LITERACY IN THE NETHERLANDS
COUNTRY REPORT
SHORT VERSION

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Main authors (in alphabetical order):
Christine Garbe, Hedwig de Krosse, Dominique Lafontaine, Andrea Netten, Gerry Shiel, Heleen Strating, 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 the Netherlands 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 on the Dutch Education System

The general information on the Dutch Education System is derived from Eurydice⁶.

Figure 1: Structure of the Netherlands School System⁷

The education system in the Netherlands is decentralised. Until their fourth birthday, children can attend a day nursery or crèche. Playgroups cater for two to four-year-olds and fall under the responsibility of the local authorities. There are programmes for early childhood education, but these are aimed at two to five-year-olds at risk of educational disadvantage. Every child must attend school full-time from the age of five; however, nearly all children start going to school at the age of four.

Primary education lasts eight years, after which, around the age of 12, pupils opt for one of three types of secondary education: pre-vocational secondary education (VMBO, which takes 4 years), senior general secondary education (HAVO, 5 years) or pre-university education (VWO, 6 years). Most secondary schools are combined schools offering several types of secondary education so that pupils can transfer easily from one type to another. Young people aged 18 or over can take adult education courses or higher distance learning courses.

In addition to mainstream primary and secondary schools there are special schools for children with learning and behavioural difficulties who – temporarily at least – require special educational treatment. Pupils who are unable to obtain a VMBO qualification, even with long-term extra help, can receive practical training, which prepares them for entering the labour market.

Overall responsibility for the education system lies with the State, specifically the Minister of Education, Culture and Science and the State Secretary (junior minister) for Education, Culture and Science. The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science lays down statutory requirements for early childhood education, primary and secondary education and secondary vocational education, and has overall control of adult general secondary education (VAVO). The government lays down the framework within which higher education institutions (higher professional education and universities) have to operate, but it is the responsibility of the competent authority of each institution to expand on the

government framework in the teaching and examination regulations. The provincial authorities’ role in education is limited to supervisory and legal tasks. The administration and management of primary and secondary schools and schools for secondary vocational education is locally organised.

3 Literacy Performance Data

The Netherlands 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.

The Netherlands performed above the EU average both in PIRLS 2011 (546 vs 535 EU-average) and in PISA 2012 (511 vs 489 EU average). The performance in PIRLS decreased slightly between 2001 and 2006 (-7 score points) but was about the same in 2006 and 2011. So, between the first and the third cycles of PIRLS, a decrease of 8 score-points was observed. In PISA, even if it remained above the EU mean, the scores of the Netherlands show a significant decrease between 2000 and 2012 (-21 score-points), namely the equivalent of about a half-year of schooling.

In PIRLS, a proportion of 10% of pupils can be considered as low-performing readers; in PISA, this proportion reaches 14%. This is less than in EU countries on average (20% on both levels). 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-performing readers remained about the same through the three cycles of PIRLS (between 9.5 and 9.9%) and tended to increase in PISA, from 9.5% to 14% between 2000 and 2012. This increase was slightly higher among girls than among boys (+5.2% vs +4%), which is an unusual pattern. The proportion of top-performing readers was 7% in PIRLS (vs 9% in EU) and 10% in PISA (vs 7% in EU).

The gap according to the pupils’ socioeconomic background was much lower than the EU average in PIRLS (46 vs 76 on average), and lower in PISA (79 vs 89 on average). However, the indices of socioeconomic background are not the same in PIRLS and PISA, so the comparison should be taken with caution.

In PISA 2009, the gap between native students and students with a migrant background was higher than in EU countries on average (46 vs 38 EU-average). 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 slightly lower than in EU countries (21 vs 26). Similarly, in PISA, this gap was lower than the EU average (39 vs 54).

In the Netherlands, the gender gap (in favour of girls) was lower in PIRLS (7 vs 12 on average) and much lower in PISA (24 vs 44 on average) than the corresponding EU average differences. The gender difference in the Netherlands tended to decrease since 2001 in PIRLS: from 15 to 7 points-score. In PISA, the decrease in reading performance observed between 2000 and 2012 was a bit higher among
girls (- 22 score points) than among boys (- 19 score points), resulting in the relative stability of the gender gap (30 points in 2000, 27 in 2012).

In conclusion, the Netherlands have slightly decreased their 4th grade pupils’ performance in reading over time. As far as 15 year-olds are concerned, Netherlands still perform better than EU countries on average but with a drastic decrease between 2000 and 2012. Its proportion of low-performing readers is lower than the EU countries on average at both levels. The spread of achievement (gap between low and top performing readers) is smaller in the Netherlands than in the EU on average at both levels. The gap according to socioeconomic status is much lower in PIRLS and lower in PISA than in the EU on average. The trends are the same for the gap according to language spoken at home.

As far as adults are concerned, the Netherlands performed above the EU in PIAAC (284 vs 271). It should be remembered that only 17 EU countries took part to PIAAC in 2012, so the comparison with other age groups should be taken with caution. The spread of achievement – namely the gap between top and bottom performers - is somewhat wider in Netherlands than the EU-17-Average (122 vs 117 on average). The proportion of adults performing at or below level 1 in the Netherlands was 12%, less than the EU-17 average (16.4%).

Females performed somewhat less well than men (281 vs 287) and the gender gap in favour of males was somewhat higher in the Netherlands (6 score points) than in the EU on average (2 score points), which is in contrast with what was observed in younger generations: the female advantage in PIRLS and PISA was respectively much smaller than in the EU countries on average. The gap according to parents’ level of education was somewhat lower than in the EU countries on average (37 vs 41), reflecting the same trend as in PIRLS and PISA. The reverse was observed for the gap according to the language spoken at home: the gap between native and non-native speakers was larger than the EU-17-average (47 vs 28) although the distribution in Netherlands of native and non native-speaking was similar to EU-17 average.
4 Key Literacy Policy Areas for Development (age-specific and across age-groups)

4.1 Creating a Literate Environment

4.1.1 Pre-primary years

Providing a supportive home environment: Compared to the European average, the number of pupils in the Netherlands whose parents have a positive attitude toward reading is slightly higher. The importance of parental attitudes to reading is shown by the fact that there are significant differences in reading performance at grade 4 between children whose parents like to read (average achievement 563) and those who do not (average achievement 541).

The Dutch Database Effective Youth Interventions\(^8\) provides an inventory of parenting programmes that have been acknowledged by a committee of experts, because they were proven to be effective and/or are theoretically well grounded. The Database is updated regularly, in response to new programmes or interventions being added, existing interventions being modified (in which case they need to be assessed again), or due to the fact that an intervention is no longer on offer.

Home Educational Resources: Eleven percent of parents in the Netherlands reported having few home resources for learning. This is well below the EU Average of 25%. Similarly, a 10 percentage points gap between the EU Average (25) for many resources, and the Dutch average (35) suggests that pupils in the Netherlands have greater access to home resources. The association between home resources and reading achievement is weaker in the Netherlands than on average across the EU-24.

Number of children’s books in the home: Compared to the European average the availability of children’s books in the home is quite high in the Netherlands. The achievement gap between those with 0-10 books and those with 200+ books is 38 points. This gap is considerably lower than the EU average of 82 points.

Challenge: Even though data on the factors creating a literate environment in pre-primary years looks favourable for the Netherlands, there is still a need for ongoing well-implemented family literacy programmes with a focus on supporting migrant parents and care givers in understanding and fostering their children’s literacy development. The relatively large migrant group of Moroccans in the Netherlands is from a traditionally more oral than written culture, where reading to and with young children is not a common practice, as it increasingly is in most of the Dutch monolingual families. Also, there is an ongoing need for programmes to raise awareness in all parents that literacy is a key to learning and life chances and that the basis for good literacy achievement is laid in early childhood.

4.1.2 Primary Children and Adolescents

Creating a literate environment in school: Based on data provided by their teachers, PIRLS shows that 86.1% of students in the Netherlands are in classrooms which have class libraries – above the corresponding EU-24 average of 72.9% (ELINET PIRLS 2011 Appendix, Table H2). In the Netherlands, 58.8% of students were in classrooms with more than 50 books, which is above the EU-24 average of 32.1% (ibid.).

Offering digital literacy learning opportunities in schools: According to teachers’ reports, 85.2% of students in the Netherlands have a computer available for reading lessons, compared to the EU-average of 44.9% (ELINET PIRLS 2011 Appendix Table I6). In the Netherlands, 77.6% use a computer at least monthly to look up information. This is well above the corresponding EU-24 average at 39.0% (ibid). In the Netherlands, 68.3% of students are in classrooms whose teachers report that they use computers to write stories or other texts at least monthly. The corresponding EU-24 average is under half of this proportion (33.1%). The use of computers and other ICT equipment in primary education is not laid down by law, but nearly all teachers use digital learning materials. Some 75% of primary school classrooms have an electronic blackboard and schools have, on average, one computer for every five pupils. Software makes up 29% of teaching materials in primary schools.

The number of secondary school teachers using computers rose by 3% between 2009 and 2010. At this rate, it will take another 10 to 15 years before all teachers have adopted ICT teaching aids. There is an average of one computer for every six pupils. This figure has not changed greatly over the last few years. Many schools have a digital library and computer work areas for groups. Many secondary schools have electronic blackboards.

Challenge: In secondary education, the (innovative) use of of ICT, new media and innovative teaching aids is, unfortunately, more often than not linked to preferences and skills of individual teachers. Pre-service and in-service teacher training should and could be the place where ongoing professionalisation of teachers on the use of ICT as an innovative tool for their teaching is linked with knowledge of appropriate didactic craftsmanship.

Strengthening the role of public libraries: Throughout The Netherlands, the involvement of public libraries with schools and parents is paramount. There are numerous ways in which libraries are an important agent in reading promotion in programs and initiatives, both for parents and for reading specialist and regular teachers in schools. The Dutch government (i.c. the Ministry of Education) funded the action programme The Art of Reading in two periods: 2008-2011 and 2012-2015. As a result of this programme, a developmental line for reading with accompanying developmental and learning goals was linked with (internationally) successful activities such as Bookstart for babies, Bookstart in daycare and the Library in the School (both primary and secondary schools). The Art of Reading ensures that all children and adolescents are introduced to books and literacy promotion activities.

4.1.3 Adults

Fostering literacy provision for adults: Adult literacy provision in the Netherlands is aimed at a number of target groups including second language speakers, lower educated mother tongue speakers, adults with low proficiency in literacy and, in particular, lower educated employees. Although younger people aged 16-17 can participate in this provision in adult general secondary education (VAVO) 18 is generally the minimum age for participation. There is no statutory entitlement to literacy
provision for adult in the Netherlands. Compared with the figures from PIAAC of 1.1 million people with problems in basic skills, the numbers participating in basic skills courses is very small. However, in the Netherlands a high proportion of the people identified by PIAAC as low literate are already almost at Level 2 and we know that this group are not aware of the fact that they are low literate and do not experience great problems in everyday life.

There has been an active policy on fighting illiteracy in the Netherlands in 2003 leading to a number of Action Plans, the most recent of which was introduced in 2012 and covered the period until 2015. Also a result of this Action Plan, the government decided to enhance quality in literacy provision and therefore national standards in literacy, numeracy and digital skills (as well as courses for second language learners) were introduced.

In 2015 important changes to the law on adult education and vocational education and training (WEB) were introduced, notably including the launch a free market policy for all types of adult literacy provision between 2015 and 2018, in several stages of 25% of the budget every year, with the rest of the budget reserved for the regional centres for adult education and vocational education and training (the ROCs). The budget for adult education courses can also be provided by private training companies, libraries or institutions for social welfare and organisations of volunteers.

The period of the 2012-2015 Action Plan also saw the introduction of a pilot project, “Taal voor het leven” (Language for life) in six regions in the Netherlands with an annual budget of 5 million euro. The pilot focused on non-formal education and working with volunteers in order to reach more learners and motivate them to follow language courses. Important pillars in the project were:

- creating local and regional partnerships for campaigning and literacy policy
- active connection between “sites” of poor literacy (places where low literate people can be found) and provision by a diversity of language providers (formal, non-formal, informal)
- training of volunteers
- development of materials that can be used by trained volunteers
- monitoring and evaluation

The program was evaluated positively by the University of Maastricht, leading the Dutch parliament to conclude that the approach should be the basis of a new action plan (2016-2018), Tel mee met Taal (“Count on Skills”) which will include:

- The development of regional and local partnerships to develop a literacy infrastructure, based on the experiences in the Language for Life pilots.
- Literacy at Work – support programme for employers
- The art of Reading – programme for the promotion of reading.
- Experiments in literacy programs and campaigns for elderly people, unemployed women, family literacy and guidance and orientation in Adult Learning.
- Monitoring, research, knowledge sharing and communication
4.2 Improving the Quality of Teaching

4.2.1 Pre-primary years

Improving the quality of preschool education: In the Netherlands, the minimum required level to become a qualified teacher is Bachelor level (ISCED 5), and length of training is 4 years. Pre-primary or kindergarten years are an integral part of primary education.

Early Childhood Education Programmes are usually carried out at day nurseries, playgroups and/or primary schools (years 1 and 2). Some early childhood education programmes focus on only one developmental domain, usually language (narrow programmes). Broad programmes address multiple developmental domains and require parents’ active participation. In both kinds of programmes, the need for high quality support of language and literacy acquisition and development is appropriately recognised and well worked out in the activities and materials, to be used by the care professionals. Playgroups providing early childhood education are in principle open to all children between 2-2½ and 4 years of age. However, early childhood education is intended primarily for children with socio-medical problems and children suffering from, or at risk of, developmental delay. Individual municipalities may give these children priority at playgroups where demand is high.

Children in early childhood education programmes are monitored using observation lists and assessments of development. The various developmental domains are usually assessed three times a year, or more often for children whose development is abnormal.

4.2.2 Primary children and adolescents

Improving the quality of literacy instruction: Formal reading and writing instruction begins in Grade 1, with approximately 75% of schools implementing an indirect phonics method called Learning to Reading Safely. Most children are able to decode simple Dutch words halfway through Grade 1. In the second half of Grade 1, there is an increased emphasis on reading short texts to increase fluency as well as decoding skills. There are no data on the relative emphasis on decoding skills as students progress through the primary grades.

It should be noted that, unlike in many European countries, schools in the Netherlands have considerable freedom in deciding which specific curriculum elements to teach. Hence, core curriculum targets (core objectives) describe attainment targets only, and schools decide how the targets should be reached, and which instructional elements to implement (Netten & Verhoeven, 2012). In practice, the Dutch language curriculum at primary levels includes three broad components: oral education, written education and linguistics. Textbooks are available that cover integrated, as well as separate, language and reading education. The curriculum does not outline specific reading strategies that must be taught. However, the core objectives for reading and writing education suggest a need to focus on specific reading comprehension strategies. In addition, long-range attainment goals for both language and maths were laid down in 2010 by the Dutch government. These developmentally described reference levels state the kind of reading, writing and oral tasks, with accompanying knowledge and skills, children should have acquired at several places on their route through the educational system.

In secondary education, every school must have a school plan, updated every four years, describing the steps being taken to monitor and improve quality and indicating the school’s policy on educational matters, staffing and internal quality assurance.
**Challenge: The engagement of students in the Netherlands in learning in general, and in applying reading comprehension strategies on a regular basis, lags behind EU-24 average levels.** A review to approaches to promoting reading comprehension in classrooms might help to explain how reading comprehension is promoted in Dutch schools, and whether any adjustments are needed.

**Digital literacy as part of the curriculum for primary and secondary schools:** The Flemish Government has implemented an ongoing policy of promoting ICT in education since 1996. This means that the government aims to encourage schools to integrate ICT in their class practice by means of information and awareness-raising campaigns, in-service training, infrastructure and project funding. In this respect, the emphasis is on the educational use of the new media and cross-curricular final objectives and developmental aims of ICT in education.

**Early identification of and support for struggling literacy learners:** teachers in the Netherlands, including remedial teachers, internal counsellors and speech therapists, are guided by a protocol, the Reading Problems and Dyslexia Protocol, which is available for Grades 1-8, and contains guidelines for a structured school-wide dyslexia policy whereby regular assessments facilitate early identification, prevention and intervention of reading difficulties. To a growing extent, in secondary education there is also more emphasis and attention to school-wide language policy: with an internal counsellor and specified means to aid and assist pupils with language and reading difficulties, including dyslexia.

Dutch primary schools are required to use a Student Tracking System (*Leerling en onderwijs volgsysteem*) that enables them to assess and track the competence of students in Grades 1-8. The system enables teachers and schools to monitor and improve the development of individual students as well as larger groups. Because tests are administered on a regular basis, problems can usually be identified at an early stage, and subsequently examined to devise a remedial action plan. A comparable STS is also available for, and widely used in, secondary education.

**Standards as basis of assessment of reading difficulties:** There are no detailed standards at each grade which form the basis of assessments allowing early identification of reading difficulties in the Netherlands. Not all Dutch schools have specific reading specialists besides the ‘Interne Begeleider’: the professional charged with internal quality control. Students with reading difficulties are often helped by the IB-er, a remedial teacher or speech therapist associated with the school or school advisory service. There is a trend in primary education toward employing coordinators who are responsible for a certain subject or age group (e.g., internal student counsellors, junior department coordinators, senior department coordinators, language coordinators, and arithmetic coordinators).

In the context of secondary education, attainment targets again specify the standards of knowledge, understanding and skills pupils are required to attain in the lower years of secondary school. The Secondary Education Act (WVO) states, for the upper years of each type of education, which subjects must in any event be included in the curriculum. The Secondary Education (Organisation of Teaching) Decree prescribes the number of periods to be spent on each subject or group of subjects in the form of a study load table.

**Improving the quality of in-service teacher training:** The Netherlands apply specific selection criteria for admission to initial teacher education, besides the general entrance requirements for entry to tertiary education. The Netherlands require primary teachers to have a bachelor’s degree which takes four years’ study. Typically, primary teachers’ education routes are through a four-year university
bachelor’s degree programme in primary education. According to an analysis of guidelines for Initial Teacher Education institutions, generic skills or methodology for teaching reading is not a topic in ITE.

In the Netherlands, 46% of the fourth grade students had reading teachers with an educational emphasis on language, 45% had teachers with an emphasis on pedagogy/teaching reading, and 25% had teachers with an emphasis on reading theory. These figures are below the corresponding EU-24 means.

**Challenges:** Initial teacher education in The Netherlands could benefit from a compulsory focus on developing literacy expertise among future primary and secondary teachers. Continuing professional development should be improving in quality and participation rates and become more targeted at building literacy expertise of teachers.

### 4.2.3 Adults

**Monitoring the quality of adult literacy providers:** Adult literacy providers in the Netherlands are monitored – as are all educational providers - the national inspection authority for education, ‘de Onderwijsinspectie’. The 2015 changes to the law on adult education and vocational education and training (WEB) outlined above reintroduced quality monitoring for formal adult-education (courses leading to a formal qualification/diploma), with a supervisory framework for adult education completed in 2015. The framework concentrates on the quality of the education and the way monitoring of quality is organised internally in the educational institute. The focus in quality is on two aspects:

- Program, diagnosis and assessment of learners and didactical approach
- Quality of exams and diplomas and the organisation of the exam-process.

Providers can submit their courses for recognition and, when accepted, they will be monitored by the inspectorate for the specific courses for which they applied for recognition.

Because of the great influence of teachers on the learning outcomes of adult students, the Onderwijsinspectie pays special attention to the quality of teachers and evaluates their competences. The inspectorate regularly publishes national reports on thematic issues in education, such as languages and math, the way complaints are processed, or time spent at school by students.

Quality in non-formal adult education comes under the responsibility of the municipalities. Due to negative experiences with courses for immigrants, and the way that quality standards were implemented following the introduction of the free market policy, this is a major area of concern. Municipalities are not experts in education and therefore in general not always qualified to monitor for quality.

**Developing curricula for adult literacy:** There is no national literacy curriculum in the Netherlands. Instead, providers and teachers create their own curricula based on the standards for their target group: as national standards have, since 2013, defined what tasks in language and numeracy should be learned and taught and at which levels, these form the basis for each curriculum.

In general, programmes of adult literacy provision are built on the principles that:

- for adult learners, education is not a goal in itself; rather the goal is to equip adults to function better in society and in the working context.
- adult learners acquire better skills in language and numeracy when they learn in their own practical context. Therefore the curriculum must provide them with the possibility of using
their skills in practical situations, so that there are opportunities to transfer what is learned into real life.

- good literacy provision is based on the individual needs and learning goals of participants.
- the curriculum must create possibilities for independent learning in the educational process.
- the curriculum must be tailor-made for the individual and must take into account the ability to learn, the preferable way of learning and the degree of independent learning the individual is capable of.

**Improving the qualification and status of teachers of adult literacy:** There are no official or standard qualification requirements for adult literacy teachers in the Netherlands, and providers of adult literacy courses make different demands on the qualifications and competences of teachers. Some ask for a teaching qualification; this of course does not mean these teachers will have special knowledge or experience in adult literacy provision. Others ask for two years or more experience in teaching adults, others demand that when no teaching qualification is held, the teacher should start a training programme to obtain a teaching qualification within two years.

ROCs should only work with teachers who are qualified and competent. In VET and adult education teachers without teaching qualifications need to obtain a pedagogical educational certificate. However, the quality and intensity of training programs to obtain such a certificate is very diverse.

Although there are specialist training courses for teachers of Dutch as a second language, including courses in continuing professional development (see below) there are no equivalent programmes for teachers of low literate adult L1 speakers. (This is also the case with adult numeracy.) The are some informal opportunities for professional development (such as courses and conferences offered by commercial organisations in the field) but these are far less developed that courses for L2 teachers.

In the Netherlands, teaching in adult education is considered to be of lower status than teaching in VET or HE. Teachers in adult education are generally women aged 55+ who work part time and are motivated by a desire to help their target groups. The fact that teaching in adult education requires no special education, at least not officially, underlines this low status. Adult education teachers working at regional training centres (ROCs) receive a salary equal to that of other teachers at ROCs. Those working for commercial providers generally receive a lower salary than teachers at ROCs.
4.3 Increasing Participation, Inclusion and Equity

4.3.1 Pre-primary years

**Encouraging preschool attendance, especially for disadvantaged children:** Pre-primary education is free for children from 4 to 6 years old. The Netherlands belongs to the half of the European countries where this entire period of ECEC is free. The Netherlands reaches the European benchmark for at least 95% of children between age 4 and the start of compulsory education participating in ECEC. According to OECD 2014 statistical data, the participation rate is 99.3% for 5-year-olds, 99.5% for 4-year-olds, and 28.3% for 3-year-olds.

4.3.2 Primary Children and adolescents

**Supporting children with special needs and migrant children and adolescents whose home language is not the language of school:** Dutch schools with a large minority student population devote more attention to vocabulary and verbal communication than schools whose student populations consist of mostly native Dutch-speaking students. Initiatives have been launched to enhance language proficiency for students lagging behind, such as bridging classes for primary school students who are disadvantaged because of poor Dutch language skills. These classes can be part-time or out-of-school classes or entirely separate from mainstream school, with students required to spend a year learning Dutch before returning to regular classes.

**Preventing early school leaving:** The Dutch Early school leaving-programme has been successful in implementing various measures at national level. Young people are staying longer in full-time education, according to research by Statistics Netherlands. The education participation rate among 15 to 18-year-olds rose to 98% in the 2011/2012 school year. In the same year, six out of ten people between the ages of 18 and 25 were involved in some form of education. Early school leaving declined. The number of men aged between 15 and 25 years leaving school without a basic qualification dropped from 15.6% in 2001 to 8.9% in 2011. The percentage of women drop-outs fell in the same period from 13.2% to 6.1%. This reduction is probably due to new legislation making it compulsory for pupils to remain at school until they have obtained a basic qualification. Pupils with a non-Western immigrant background still drop out of school more often than Dutch pupils, and boys drop out more often than girls.

Increasing amounts of young people are opting for senior general secondary education (HAVO) and pre-university education (VWO). Also, an increasing number of young people with a pre-vocational education certificate (VMBO) are staying in school in order to get a HAVO qualification.

4.3.3 Adults

**Increasing offers for second-language learners:** Provision for adults who do not have Dutch as a first language (known as NT2) is offered in two strands – provision for immigrants who required to take the civic integration programme (as set out in the Civic Integration Act) and provision for L2-learners that are not obliged to pass the exam, but want to improve their skills. Courses in the non-exam strand are funded by the municipalities from the WEB-budget. Courses leading towards the civic integration exam or State Exam are provided by local training centres (ROCs), commercial providers and individual teachers. Online language learning is becoming more common in the Netherlands, perhaps because the government no longer pays for courses, leaving adult migrants to self-finance their education and exams. The exception to this is Dutch as a second language provision for refugees,
who receive funding from the Dutch government providing their tuition takes place at a certified provider. In addition, regional training centres (ROCs) – and since 2015, some other providers, offer special courses for adults with low literacy skills in their L1, from a very basic level to reading and writing at level 2F. These courses aim at reaching a higher level of independence in everyday life, at work and when following a training programme.

Special training programmes (post HE and post academic) for NT2 teachers are offered at several HE institutes and Universities in the Netherlands. A professional association for NT2 teachers (the BVNT2) was founded in 2003 and has developed a competence profile for NT2 teachers on which all NT2 teacher-training programmes are based. Nonetheless, there is no requirement for providers to hire NT2 certified teachers.
5 References


