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Main authors (in alphabetical order):
Valeria Balbinot, Juliana Cunha, Maria de Lourdes Dionísio, Giorgio Tamburlini

Contributing authors (in alphabetical order):
Christine Garbe, Dominique Lafontaine, David Mallows, Gerry Shiel, Renate Valtin

Coordinator of the ELINET-Project:
University of Cologne
Prof. Dr. Christine Garbe
Institut für Deutsche Sprache und Literatur
Richard-Strauss-Str. 2
50931 Köln – Cologne
Germany
christine.garbe@uni-koeln.de
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1 Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Italian school system is mainly public (over 90%) and therefore free of charge, while private schools may charge fees that in many instances are at least partially waived by local governments.

The education system in Italy is organised according to the subsidiary principle and autonomy of schools. The State has exclusive competence on general issues on education, on minimum standards to be guaranteed throughout the country, and on the fundamental principles that Regions should comply with within their competences. Regions share their competences with the State on education issues, while they have exclusive competence on vocational education and training. Schools are autonomous as for didactic, organisational, and research and development activities.

The education system is organised as follows:

- **Pre-primary school** for children between 3 and 6 years of age;
- **first cycle of education** lasting 8 years, made up of:
  - **primary education** (lasting 5 years), for children between 6 and 11 years of age;
  - **lower secondary school** (lasting 3 years) for children between 11 and 14 years of age;
- **second cycle of education** offering two different pathways:
  - **State upper secondary school** (lasting 5 years) for students from 14 to 19 years of age. It is offered by licei, technical institutes and vocational institutes; three and four-year **vocational training courses (IFP)** addressed to students who have completed the first cycle of education. It is organised by the Regions.
  - **post-secondary non tertiary education** offered through: post-qualification and post-diploma vocational courses organised by the Regions; Higher technical education and training courses (IFTS).
  - **higher education offered by universities and the High level arts and music education system** (Afam). Higher education is organised in first, second and third levels according to the Bologna structure.

The Italian school system is fully inclusive for all children, and children with disabilities are assessed by a multidisciplinary team in order to obtain a support teacher. Learning of a foreign language starts now in the primary cycle.

Figure 1: Structure of the Italian School System

Kindergarten (Scuola dell’Infanzia) starts at 3 years and there are “primavera” (spring) classes from two years of age. The access to kindergarten is over 88% on average at national level. Kindergarten is also mainly public, however the private offer is in this sector quite significant.
Compulsory education covers the eight-year first cycle (5 years of primary school and 3 years of lower secondary school) and the first two years of the second cycle (DM 139/2007). After completion of the first cycle of education, the last two years of compulsory education (from 14 to 16 years of age) can be accomplished either in State upper secondary schools (licei, technical institutes and vocational institutes), or through the three-year vocational education and training courses, (istruzione e formazione professionale) falling under the competence of the Regions (law 133/2008).

Compulsory education refers to both enrolment and attendance. It can be accomplished either in a State and a paritaria school (accredited private school) and also, under certain conditions, though parental education and merely private schools; regional three-year vocational training courses are offered by the relevant training agencies. Parents or caregivers are responsible for the accomplishment of compulsory education, while supervision on the fulfilment of compulsory education falls under the responsibilities of local authorities where pupils reside and school heads of the schools pupils are enrolled in.

Once compulsory schooling has been accomplished, pupils who don't pursue their studies receive a certification attesting compulsory education fulfilment and competencies acquired; these constitute formative credits for the attainment of any professional qualification.

Access to tertiary education is reserved for students who passed the State exam at the end of upper secondary school. Yet, specific conditions for admission are the responsibility of the Ministry of education, University and Research (MIUR), or of each single university.
3 Performance data Italy

Italy participated in IEA’s PIRLS (4th graders reading comprehension) in 2001, 2006 and 2011, in OECD’s PISA (15 year-olds’ reading literacy) since 2000, and in OECD’s PIAAC (adults’ reading literacy) in 2012. This means it is possible to describe the changes over time in average reading proficiency, according to different characteristics of the readers, and to compare relative reading levels of proficiencies for different age groups.

Italy performed above the EU average in PIRLS 2011 (541 vs 535 EU-average) and very close to the EU mean in PISA 2012 (490 vs 489 EU average). In PISA, the overall reading score is also very close to the average for European countries on average.

In PIRLS, a limited proportion of pupils (15%) resulted as low-performing readers. This is slightly less than in EU countries on average (20%). These students can read simple texts, retrieve explicit information, or make straightforward inferences, but they are not able to deal with longer or more complex texts, and are unable to interpret beyond what is explicitly stated in the text. The proportion of low performers decreased between 2001 and 2011 in PIRLS. In PISA 2012, the proportion of low-performers was very close to EU average and rather stable over time: among boys, a slight increase was observed (+1.3%), while among girls no change was observed. The proportion of top-performing readers was 10% in PIRLS (vs 9% in the EU). In PISA 2012, the percentage of both low and top performing readers was also very close to the EU average of around 7%.

The gap according to the pupils’ socioeconomic background was considerably lower than the EU average in PIRLS (59 vs 76 on average) and almost the same in PISA (84 vs 89). The difference may be due to the fact that the indices of socioeconomic background are not the same in PIRLS and PISA.

In PISA 2009, the gap between native students and students with a migrant background was much higher than in EU countries on average (72 vs 38 EU-average), the equivalent of about two years of schooling. Similarly, in PIRLS, the mean score difference between those who always spoke the language of the test at home, and those who sometimes or never did so was higher than in EU countries (31 vs 26). In PISA, too, this gap according to the language spoken at home was higher than the EU average (62 vs 54).

Girls’ and boys’ performances were very close, the gender gap (in favour of girls) was then lower than the corresponding EU average differences in PIRLS (3 vs 12), and slightly higher in PISA (46 vs 44). The gender difference in Italy was higher in the two first cycles of PIRLS (8 and 9 points) but always below the EU average. In PISA, the reading performance observed between 2000 and 2012 was similar for girls (+ 3 score points) and boys (+ 2 score points). The trend was slightly different in EU countries on average: between 2000 and 2012 the girls’ performance increased by 5 score points while the boys’ decreased by the same value.

Unsurprisingly, students in Italy in the top quarter of the Confidence in Reading scale achieved a mean score (569) that was some 57 points higher than students in the bottom quarter (513). The average difference across the EU-24 was 80 points, indicating a relatively weaker relationship between Confidence and performance in Italy.
In conclusion, Italy performed above the EU average in PIRLS and very close in PISA. Results seem stable over time, since PIRLS in 2001 and 2011 show the same scores. The pattern by level of performance is very close to European countries on average in both PISA and in PIRLS except as for the proportion of low-performers which has decreased and is now lower than the EU on average. The gap between low and top-performing readers is smaller in Italy than in the EU on average, and the gap according to socioeconomic status also tends to be smaller than in the EU on average. On the contrary, the gap according to language spoken at home is greater.

As far as adults are concerned, Italy performed below the EU in PIAAC (250 vs 271). The spread of achievement – namely the gap between top and bottom performers - is somewhat lower in Italy than the EU-17-Average (114 vs 117 on average). The proportion of adults performing at or below level 1 in Italy is 28%, much higher than the EU-17 average (16.4%). Females and males performance are very similar (251 vs 250), both well below the EU average (271). The gender gap in favor of females was very low (in EU on average it is 2 score points in favor of males), which is in contrast with what is observed among 15 year-old both in Italy and at EU level: a high gender difference in reading equivalent to about one year of schooling. The gap according to parents’ level of education was somewhat lower than in the EU countries on average (39 vs 41), reflecting the same trend as in PIRLS and PISA. The same was observed for the gap according to the language spoken at home: the gap between native and not-native speakers was smaller than the EU-17-average (25 vs 28) and much smaller among adults than among children and adolescents, showing that the gap is growing in Italy due to the increased migration over the last two decades.

4 Key literacy policy areas

4.1 Creating a literate environment

4.1.1 Pre-Primary Years, Children and Adolescents

Parental attitudes to reading

PIRLS 2011 used the “Parents Like Reading Scale” according to their parents’ responses to seven statements about their reading attitude. In Italy, a lower proportion of parents “like” reading (23.8% vs an European average of 35.3 %). Thirty-six percent of parents in Italy reported having few home resources for learning – well above the EU Average of 25%. The difference in achievement between pupils in Italy whose parents reported having many home resources and few resources was 64 score points – 15 points lower than the corresponding EU-24 average (79).

According to PIRLS 2011, in Italy, 16.9% of children belong to families with no or few children’s books at home (European average 11.8%). PIRLS 2011 also reports the percentages of students whose parents (often, never or almost never) engaged in literacy-relevant activities with them before the beginning of primary school. Nine activities are considered: reading books, telling stories, singing songs, playing with alphabet toys, talking about things done, talking about things read, playing word games, writing letters or words, reading signs and labels aloud. If a composite indicator combining all these activities is used, 50.9% of Italian students reported that their parents engaged with them in
these activities at least sometimes (European average 57.4%) while only 1.1% reported they “never or almost never” did so (European average 1.9%).

The percentage of children whose parents engaged in specific literacy-related activities with them before the beginning of primary school were the following: read books to them often: 46.4% (European average 58.4%); told stories to them often: 60.4% (European average 51.5%); sang songs to them often: 58.4% (European average 50.6%).

The data show that in Italy there is a higher proportion of families than in the EU average who do not read, do not have children’s books and do not engage in literacy relevant activities with their children. Data also show how family attitudes and practices has implications in later school performance. For example, there is a significant differences in reading performance at grade 4 between children whose parents like to read (average achievement 565) and those who do not (average achievement 528).

**Family literacy programs**

The main family literacy programme in Italy is **Nati per Leggere**[^6], Nati per Leggere (listed as a Good Practice on the ELINET website) promotes the development of emergent literacy competences, parent-child relationship and interest in books. The programme has been active since 1999 and is based on a partnership between the Associazione Italiana Biblioteche (Italian library association), the Associazione Culturale Pediatri (Pediatric cultural association) and the Centro per la salute del Bambino, an NGO which actually manages the programme at national level. Nati per Leggere promotes reading to babies from their first months of life as a family practice through local multi-sector networks involving health professionals, librarians, educators, civil society associations, municipalities and regional governments. It has been estimated that parents of about 1 out of 3 newborn babies are contacted by the programme. Key strengths of the programme are the involvement of all professionals involved in providing services for children, multi-professional training modules and the mobilisation of thousands of volunteers in over 500 local projects. Through a special agreement with publishers, children’s books are provided at low cost. The programme makes attempts to reach out for the poorest families as well as migrants, through multilingual materials. Nati per Leggere in collaboration with local NGOs sets up “Punti Lettura” (reading spots) where public libraries are either not existing or without specific children’s sections. However, there is a North-South divide in the programme implementation with the consequence that the many disadvantaged families are the least served by the programme.

There is a national programme, promoted by the Ministry of Health, called “Genitori+”[^7] which supports parents in a series of 8 health-related good practices for children, one of which is home reading, with explicit reference to Nati per Leggere.

Cooperation among parents, day-care centres and kindergarten and health services in reading promotion for pre-primary children is very diverse from region to region, even though cooperation among day care centres and kindergarten and parents is currently considered a priority for the early education system. Recently the project *Dalle scuole allafamiglia* (From schools to family) has been launched and carried out in the Friuli Venezia Giulia Region. The target were kindergarten and preschool teachers, with the ultimate target population of children aged 2-5 and their parents. Teachers received specific training to understand why and how to better interact with parents to promote home

[^6]: See: [www.natiperleggere.it](http://www.natiperleggere.it).
[^7]: See: [http://www.genitoripiu.it/](http://www.genitoripiu.it/).
reading and how to collaborate with public libraries and other community services to provide books and teaching aids. A multimedia guide is now available for all teachers.

There is a need to further support programmes that raise awareness of all parents that literacy is a key to learning and life chances and that the basis for good literacy achievement is laid in early childhood, with a focus on supporting all parents and particularly in disadvantaged areas and for families who are at risk of social and cultural disadvantage in understanding and fostering the literacy development of their children.

Providing a literate environment in school

In Italy there is a remarkable decrease in reading motivation from 4th grade (cf. PIRLS 2011) to age 15 (cf. PISA 2009). In PIRLS 2011 about 18% percent of Italian pupils reported that they do not like reading. According to PISA 2009, more than 30 % percent of 15-year-olds do not read for pleasure. In PISA 2009, Italy has a gap of 98 score points – which is equivalent to almost two years and a half of schooling - between the students who report being highly and poorly engaged in reading.

PISA and other studies show a strong and reciprocal correlation between reading for pleasure and reading performance. Families, communities, schools and libraries should therefore do more in order to support reading motivation and a stable self-concept as a reader among adolescents. This should be achieved through a variety of specific initiatives, ideally through collaborative community networks and multisector agreements. The role and specific training of teachers in promoting reading for pleasure should be emphasised. School libraries should be supported in their ability to offer a variety of age-appropriate books.

The role of public libraries in reading promotion and cooperation between secondary schools, libraries and other agents in literacy promotion for children and adolescents

The National Library Service “combines almost 4,000 libraries, local bodies, universities, schools, academies and private and public institutions into a cooperative system” (EACEA/Eurydice, 2011:126). Public libraries have recently strengthened their action in and for the communities with a variety of programmes that involve teachers and pupils.

A separate national body has been established to promote reading in Italy. The “Book and Reading Centre” (CEPELL) oversees the collaboration between public and private bodies to encourage young readers to read more (EACEA/Eurydice, 2011:123). Through annual campaigns, such as “Il Maggio dei libri” (“May of Books”) and “Libriamoci”, regions, provinces, municipalities, institutions, local bodies, schools, libraries, cultural associations, publishers and bookshops attempt to reach out to people who “do not read”, not only adolescents.

There are other programmes attempting to establish collaborative networks among all community actors and particularly between public libraries and primary schools. Crescere Leggendo (also mentioned in the Good Practices Framework) does so by asking for the active support of municipalities through the public libraries network. A number of other similar reading animation programmes exist on a local basis.

8 Available at: http://www.csbonlus.org/cosa-facciamo/progetti/dalle-scuole-alla-famiglia/.
9 See: http://crescereleggendo.it/.
Unfortunately, there are only few programmes specifically targeting adolescents. In the Friuli Venezia Region a region-wide programme "Youngsters", promotes reading for pleasure through a variety of initiatives involving adolescents in reading animation.

Public libraries are an important agent in reading promotion. Proactive action is needed to make libraries widely accessible (opening hours, ability to welcome the public and provide assistance), but also able to reach out to all social groups, with activities aimed at raising awareness of the importance of reading for pleasure. Migrant communities as well as minority groups should see their culture and literature, including children's books, represented in the library provision.

Although there is an increasing cooperation among different stakeholders aimed at reading promotion, the coverage of the Italian adolescent population is still quite patchy with spots of excellence, usually located in the north and center of the country, coexisting with a general lack of initiatives. The ministry of Culture in collaboration with the Italian Association of Public Libraries (AIB) and the Publishers Association (AIE) recently promoted a national initiative to promote reading at school level.

Initiatives to foster reading engagement among children and adolescents

In Italy, the "Book and Reading Centre" ("Centro per il Libro e la Lettura" - CEPELL) (Teaching Reading in Europe: Contexts, Policies and Practices, EACEA/Eurydice, 2011:123), a not-for-profit statutory body founded and supported by the Italian Ministry of Culture, works together with various levels of national and local government bodies and with private parties operating in the book chain. The objectives of the centre are to improve the social value of books and of reading and to increase the number of habitual readers, young and old, from eight to ten per cent of the adult population\(^{10}\). The Cepell recently (December 2015) developed a national reading plan (Piano Nazionale per la lettura), which is still to be approved by the Government.

Fostering digital literacy in and outside schools

In Italy, 14% use a computer at school at least monthly to look up information. The corresponding EU-24 average is 39%. In Italy, 18% of students are in classrooms whose teachers report that the students use computers to write stories or other texts at least monthly. The corresponding EU-24 average is 39% and 33% respectively. In PISA 2009, 89% of the students reported that they spent no time at all on computers during language-of-instruction lessons (OECD average: 74.0%) (OECD, p. 321). More than 70% of students do not spend time using computers in other subjects, such as Science or Mathematics (OECD, 2011, PISA 2009 Results: Students on Line: Digital Technologies and Performance: 321). In comparison to the OECD average and especially in comparison to the well-equipped Nordic countries, the ICT coverage in Italy schools still shows room for improvement. PISA also shows that only 5.3% of Italian students report using laptops at school. In Denmark, for instance, this number is more than 13 times higher (73.2%) (OECD, 2011: 323).

Access to a digital environment is significantly lower in Italy than in most EU countries, but situations are quite diverse across regions, with most southern regions still quite below an acceptable standard. Recognising the gap, the Ministry of Education, as well as many Regional Governments, have recently invested in digital equipment for schools, as well as in professional training on digital literacy for

Each school is required to identify and train a teacher who will be in charge of fostering digital literacy.

There are a number of local initiatives to foster digital literacy. The programme “Laboratori” offers “a series of online activities and workshops for children and adolescents to promote books, library use and a reading culture around works of fiction and non-fiction” (EACEA/Eurydice, 2011:127). There is also “Using Web Comics in Education”. This is a project that makes use of internet-based comics to further reading and writing abilities. Students can conceive their own web-comics or read those made by others\textsuperscript{11}. The project “Lesamol” is another example, which consists of an online platform where adolescents from 11 to 16 (German speaking minority of Italy) can read and review books. All the books that are part of the project can be found in the school libraries of the area\textsuperscript{12}. Furthermore, the German speaking minority of Italy offers access to a web portal\textsuperscript{13} where digital entertainment material can be downloaded.

4.1.2 Adults

Fostering literacy provision for adults

Adult education in general is not well-developed in Italy; there are neither clear adult education policies nor outcomes. Instead the adult learning sector in Italy is characterised by a very low degree of regulation and a very high degree of diversity which make it difficult to describe the sector clearly. Education and training opportunities for adults are available through secondary schools or through adult education centres (CTPs - “Centri territoriali permanenti per l’istruzione e la formazione in età adulta”). The CTPs operate at the local level as operational arms of Municipalities delegated by Regions to administer Employment Services. The regional governments are therefore very important for the development of adult literacy education policies, as they also manage the European Social Fund resources through which labour policy services are financed. Italian lifelong learning policies for low skilled adults are implemented at a local and regional level and regulated at a national level by the Ministry of Labour, the Ministry of Education and Research, a board of experts and a technical Committee appointed by the Ministries responsible for policy-making in this area.

As noted above, Italy participated in the 2012 round of the OECD’s Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC). Italy has adopted the definitions of literacy and reading used in PIAAC, with the intention that this will increase the Government’s activities in this area and give low-skilled adults new opportunities to continue learning throughout their lives and to improve their literacy skills.

4.2 Improving the Quality of Teaching

4.2.1 Pre-primary years

Providing free or affordable high quality preschool education for all children / investing more money in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)

According to the European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice/Eurostat, with an enrolment rate at age 4 of 96.8%, Italy reaches the European benchmark for at least 95% of children between age 4 and 6. The OECD Family Database (2014) offers more differentiated figures of participation rates at age 3, 4 and 5. According to 2010 statistical data, the participation rate is 97.3% for 5-year-olds, 96.8% for 4-year-olds, and 93.0% for 3-year-olds (OECD 2014). The total public expenditure per child in pre-primary education as a percentage of GDP in Italy is 0.5%. The range is from 0.04% in Turkey and 0.1% in Ireland to 1.01% in Denmark. Italy belongs to the half of the European countries where the 3-5 years period of ECEC is free. Prior to the age of 3 years, a network of day-care centres provides cover for up to 40% of children 0-3 years. The attendance to these centres is publicly subsidised but families are required to pay a fee proportional to their income.

Improving the quality of literacy instruction in preschool education

The ratio of children to teachers in pre-primary schools in Italy is 11.8 (the range is from 5.8 in Hungary to 23.1 in Turkey). The minimum required level to become a qualified teacher in Italy is now the Master level (ISCED 5), the length of training is 5 years (European Commission/ EACEA/Eurydice/Eurostat 2014, p. 101). Continuing Professional Development (5 days per year) is mandatory. According to the findings of the project "Dalle Scuole alla Famiglia" carried out in the Friuli Venezia-Giulia Region and aimed at improving the knowledge and practice of pre-primary schools on shared reading promotion at home, the great majority of teachers include reading for pleasure and telling stories sessions at school. However, most of the teachers recognise that their training and practice can be substantially improved and that many still focus on literacy development and not on reading for pleasure.

Improving early language and literacy screening and training

In Italy, there are no guidelines for early language and literacy screening and training for nurseries. For kindergarten, the learning objectives for ECEC provision include reading literacy. The assessment of children's progress in these areas, as recommended by the Ministry of Education, is based only on observation and does not include any specific screening test.

While the situation is quite satisfactory for children aged 3-6 in terms of both access to and quality of preschool services, the same is not true for the earliest years where there is a dramatic disparity between both access and quality in the northern centre of the country and the southern regions. Teachers’ competences and skills in promoting reading for pleasure and raising parents’ awareness about the importance of shared reading at home should be strengthened.
4.2.2 Children and adolescents

Improving literacy curricula in schools

**Primary schools:** In Italy, reading is included in an integrated Italian language curriculum that also includes listening and speaking, writing and reflecting on language. The curriculum includes goals that are specific to reading, which should be achieved by the end of grade 5.

According to Eurydice’s (2011) analysis of curriculum documents, a broad range of word-reading and fluency skills are taught at primary level (Grades 1-5), with a relatively strong emphasis on emergent literacy skills (different functions of printed material; awareness that print carries meaning; organisation of written language) and some emphasis on phonics skills (progression in recognising words; enriching vocabulary; linking sounds to letters/naming and sounding letters of the alphabet) and fluency (repeated practice of reading aloud; gradual shift from reading aloud to reading silently; reading various kinds of texts fluently, without mistakes, and with appropriate intonation).

In 2012, the MIUR, according to European parliament directive 18.12.2006, issued a norm which details the key competences to be acquired at the end of primary school. The norm focuses on competences in mastering of oral, written language, in both comprehension (ability to identify relevant information, infer and relate concepts, understanding logical relations in a text) and production (oral and written texts including ideation language appropriateness). Literacy competences are separated from other language sectors, for example literature or foreign languages.

**Secondary schools:** Curricula for secondary schools (Ministerial decree 138, 2007, Regolamento recante norme in materia di adempimento dell’obbligo di istruzione) are competence-based. Competences include: “to communicate and understand diverse typologies of messages (everyday, literature, technical, scientific) of varying complexity, using different languages (verbal, mathematic, scientific, symbolic, etc.) and support materials (paper, digital, multimedia, etc.) and to be able to describe events, phenomena, principles, concepts, norms, procedures, attitudes, state of mind, emotions) and based on a variety of disciplines. Students must acquire competences in both comprehension (ability to identify relevant information, infer and relate concepts, understanding logical relations in a text) and production (oral and written texts including ideation language appropriateness)\(^\text{15}\).”

**Reading instruction**

PIRLS 2006 data for a latent class analysis (Lankes and Carstensen, 2007) identified in Italy mainly two types of instruction in fourth grade: teacher-directed instruction in the whole class without individual support and highly stimulating whole-class instruction with didactic materials.

In 2011, pupils in Italy spent more hours per year at school (1085) than on average across EU-24 countries (850 hours). Students in Italy spent 274 hours (about 25% of all instructional hours) on instruction in the language of the PIRLS test, compared to an EU-24 average of 241 hours. In Italy, 63 instructional hours per year are spent on reading as part of language, compared with and EU-24 average of 68.

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\(^{14}\) Indicazioni per il curriculo infanzia e primo ciclo, MIUR, 2012.

\(^{15}\) A full description of the key competences to be acquired at the end of secondary school can be found in: http://archivio.pubblica.istruzione.it/normativa/2007/allegati/all2_dm139new.pdf.
Activities of teachers to develop students’ comprehension skills

PIRLS 2011 provides information on the frequency with which teachers in Italy engage students in specific reading comprehension activities. The percentages of students in Grade 4 in Italy who engage in specified comprehension activities ‘every day or almost every day’ compare favourably with the EU-24 averages. For example, 69.6% of them explain or support their understanding of what they have read (EU-24 = 61.6%). Based on a scale summarising frequencies across all six items, 73% of students in Italy were deemed to be taught by teachers who implemented instructional practices to engage learning in “most lessons”. The corresponding EU-24 average was 70% (ELINET PIRLS 2011 Appendix, Table I2). In spite of what students reported, several reports show a serious teacher dependency of the textbooks, which is a problem because, as it has already emphasised, textbooks do not include the strategies needed to engage students in reading comprehension. The research also highlights the lack of teachers’ knowledge of reading comprehension teaching strategies.

Level of qualification and length of the required training for primary teachers

Italy requires primary teachers to have a laurea magistrale degree which takes five years’ study. In ten more European countries – Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Germany, France, Iceland, Portugal, Slovakia and Slovenia – initial education for primary teachers is at master’s level and usually takes five years. Teacher training for primary education has been organised at tertiary level since 1998/99, thus the number of teachers with university degrees is gradually increasing (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2012, Fig. E2, p. 112).

Initial Teacher Training has been recently reviewed (Ministerial Decree no. 249/2010). According to this reform, lower and upper secondary teachers must complete a teaching-oriented second-cycle university course (two-year programme corresponding to a master level) within a planned number of available posts and through an admission exam. Training is followed by a one-year traineeship period called “active formative traineeship” (TFA)16.

Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

In Italy, in-service training is considered a right and a duty for the full development of school staff17. Teachers of both primary and secondary schools are entitled to five days per school year for attending CPD programmes18. The recent school reform (La Buona Scuola 2015) has introduced a 500 euros bonus to be spent every year by teachers in accredited CPD activities.

The decision making bodies for CPD planning are the Ministry of Education, which establishes the priority objectives for the organisation and carrying out of formative interventions; the regional school administration which must guarantee professional services to support the planning character of schools; the local school or school associations, which must plan training initiatives and prepare the relevant annual programme, according to school needs.

CPD courses are organised according to specific objectives, contents and times. The methods adopted for the educational interventions are various and include lessons, study cases, simulations, various

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There is no compulsory continuing professional development (in-service training) for teachers which focuses specifically on literacy development.

Literacy expertise should become a clear standard for teacher education across all grades and subjects for primary and secondary school teachers. Training should cover topics as the teaching of reading, tackling reading difficulties, assessing pupils’ reading skills, and supporting those with persistent difficulties. Literacy promotion and literacy instruction across the curriculum should be a systematic part of CPD, addressing teachers of all grades and all subjects.

**Digital literacy part of the curriculum for primary and secondary schools**

In Italy, digital literacy is implicitly included in curricula, but it is not a separate subject, because other compulsory subjects contain media related competences. Moreover, in primary schools ICT is taught within technology as a subject, and as a general tool for other subjects/or as a tool for specific tasks in other subjects (European Commission, 2013:4). A number of programmes have been launched to provide support on a national level, in Italy, such as “LIM” (provides Interactive White Boards to promote ICT in education). Little information is to be found about the effect of these and similar programmes.

The frequency of use of digital resources is relatively low at the secondary level (European Commission, 2013: 88). Also, Italy shows the lowest percentage of ICT based classroom activities in the EU (European Commission, 2013: 77). The percentage of students in schools without broadband internet access is below the EU average at all grades.

Quite recently, within the Law 107 (La buona scuola) approved in late 2015, a national plan for the digital school (Piano nazionale per la scuola digitale) has been established. The plan supports the introduction of digital technologies and foresees the introduction of a digital animator in each school (from primary to secondary) to be identified among the existing teachers and trained.

**4.2.3 Adults**

**Monitoring the quality of adult literacy providers**

No information was provided on specific measures to monitor the quality of adult literacy providers in Italy. The adult learning sector in Italy is characterised by a very low degree of regulation and a very high degree of diversity in terms of structures, learning offers and actors involved.

**Developing curricula for adult literacy**

See above.

**Improving the qualification and status of teachers of adult literacy**

Due to the diversity of adult literacy education in Italy and the fact that the sector is largely unregulated, it is not possible to describe either a curriculum for teacher training or CPD activities, or to identify the competences and qualifications that adult literacy teachers require. Some information is available via the Italian national EQF report (ISFOL, 2012) which states that those working in adult education should have a Master’s degree in “Adult Learning and Continuing Education” Master’s degree. Italy has a shortage in well-qualified teacher training staff of professionals.

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4.3 Increasing Participation, Inclusion and Equity

4.3.1 Pre-Primary Years, Children and Adolescents

Addressing socio-economic factors which affect literacy development

At 15.9%, Italy is in the upper third of the distribution for child poverty among European countries participating in ELINET. It is therefore a priority to address child poverty as the main contributor to early disadvantage, including in literacy acquisition. The 2015, financial law established a fund to complement the income of poor families with children. Local regional governments may provide benefits for poor families as well. Local authorities provide social services, together with non-governmental organisations or associations in the field.

Schools and social care services collaborate in order to identify and manage situations of socio-economic disadvantage and to prevent problems at the developmental age. For example, the role of teachers is crucial in identifying suspected situations of neglect, abuse or violence, which is also a known cause of language problems and school failure. In these cases, the school should encourage the family to contact social services. Should the family fail to do so, the school can make a referral to the social care service.20

Encouraging preschool attendance, especially for disadvantaged children

Italy has a high preschool enrolment rate. According to the European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice/Eurostat (2014, Figure C1 p.62), with an enrolment rate at age 4 of 96.8%, Italy reaches the European benchmark for at least 95% of children between age 4 and the start of compulsory education participating in ECEC. The OECD Family Database (2014) offers more differentiated figures of participation rates at age 3, 4 and 5. According to 2010 statistical data, the participation rate is 97.3% for 5-year-olds, 96.8% for 4-year-olds, and 93.0% for 3-year-olds (OECD 2014) (for an overview of European countries see table C2 in Appendix B).

Italy belongs to the half of the European countries where the 3-5 years period of ECEC is free. Prior to 3 years, a network of day-care centres covers from 4 to 40% of children aged 0-3 years. The attendance at these centres is publicly subsidised for poor families. However, the public provision of such services, which is around 15%, is far from the European benchmark of 33%, mostly due to very low provision in southern Regions.

Preventing early school leaving

According to Eurostat, in Italy, the rate of early school leavers was 17% in 2013, down from 17.6% a year before. The target value of the early school leaving (ESL) rate set for 2020 is 15.0-16.0%. A national plan on guidance and dropout was published in 2011 following guidelines on guidance for lifelong learning issued in 2009. The plan, which has been further defined at regional level for full implementation, aims to shift current guidance services from an informative role into a proper career and guidance counselling function. It also provides for the activation of ‘local integrated services’, ensuring the appropriate reception, needs analysis and response to each individual case.

The main challenge is to reduce the gap in preschool enrolments among regions. In order to prevent early school leaving, collaborations needs to be established among different sectors (education, social services) through intersectoral agreements.

Support for struggling literacy learners

According to Eurypedia, in Italy, children with special educational needs get support in mainstream Kindergarten and in schools. There is no systematic assessment of children in order to identify language development problems. The absence of standards at other grade levels and of a testing culture more generally (see below), suggests that teacher judgements play a key role in the early identification of reading difficulties in pre-primary children.

In primary and secondary school, class teachers assess pupils on a daily basis, and summative assessment takes place at the end of each school term. Secondary school students also have a right to a transparent and quick evaluation aimed at starting a self-evaluation process to identify their own strong and weak points and to improve their own performance.

According to the Inter-Ministerial decree (Ministry of Education and Ministry of Health Decree (17/4/2013), concerning early detection in school of struggling readers, this category (BES, Bisogni Educativi Speciali, Special Educational Needs) includes children with difficulties due to socio-cultural disadvantage and children affected by Specific Learning Disabilities (SLDs). Such difficulties should be detected early, generally starting from the second year of primary education. In case of special educational needs, schools should intervene promptly, in order to proceed with further diagnosis and support.

There are multidisciplinary teams that, within the national health system, are in charge of diagnosing the causes of special educational needs whether they are due to socio cultural disadvantage, SLDs or other causes.

Meeting the needs of pupils with special educational needs is mainly a responsibility of the curricular teachers. The Ministry of Education, University and Research (MIUR) has issued guidelines (for the right to education of students with BES, promulgated in July 2011), to help schools support pupils in their education. Schools ought to put in place specific pedagogical and didactical measures to guarantee all pupils’ academic achievement. Individualised education plans and the option to take advantage of compensatory tools and dispensatory measures for those with learning difficulties are also recommended. Furthermore, in order to facilitate the educational process of pupils with BES, teachers and school principals at all school levels undergo specific in-service training. Training focuses on the early identification of SLD risk, teaching methods to be adopted both with the pupil and the whole class, assessment procedures, and guidance. Training activities are organised directly by the MIUR or by schools and may involve universities, research institutes, scientific organisations, associations and local health authorities. Inclusion and teaching of different pupils in one class is also often promoted by having a support teacher (insegnante di sostegno) in the classroom. These teachers serve as a partner to the general education teacher and provide instructional support for all pupils.

Based on a question that class teachers answered in PIRLS 2011, it is estimated that 14.4% of students in fourth grade in Italy are considered to be in need of remedial reading instruction. It is also estimated by teachers that 8.9% are receiving remedial reading instruction. Hence, there is a shortfall of 5.5% between those in need and those actually receiving remedial instruction. On average across EU-24 countries, 18.1% of students in Grade 4 are identified by their teachers as being in need of remedial teaching, while 13.3% are receiving such teaching.

The main challenge is to ensure for all Italian children a quality system of school and health services which are able to detect needs timely, and to provide specific support to pupils. There are parts of the country where this is not guaranteed. It might be useful to administer periodically tests to pupils in order to identify as early as possible learning difficulties, and to respond with focused instruction tailored to the individual needs.

Support for migrant children and adolescents whose home language is not the language of school

Another key factor affecting literacy development is whether the primary language spoken at home is different from the language used at school. In PIRLS 2011, 17.8% of students in Grade 4 in Italy reported that they sometimes speak a language other than the test language at home, while 2.9% reported that they never did so. Corresponding EU-24 averages are broadly similar at 17.3% and 3.0% respectively. According to Alivernini, Di Leo and Manganelli (2012), 9% of students in Italian schools in 2010-11 were non-native students, although one half of students with foreign citizenship enrolled in schools that year had been born in Italy.

Foreign students attend common classes, according to their age. The Ministerial Directive 27.12.2012 for pupils with special educational needs includes the area of linguistic and cultural disadvantage and asks all schools to create a technical group for school integration and develop individualised plans for each pupil with BES.

The law allows schools in Italy to exercise their autonomy to provide specific individualised interventions for groups of students to help them learn the Italian language. Where possible, school are expected to use their professional resources to provide additional intensive Italian language instruction through specific projects, including additional teaching activities to enrich educational offerings" (Alivernini, Di Leo and Manganelli, 2012,p. 272).

The MIUR has provided specific guidelines on the inclusion of migrant pupils. The guidelines contain a regulatory framework, as well as some suggestions concerning school organisation and teaching. For example, each class can host a maximum of 30% migrant pupils, as a higher proportion may hinder effective inclusion. Recently arrived migrants should be assessed on their language knowledge during the initial period of their integration into local schools. Based on the assessment, schools then organise Italian classes according to the pupils’ capacities24.

Migrant pupils are the direct responsibility of curricular teachers. However, local authorities, as well as associations and organisations working at local level, often provide cultural and linguistic mediators to

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help teachers and school staff communicate with pupils and their families. Foreign students attend common classes, according to their age.

The existence of an important gap in literacy competence among children depending on the language spoken at home requires identification of support measures for migrant children who do not have sufficient knowledge of Italian and their families as a priority. Priority actions should include: a) early intervention in families of migrant children to promote the home learning environment with specific focus on supporting emergent literacy development in the host country host language; b) support for early attendance of day care for migrant children; c) implementation of the ministerial directive on BES.

4.3.2 Adults

Increasing offers for second-language learners

No information was provided on second-language provision for adults in Italy.

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