 6. Digital competence** is promoted across all age groups.
- 7. Reading for pleasure** is actively promoted and encouraged.
- 8. Libraries** are accessible and well resourced.

11 conditions required to put the right to basic literacy into practice

9. Children and young people who struggle with literacy receive appropriate specialist support.

10. Adults are supported to develop the literacy skills necessary for them to participate fully in society.

11. Policy-makers, professionals, parents and communities work together to ensure equal access to literacy by closing the gaps in social and educational levels.