LITERACY IN SWITZERLAND (GERMAN-SPEAKING)
COUNTRY REPORT
SHORT VERSION

March 2016

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1 Introduction

1.1 Context

This report on the state of literacy in German-speaking Switzerland 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\(^1\). 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\(^2\). All country reports produced by ELINET use a common theoretical framework which is described here: “ELINET Country Reports – Frame of Reference”\(^3\).

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)\(^4\).

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”\(^5\).

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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.

1.2 Introduction to the Report on German-speaking Switzerland

What it is about: The literacy report at hand should provide an initial overview of the actors in (German-speaking) Switzerland who are active participants in the promotion of literacy. The purpose is to create a base through which the promotion of literacy can be addressed coherently in future.

Unique Swiss Features (see Chapter 2):

The Swiss education system is not controlled centrally, nor is it in the hands of the Federal Government. Rather, the cantons or the municipalities hold the power of decision in important educational matters.

- Switzerland has four national languages and is divided into 26 cantons; the education system is largely regulated by these cantons.
- The education system in Switzerland is organised in a subsidiary manner: the Confederation acts in an organisational and comprehensive capacity whenever other actors are not yet inherently active.

The report at hand therefore remains patchy and in this first version exclusively refers to German-speaking Switzerland.

Overview (see also figure 1):

- At the very beginning in Chapter 2, the basic principle of subsidiarity in Switzerland will be discussed. It is essential for all responsibilities in terms of education. Here we explain how the actors in the Swiss educational landscape are organised – generally and more specifically with reference to the promotion of literacy.
- Chapter 3 gives an overview over Swiss performance data concerning literacy.
- Part A is then dedicated to the creation of a literate environment, i.e. the promotion of literacy outside school, namely reading and writing in leisure time (see Chapter 4).
- Part B informs about improving the quality of teaching in the Chapters 5 and 6: Chapter 5 is devoted to the promotion and teaching of literacy at school. It looks at how the University of applied sciences and universities train teachers and which sectors Swiss universities engage in when it comes to researching and developing new concepts for teaching.
- Chapter 6 provides an overview over the means of the implementation of the promotion of literacy at school, namely the Swiss curricula (in particular «Lehrplan 21» (Curriculum 21)), the school material used in German-speaking Switzerland, and educational monitoring.
- Part C gives information about the increasing participation, about inclusion and equity in the Chapters 7 and 8: read about the pre-school promotion of literacy (Chapter 7), and
- the promotion of literacy in adulthood (Chapter 8) – the projects, in other words, which follow the transition from elementary school to the life of adults.

Each chapter ends with a conclusion, where the given information is considered and reflected in terms of future activities in the field of literacy.

6 An outline of the Swiss cantons and their abbreviations can be found in the appendix, appendix, p. 33.
Figure 1: Graphical overview of the Swiss education system and the report at hand
2 Political and Legal Framework of Literality Furtherance in Switzerland

Due to the principle of subsidiarity, federalism, and multilingualism, the responsibilities of the various actors in the Swiss education system are sometimes confusing. After a brief introduction, the individual levels with their actors are taken into view, and their interactions explained. The graphic in figure 1 provides a schematic overview.

What it is about: Switzerland is organised subsidiarily: the government is active federally or on a regional basis, while neither the cantons nor private organisations (e.g. foundations) are active on their own.\(^7\)

Under the heading «harmonisation», the effort to unify the Swiss education system has existed for several years – with partial success so far (see e.g. Lehrplan 21).

Language Situation in Switzerland

Multilingualism. Switzerland has four national languages: German, French, Italian and Romansh. Switzerland’s four national languages are written in the Federal Constitution.\(^8\)

Diglossia. In German-speaking Switzerland, there is a juxtaposition of Dialect and Standard German. Depending on the situation (formal – informal), interview participants (Swiss German – other language speakers), and context (letter, email, WhatsApp, ...), dialect or standard German is used both in either writing or spoken language. The use of dialect or Standard German says nothing about the social status of a person.

Swiss Standard German or «Swiss Standard German» is the national variety of German, which is written and spoken in Switzerland as the standard language. The Swiss Standard German is subject of instruction in schools and the language of instruction. It is used in written form in official documents, magazines, and newspapers, and it is codified (Variantenwörterbuch des Deutschen, Schweizer Schülerduden).

Pluricentricity of the German language. Equivalent to Swiss Standard German, there is the Austrian and the German Standard German. These three national standard languages are equal. The principle of national varying degrees of standard languages is called pluricentricity.\(^9\)

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\(^7\) An outline of the Swiss cantons and their abbreviations can be found in the appendix, appendix, p. 33.
\(^8\) Namely, in Article 4. In addition, the Federal Constitution (Art 70.) stipulates that the exchange and understanding between the languages is to be promoted and both Italian and Romansh should receive special support.
2.1 Organising Principle «Subsidiarity»

**Subsidiarity – the leading organisation principle in the Swiss educational landscape:** In accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, tasks are always performed by the smallest possible political or institutional authority and only left to the next higher one if they cannot be managed.

In the federalistically organised multilingual Switzerland, language learning and the corresponding educational coordination of language teaching play an essential role. Both the language regime and the education in Switzerland are subject to the principle of subsidiarity. Against this background the Swiss education system is subject to the individual cantons to a significant extent, with a great leeway left open to the municipalities in administrative matters.

The educational and language policy coordination alongside these political premises is exposed to change over time: The question about the aims how languages are learned, and what language skills should be acquired by the learner, adapts to social developments and insights from research (see Chapter 5).

**Language Promotion in Transition:** Until the harmonisation efforts, first the local language, and later a second national language were learned in language teaching in Switzerland. Learning these second languages was carried out in isolation, but with the same objective: to handle both languages as correctly as possible.\(^{10}\)

The cantons in the different linguistic regions of Switzerland could follow this understanding of learning of their own accord.

Meanwhile, however, a change in perspective has taken place: on the one hand, the majority of children – also due to migration – are in contact with different languages and cultures. On the other hand it is now proven that the learning of different languages should not be isolated but linked. This understanding of learning has changed under these premises to a communicative-action oriented, multilingual competence.

Against this background the development of a new Swiss language concept suggested itself in the 1990s. Furthermore, English as science and media language grew more important and should therefore be learned excessively as an additional foreign language. Some cantons were already planning this for the primary school level. Faced with these reasons, the cantons saw to the task of drawing up a coordinated solution throughout Switzerland.\(^{11}\)

But since nationwide regulations could not be worked out by the individual cantons, in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, the Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education (EDK) took over the coordination of language teaching and developed a unified concept of language.

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\(^{10}\) Hutterli et al. (2012).

\(^{11}\) EDK (2004).
2.2 Actors in the Education System in Switzerland

2.2.1 Federal Level

**EDK (CDIP):** The EDK (= Schweizerische Konferenz der kantonalen Erziehungsdirektoren, i.e. Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education, CDIP) is a link between the Confederation and the cantons. It is a national political authority in which all 26 Cantonal Ministers of Education are represented. The EDK has various tools at hand to tackle solutions for education issues that are of national interest. However, these instruments are only binding for the cantons if they agree with them or join respectively (see Chapter «the instruments of the EDK).

**The Instruments of the EDK: Concordats.** The most binding instrument of inter-cantonal cooperation in education is formed by the concordats with legal binding character. However, each canton decides on joining a concordat, making them ultimate decision-makers.

**Recommendations.** The EDK may adopt recommendations to contribute to the promotion and harmonisation of the school system. Unlike the concordats, recommendations do not create legally enforceable obligations.

**Explanations.** In the form of statements, the EDK takes a position on educational issues.

2.2.2 Between the federal and cantonal levels: The HarmoS Agreement

In 2006, the Swiss electorate decided that compulsory education should be harmonised in Switzerland. Under the leadership of the CDIP (see Chapter «the instruments of the EDK) duration and educational goals of language teaching were specified in the so-called HarmoS Agreement («inter-cantonal agreement on the harmonisation of compulsory education»).

The «HarmoS Agreement» of 2007 and the strategy paper «Language Teaching in Compulsory Education» from 2004 are the main anchor points of a unified language concept of the Swiss education policy.

In it, the acceding cantons define the compulsory education by standardising the education structures and the objectives of teaching, as well as developing common management tools (see Chapter 6).

Regarding the structure, the Concordat sets the duration of each school level (2 years Preschool, 6 Primary, 3 secondary level) and thus unifies the sequence of grades hitherto different from one canton to the other.

The HarmoS Agreement also aims at the regional harmonisation of curricula and coordination of teaching material (see Chapter 6.1). As for language teaching, the HarmoS Agreement regulates the number and order of foreign languages to be taught during compulsory education (see Chapter «cantonal level of education»).

The cantons which acceded to the HarmoS Agreement also agree to promote the development and establishment of the HSK-teaching (= Instruction in Native language and Culture). This way, children with migration background can consolidate and perfect their first language in a school environment.

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12 The Principality of Liechtenstein is an advisory member of the EDK and can apply concordats and provisions with all rights and obligations.
13 www.edk.ch/dyn/11659.php
14 EDK (2007)
Sponsorship of the HSK-teaching are Consulates, Embassies or parents’ associations of the different countries of origin. The HarmoS cantons provide free classrooms, school infrastructure and education for the coordinators as well as for the HSK teachers.

The special needs education is partly taken over by the EDK according to the subsidiarity principle, to relieve the cantons selectively.

2.2.3 Regional Language Level

What it is about: The cross-cantonal cooperation takes place between those cantons which have common interests, linguistic reasons (cooperation between the French-speaking cantons) or due to geographical proximity (educational areas).

The increased cooperation between the cantons do not only work at national but also at regional language level. This concerns in particular the arrangements for the educational objectives and curricula. The French-speaking cantons have launched the Curriculum PER (plan d’études Romand), while the 21 German-speaking cantons have developed the Lehrplan 21 (see Chapter 6.1). Correspondent to the harmonisation of the curricula, an inter-cantonal cooperation consists in the teaching material coordination (e. g. Die Sprachstarken, Sprachland etc.) and performance tests (see Chapter 6.3).

Furthermore, there are educational areas that cooperate in education due to geographic proximity.

- Educational area of Central Switzerland (cantons LU, UR, SZ, OW, NW and ZG), which knows the cooperation with respect to curricula, teaching and development orientation work, and
- the educational area of Northwestern Switzerland (AG, BL, BS and SO), with the co-sponsored Pedagogical University and joint ventures, both in the context of teaching material, as well as with respect to performance tests.

2.2.4 Cantonal Level

The intra-cantonal responsibilities for regulation, financing and implementation will vary depending on the level of education and educational institutions. These differently organised responsibilities are presented in detail below.

What it is about: In educational matters, most aspects of responsibility lie with the cantons. However, government, cantons, and other institutions such as the professional organisations or private training providers work closely together.

The education and language policy is a matter for the cantons. All competences that are assigned to the EDK due to the joint efforts to harmonise must be accepted or rejected by each canton.

The principle of subsidiarity in the education system of Switzerland is applied down to the lowest levels. The different responsibilities at the cantonal level is split between the canton, municipalities, schools and education (see chapter «cantonal level of education»).  

\[ \text{SKBF (2014).} \]
\[ \text{An outline of the Swiss cantons and their abbreviations can be found in the appendix, p. 33.} \]
\[ \text{SKBF (2014).} \]
\[ \text{SKBF (2014).} \]
Who Is Responsible For What?¹⁹

**Canton:** Education policy laws and regulations, curriculum, resources, supervision

**Municipalities:** Education policy implementation and organisation, strategic management of schools, infrastructure

**Schools:** Operative school management, quality and personnel management, instructional development, parental involvement

**Education:**
- Teachers: teaching, classroom management, assessment and career recommendation, parent contact
- Students: learning and competence development, social behaviour and personal development, career decisions

In the last twenty years, the control of the schools has undergone changes in most cantons. Control mechanisms used to be rather input-oriented (e.g. through specifications to learning resources, curriculum, and finances), now a tendency shows that **municipalities and individual schools** are granted a more output-oriented leeway, while increasingly respecting the quality of the processes at the same time²⁰.

**Permeability in the Swiss education system:** The Swiss education system is characterised by its high permeability: There are several ways to get in or change schools or make up for an education. The Federal Constitution prescribes this permeability and commits the Confederation and the cantons into coordination. The Federal Vocational Education is an example where the high permeability applies: Basic vocational training with a federal certificate (ISCED 35) can be supplemented with a vocational baccalaureate (ISCED 34). The professional baccalaureate allows admittance to study at the University of Applied Sciences (ISCED 6). With the supplementary exam «Vocational education- university college» (Passerelle) the transfer to a Swiss university is possible.

1) Compulsory School

The cantons are responsible for regulating the compulsory education, whereas the municipalities support the **nursery schools** (ISCED 020)²¹ as well as, the **primary** (ISCED 1) and **secondary** schools (ISCED 2) (in some cases it is the cantons). This means: all lesson contents for elementary schools are set by the cantons and executed by the municipalities. Supplementary school offers are regulated equally, for example the DaZ-lessons (German as a second language).

2) Secondary Education

The Confederation, cantons and professional organisations are responsible for the **vocational education** (ISCED 35). The three project partners are working together for high-quality training. They are aiming for a market-oriented range of training courses and educational programs. The

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¹⁹ Based on Fend, 2008.
²⁰ SKBF (2014).
²¹ ISCED stands for «International Standard Classification for Education» and was developed by UNESCO and enables an international comparison of educational levels.
responsibilities of the project partners are governed by the Vocational Training Act and the Vocational Training Regulation. In finance questions of vocational training, the three partners decide together.\textsuperscript{22}

The cantons are responsible for the secondary school Matura and vocational schools (ISCED 34). They take over the supervision and financing. The Confederation in turn is responsible for the recognition of the Matura throughout Switzerland. This means that all cantonal secondary school Matura certificates entitle the bearer to admission to universities in Switzerland.

**Graduation Rate in Secondary Education:** The graduation rate in upper secondary education (ISCED 34 + 35) in Switzerland is 95.1% (as of 2013).\textsuperscript{23} The post-compulsory education at upper secondary level gives access to next levels of education (university, college, higher vocational education) and is regarded as a prerequisite for the entry into the labour market. To increase the graduation rate, various measures are put at the interface between compulsory schooling and secondary education:\textsuperscript{24}

- Multiple bridge offers by the cantons (10th grade, career education courses, etc.)\textsuperscript{25}
- Case Management Training (CM BB) for social and professional integration of young people at risk\textsuperscript{26}
- Two-year vocational education with vocational certificate (EBA)\textsuperscript{27}
- Validation of prior learning efforts from informal or non-formal education\textsuperscript{28}
- Lehrplan 21: module «Vocational Orientation»

3) Tertiary Level

The higher vocational education and vocational training (ISCED 6) are part of the vocational education and are primarily the responsibility of businesses and individuals. They are, to a substantial extent, privately funded.\textsuperscript{29}

The universities (polytechnics, universities of applied sciences, and universities) (ISCED 6 + 7) are assigned to the cantons.\textsuperscript{30} Quality assurance in the form of laws and agreements are the joint responsibility of the Confederation and the cantons, but also take into account a degree of autonomy of the universities.

A central task of the cantons is the training of teachers. The EDK attests teachers and teacher education a key role with regard to the successful and harmonised realignment of instruction.\textsuperscript{31} The educational institutions assume the teachers’ training for compulsory education on behalf of the respective cantons.\textsuperscript{32} In the formation of the secondary education school teachers, the teacher education is completed at the universities (see Chapter 5.2).

\textsuperscript{22} SBFI (2015).
\textsuperscript{23} BFS (2015).
\textsuperscript{24} EDK (2011)
\textsuperscript{25} See: www.berufsberatung.ch/dyn/1293.aspx.
\textsuperscript{26} Egger et al. (2015)
\textsuperscript{27} See: www.eba.berufsbildung.ch/dyn/2678.aspx.
\textsuperscript{29} SBFI (2015)
\textsuperscript{30} However, the Federal Government operates both Federal Institutes of Technology (ETH) (see chapter 2.2.1).
\textsuperscript{31} EDK (2004)
\textsuperscript{32} In the canton of Geneva this lies in the responsibility of the university.
For several years now, basic and harmonisation work has existed throughout Switzerland in the basic training of teachers (especially in foreign languages). The EDK is working closely with the COHEP (Swiss Conference of Rectors of Universities of Education).33

4) Further Education

The federal government sets out the principles for professional training (BV64a). The vocational training is organised primarily by private providers; Federation and cantons act on a subsidiary basis. Financing and execution of further education are organised differently from canton to canton.34

A federal law on further education is being developed (as of 2015). Life-long learning is therefore taken into account, especially in the promotion of literacy in adulthood: The education law aims e.g., to coordinate measures for obtaining and retaining basic competences in adults and to provide financial support (see Chapter 8).35

The universities of applied sciences offer further education of teachers directly on behalf of the cantons. However, the teacher education at universities of applied sciences entertain an individual training offer which they base on research findings and needs assessments (see Chapter 5). Another approach lies in cooperation between individual schools: Therefore, schools with distinctive multicultural composition, for example in the canton of Zurich, have recognised the promotion potential and coordinate the developments of teachers together, this is done in the context of QUIMS project (= Quality in Multicultural Schools see Chapter 8).36

2.2.5 Other Actors

The EDK considers it a principle for the successful development of language teaching that political, cultural, and social institutions which are not actively involved in the school system are integrated into the language support and participate in accordance with their respective competencies. This is the work of the PISA Plan of Action and the integration of «third parties»,37 i.e. organisations employed by the federal government, such as the SKBF, or private institutions and foundations, such as the SIKJM (see Chapter 4).

Conclusion: It is clear that educational aspirations in Switzerland are not mainly run centralised, but are supported by the cantons, the municipalities, schools, specifically created institutions, and private actors.

According to this finding, the present report must remain incomplete.

The coordination of the Swiss education system is placed between two opposing principles, namely between autonomy of the cantons and national harmonisation efforts. Switzerland can look back on a long federalist tradition, and simultaneously desires a uniformly organised school system due to altered circumstances (higher mobility of the population, ...). Educational issues must be negotiated within these two (divergent) principles. Thus it is not surprising that they will lead to detailed discussions in Switzerland.

33 Hutterli et al. (2012)
34 www.edk.ch/dyn/24150.php
35 SBFI (2016).
37 EDK (2004).
3 Literacy Performance Data

3.1 Swiss Literacy Performance data in the European Context

Switzerland participated in OECD's PISA (15 year-olds' reading literacy) since 2000. This means it is possible to describe the changes over time in average reading proficiency, according to different characteristics of the readers for that age group only.

In PISA 2012, Switzerland performed above the EU's average (509 vs 489 EU-average), showing a gradual increase in reading: +7 score points between 2000 and 2009, +8 score points between 2009 and 2012. The difference between 2000 and 2012 reached 15 score-points. Whereas Switzerland performed just above the EU countries on average in 2000 (494 vs 489), it increased its advantage over time: the difference was by 20 score-points in 2012.

The proportion of students who can be considered as low-performing readers was below the EU countries on average (13.7% vs 19.7%). 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 has decreased (by 7%) in Switzerland between 2000 and 2012. This decrease concerns girls (-7%) to the same extent as boys (-6%). The proportion of top-performing readers was higher than in EU countries on average (9.1% vs 7%).

In PISA 2009, the gap according to the pupils' socioeconomic background was higher than the EU average (93 vs 89 on average). Similarly, the gap between native students and students with a migrant background was higher than in EU countries on average (48 vs 38 in EU). However, the mean score difference between those who always spoke the language of the test at home, and those who spoke another language was exactly the same in Switzerland as on EU average (54). It should be noticed that the proportion of students with a migrant was much higher in Switzerland than in EU countries on average (23.5% vs 8.3%).

In Switzerland, the gender gap (in favor of girls) was slightly lower in PISA as in the EU on average (39 vs 44) but it tended to increase between 2000 and 2012. Whereas girls improved their performance on EU-average by 5 score-points, they show a higher increase in Switzerland between 2000 and 2012 (+17 score-points). Boys’ performance increased by 11 points, while on the EU level, the trend was different: a decrease was observed (-5 points).

In conclusion, whereas Switzerland performed better than EU-average mainly in 2000 and more slightly in 2009, its score fell below the EU mean in 2012. Both girls and boys show a decrease of their performance whereas the European trend was an improvement of performance among girls. The proportion of low-performing readers decreased between 2000 and 2012 and is now below the EU average. Switzerland shows a higher proportion of top-performers. The gap according to socioeconomic status is higher than in EU on average, which could indicate that the educational system in Switzerland is more equitable than EU countries on average. The gap according to language spoken at home is similar to EU average. It should be underlined that the proportion of students with a migrant status and the percentage of students who speak another language at home are much higher in Switzerland than in other European countries; the results must then be taken with some caution.
Conclusion:
Regarding reading skill assessments done to date, the following long-term trends of PISA can be noted:

+ Reading skills at the end of compulsory education have improved slightly.
+ The proportion of weak readers is falling.
+ The heterogeneity of the students gradually plays a lesser role.
+ The effects of migration have declined sharply, particularly in the 1st generation of migrants.
+ The effects of socioeconomic status are declining.
  - Gender differences remain relatively stable, but do not have as strong an effect as family characteristics

In contrast to reading, there is no evidence from PISA regarding the writing skills of young people. However, research results point to the importance of the promotion of writing skills.
A CREATING A LITERATE ENVIRONMENT
4 The Promotion of Literacy Parallel to School

School is far from the only place where literacy is taught and encouraged. On the contrary: the formal literal socialisation and education at school is usefully flanked and supported by extracurricular offerings. In this chapter, both nationally and regionally active institutions committed to the promotion of literacy at different ages are presented. They are active through various offers, among other things through entertaining publishers as well as through prizes and projects in the promotion of literacy.

Tradition of the promotion of literacy parallel to school: Until the end of the 20th century, the extracurricular promotion of literacy in German-speaking Switzerland was closely linked to school and was operated by school-related associations and Bibliomedia Switzerland. There were virtually no initiatives for reading and writing for pre-primary level and the leisure time of children and adolescents. Since PISA 2000, the landscape regarding the funding of such initiatives has changed dramatically. Especially in the field of early learning, projects in favour of the promotion of literacy in families and in early learning institutions (Kitas, playgroups) throughout Switzerland have been implemented (see Chapter 7, also Chapter 5). But also the academic field of action has been extended to include services for families and peers to better achieve extracurricular reading socialisation (see Chapter 5).

The present compilation shows only few examples of the many key players in the promotion of literacy outside school and presents selected offers with a wide reach.

4.1 National and Widely Active Institutions in the Promotion of Literacy and Libraries

Extracurricular Organisation of the Promotion of Literacy: In German-speaking Switzerland, associations’ and foundations’ interest in and support of extracurricular reading promotion has a long tradition. These institutions have usually stemmed from the need to provide children and young people with «good» reading for their free time.

Based on Article 15 of the Kulturförderungsgesetz (Cultural Promotion Act), the Confederation supports organisations and institutions active in the promotion of reading with structural funding contributions. It also supports sustainable individual projects in the area of the promotion of literacy, which are located at the interface between libraries and schools, while taking into account the competences of the federal government and the cantons, with regard to school (see Chapter 2). In order to be accessible to the operating businesses, the nationally active organisations usually work with a central office and language-regional offices.

For example:

Schweizerisches Institut für Kinder- und Jugendmedien (Swiss Institute for Media Aimed at Children and Youth) (SIKJM): The SIKJM, which collaborates with eleven partners from cantonal and regional organisations, collects and documents media for children and youth. It examines such media with a cultural studies approach, presents the results through publications and exhibitions and promotes pleasurable approaches to media for children and adolescents (see the projects listed below: Buchstart, Erzählnacht, Leseanimatorin SIKJM, Mein Buchumschlag, Schenk mir eine Geschichte).
SIKJM reports on media for children and youth, on trends and backgrounds, and honours outstanding children’s books (Schweizer Kinder- und Jugendmedienpreis; Swiss Youth Literature Price).  

**Bibliomedia Switzerland:** Bibliomedia Switzerland is a public foundation. It is committed to the development of libraries and the promotion of reading. It sees itself as a library of libraries and as an information hub in Switzerland’s library landscape. It provides a wide range of current books for children, adolescents and adults in all national languages and in several foreign languages, and promotes reading and the joy of literature. → Buchstart; → Mondomedia. The diverse offers of Bibliomedia are aimed at local libraries, schools and school libraries.

### 4.2 Publishing Companies

**The Publishing Landscape of German-Speaking Switzerland:** Swiss German publishers for children’s books (such as Atlantis, Artemis or Sauerländer) played an important role for the German-speaking children’s literature up to the 1990s. Globalisation, the strong Swiss franc and fixed book prices have since greatly damaged this area of the publishing scene. Currently, there are three major trade publishers in German-speaking Switzerland (Atlantis / Orell Füssli, Aracari and NordSüd), which focus on and publish picture books and Swiss classics.

Additionally, there is the Schweizerische Jugendschriftenwerk (Swiss Youth Writing Group) SJW, which has since 1932 been publishing affordable CYL in all four official languages. The trade publishers are members of the industry association SBVV.

For example:

**Schweizerisches Jugendschriftenwerk SJW (Swiss Youth Writing Group):** The SJW is a foundation; it provides children and young people with timely and affordable literature in all official languages and hopes to awaken the desire to read, to provide an incentive to begin reading books and to disseminate information. For young authors and illustrators, it is a platform for first publications. In 2013, SJW-issue no. 2387 «Die grosse Flut» (The Great Flood) by the artist duo «It’s Raining Elephants» won 1st prize Grand Prix BIB at the Biennial of Illustration Bratislava (BIB) and in 2012 it won the prize for Illustration at the Children’s Book Fair Bologna.

### 4.3 Prizes

In Switzerland with its four official languages, awarding national literary awards is not so easy. Since 2012, the federal government has met this major challenge with a price concept that takes into account all official languages, but which does not include children’s literature. For children and youth

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38 See: [www.sikjm.ch](http://www.sikjm.ch).
40 See: [www.sjw.ch](http://www.sjw.ch).
literature there is a separate, national prize awarded by two institutions. There are also regional languages prizes. The most important one for German-speaking Switzerland is the Swiss Book Prize.

4.4 Readings – Literal Animation Focussing on «Reading»

Readings at School: Readings by authors in schools are widespread in German-speaking Switzerland and are supported by the authorities. There are many national, regional and local extracurricular fun reading and storytelling events as well as reading promotion offers starting at early learning level.

For example:

Schweizer Erzählnacht (Swiss Story Night): «Same night, same motif, individual design». This slogan has been used for over 25 years, every year on the second Friday in November, at the biggest cultural event in Switzerland. Throughout the country, about 70,000 children and adults in over 500 locations tell each other stories. Schools, libraries, bookstores and various cultural institutions stage the respective motto freely according to their own preferences.

Swiss Story Night is a joint project of SIKJM, Bibliomedia Switzerland and UNICEF Switzerland.

Schenk mir eine Geschichte – Family Literacy: (Give Me a Story) – Family Literacy: The project encourages parents with an immigrant background to tell stories and read picture books to their children from an early age. Parents are especially encouraged to do this in their family language. Reading animations are conducted by cultural educators and teachers for «Heimtliche Sprache und Kultur» («home language and culture») (HSK), who are trained for this task by SIKJM. The project is currently being implemented in 14 cantons in 17 languages.

4.5 Literal Projects Focussing on «Writing»

Writing is Also a Part of Literacy: Extracurricular offers have traditionally focused on the area of reading. Only for about a decade has a wider definition of literacy – as defined by PISA 2000 – encouraged the focus of extracurricular support measures on written communication and the acquisition of written language skills. These measures are often implemented in the form of writing

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41 See: www.sikjm.ch/literale-foerderung/projekte/schweizer-erzaehlnacht

42 Isler & Künzli, 2008; Diez & Dreifuss (2015); see: www.sikjm.ch/literale-foerderung/projekte/schenk-mir-eine-geschichte/.
competitions or offers for participatory writing. Initiators of these projects are often people or institutions closely linked to the world of literature.

For example:

**School Novel:** In a fixed number of class visits, authors together with pupils write a fictional text – from the first ideas to the quasi printable manuscript. The writing project takes place in classes of lower performance categories of secondary school level Sek I. The formulated goal is to have a completed version of the text by the end of the course, with which the young people can identify and which they take responsibility for.

**Mein Buchumschlag (My Book Cover)** is a competition for students from 3rd to 8th grade, who develop the envelope for a book that does not yet exist, but which they would like to read. They invent their book title, an author, and publisher with a publishing logo and design an attractive cover. A jury evaluates the book covers received. The award ceremony has event character.

**Conclusion:**
Especially for reading there are many extracurricular support activities. Their target group are mainly children and adolescents in the education years 1–9 and in secondary school level Sek I. These offers complement and expand the schools’ promotion of literacy at the level of literal animation. They serve mainly as offers for participation and provide a bridge between school and home (ex. Story Night).

Since PISA 2000 a shift has taken place in libraries: Toddlers and small children as well as their parents have been identified as a new target group thanks to projects such as «Buchstart Schweiz» («Bookstart Switzerland»), so that such offers have been rebuilt or expanded on a massive scale.

There is hardly any reading without writing, nor any writing without reading: Increasingly, writing also comes into view – on its own or in conjunction with reading – as a communicative or literal practice. In this context, a gradual promotion of multiliteracy is occasionally taken into account. This element must and will probably be expanded in the coming years. Libraries increasingly become a place for communicative exchange, where all ages meet – in a real or a virtual forum.

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43 See: www.schulhausroman.ch.
44 See: www.sikjm.ch/literale-foerderung/projekte/mein-buchumschlag/.
B IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF TEACHING
5 Universities of applied sciences and Universities

This chapter provides an overview of different projects with which universities of applied sciences are involved in concerning research and/or development of literacy in order to improve the quality of teaching. It also deals with the question of to what degree literacy should be included in the (further) education of teachers at University of applied sciences (pädagogische Hochschule, PH) in German-speaking Switzerland.

5.1 Research and development projects

The University of applied sciences do research and development on the promotion of literacy in a number of different projects. The following overview shows a relevant selection of completed and current individual projects of various Swiss German PHs. Literacy is being developed and researched in a detailed, multi-faceted and diverse way. Thus, the PHs contribute significantly both to the development of teaching as well as to the theory in terms of literacy. Some projects are presented in more detail (★).

The following list is incomplete: The quantitative distribution of the listed and illustrated projects may not be transferred to the actual relevance or importance of an university of applied sciences for the field of language didactics in German-speaking Switzerland.

Figure 2 visualises the current (or recently completed) literacy projects in research and/or development at the university of applied sciences of German-speaking Switzerland (and ZHAW).

Figure 1: Overview concerning the literacy projects in research and/or development of Swissgerman universities i.e. university of applied sciences.
The graph clearly shows that a lot of attention is paid to literacy in the broad sense of multi literacy with its precursor skills; this holds true especially for early schooling, but also for elementary school (primary and secondary Level).

It is also apparent that few projects are limited exclusively to one modality only (reading OR writing, red or green): It is much more common to tackle literacy multi modally (brown and beige).

Detailed information (institution, duration, further descriptions ★) may be found in the appendix (p. 68-74).

5.2 Literacy in the Training of Teachers

The chapter addresses the question of which domains of literacy are taught in the education of prospective teachers.

What it is about: Competences in literary language are not primarily acquired automatically or exclusively in the family, but rather in the formal acquisition at nursery and primary school. While children in nursery and primary school are taught by generalists, skilled specialist teachers are responsible for the lower and upper secondary school level. Teachers at all levels are trained at universities.

Based on module handbooks and course catalogues available online it can be stated that:

- Literacy is focused on and weighed differently in the study programmes at the various universities.
- Literacy topics are treated marginally outside of the language subjects and didactics.
- The importance allocated to reading, writing, linguistics, literature, and spelling varies at the different universities.

5.3 Literacy in the further education of teachers

This chapter gives an overview of further education for teachers concerning various aspects of literacy. Legally, the further education is regulated cantonally. Within the cantonal guidelines, the responsibility for the specific curriculum of each teacher’s further education lies with him- or herself: each can choose from a number of courses differing in formality and content.

What it is about: A large number of individual further education is concerned with literacy. Further education is the business of Universities of applied sciences (PHs) and Universities. We state:

- different considerations of literacy in the courses,
- different foci within the literal domains and
- differently trained personnel.

Postgraduate courses for literacy and literacy-related issues are rare.

Further education is part of the rights and duties of a teacher and is stated in the professional ethics of the «Dachverband Schweizer Lehrerinnen und Lehrer» (umbrella organisation of Swiss teachers). Guideline number 5 states: «Teachers have an education at a university (of applied sciences), further their education and build their career.» Further education remains a part of the teaching profession for the entire duration of professional practice. School management, the community school board and

the cantonal Department of Education usually arrange and approve further education. Teachers are encouraged to participate in joint development with their teaching colleagues and to educate themselves personally in order to obtain an individual skills profile.

Both the University of applied sciences and the universities offer a vast choice of further education. This ranges from courses of two to nine hours to certified postgraduate courses (MAS / CAS).

**Conclusion:**
The research and development work at University of applied sciences in German-speaking Switzerland are widespread. Literacy is being explored in all its facets: the promotion of reading and writing in digital and multimodal environments, school and teaching development, from the promotion of early literacy up to literacy in adulthood. Research and development projects focusing specifically on writing can also be found.

Looking at module handbooks, one gains a different impression: In the (further) education of teachers, the focus of topics on literacy lies in the mediation of receptive actions (reading, listening).

Topics related to literacy account for a small proportion in the training of teachers, which is reflected in the courses for the further education of teachers. This must be considered critically, as written language skills are the basis of all (school) learning. In addition, it would be desirable for the various institutions to pool their expertise in training and further education of teachers in order to ensure the best possible education.

The overview of the offers in early education in German-speaking Switzerland shows: There is a remarkable selection of training courses in early education in general, early promotion of German, and early promotion of literacy, with different requirements for admission (see also SIKJM, Chapter 4) and final qualifications.

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46 Whether or not this is correct in reality cannot be determined by analysing documents of the module handbooks alone.
6 The Harmonisation of Literal Educational Goals

In the following the individual elements that serve to harmonise the educational goals of all cantons are explained: The Lehrplan 21 (curriculum 21) sets the literal skills to be acquired during compulsory schooling. Following this, the material used in German lessons in German-speaking Switzerland will be discussed briefly. Lastly, Swiss educational monitoring, which is carried out to verify the educational goals, will be discussed.

6.1 Lehrplan 21 (Curriculum 21)

What it is about: Based on the constitutional article on the harmonisation of educational goals and the HarmoS concordat, three language-region specific curricula have been developed. These serve as a template by the Federation; the individual cantons decide on the introduction of the curriculum themselves.

3 Cycles in the New Curricula: All three curricula are designed for eleven years of school (two years of nursery school and nine years compulsory education). They are divided into three cycles:

- 1st cycle = nursery school (Kindergarten KG) and the first two school years
- 2nd cycle = the four following years of primary school
- 3rd cycle = three years of secondary school level I

All three curricula define competences that are to be achieved for each cycle. They thus represent the building blocks of such competences during school years. In addition to subject-specific educational areas, interdisciplinary and transversal competences are described. These include cooperation and communication skills as well as dealing with ICT and media.

Concerning the school language, the curricula are based on the same speech act model and educational standards (so-called EDK basic skills): In all three language regions, the focus of teaching lies on listening, reading, speaking, and writing. In the Swiss-German curriculum, these four speech act domains, which are crucial for all subjects, are complemented by the competence areas «language in focus» (=reflection on language structures or grammar and orthography, and reflection on speech acts or pragmatics) and «literature in focus ». The curriculum also specifies the basic competences described in the educational standards.

Conclusion:

The language-region specific curricula aim at the harmonisation of objectives for compulsory schooling. The implementation of the curriculum in German-speaking Switzerland falls to the cantons. Therefore, different versions of the Lehrplan 21 exist and its introduction is at different stages. The common curriculum is the basis for harmonisation in other areas:

- Development of teaching materials (see Chapter 6.2)
- Education and advanced training of teachers (see Chapter 5.2–5.4)
- Development of instruments for the promotional-diagnostic performance measurement

The Bildungsmonitoring Schweiz (Swiss Monitoring of Education) verifies the achievement of the educational goals (see Chapter 6.2).
6.2 Teaching Material

The following provides an overview of the available teaching aids and teaching materials for the subject of German and German as a second language.

In Switzerland, the choice of teaching materials is organised by the different cantons; there are no nationally mandatory teaching materials (see Chapter 2). Common to all the cantons is that the selection of teaching materials for the different subjects such as German is regulated. However, the binding character of regulation varies greatly depending on the canton, grade and school subject: while some cantons set mandatory or alternatively mandatory teaching materials, others merely provide lists of recommendations.

6.2.1 Courses for First Reading and Language Teaching Materials

Switzerland does not have nation-wide mandatory teaching materials. The existing courses for first reading are very diverse; cantons give recommendations for the choice of teaching aids.

Language teaching materials in Switzerland are based on competences and conform with the Lehrplan 21 (the curriculum 21).

All teaching materials are competence-oriented and compatible with the Lehrplan 21 (see Chapter 6.1). They focus on the promotion of all language skills, both receptive (reading, listening) and productive (writing, speaking). In different ways, they all concentrate on addressing and reflecting on language strategies such as reading and writing strategies.

6.2.2 Storybooks and Reading Training

In Reading and Literature Classes, at all levels, various reading books are used. In addition, individual readings, readings in class and reading training play an important role in the basal reading competences.

6.2.3 German as a Second Language (GSL)

A Switzerland-wide uniform funding practice for children and young people with German as a second language does not exist. The selection of teaching tools in the DaZ area is manageable.

Conclusion:

The situation in Switzerland regarding teaching aids is relatively clear, apart from the courses for initial reading. This is partly due to the limited number of publishing companies for teaching aids: the cantonal publishing companies for teaching aids of German-speaking Switzerland are united in the interkantonale Lehrmittelzentrale (ilz), and there is only one further publishing company, which is privately owned (Klett und Balmer).47 I Because of the Swiss Standard German (see Chapter «language situation in Switzerland» in Chapter 2) teaching materials from Germany are not recommended other than for beginner classes.

In other words, there is little competition in the Swiss market when it comes to teaching aids. Nevertheless, this lack of competition has not had a negative effect on the quality of teaching materials: those for language teaching have all been developed in cooperation between experts in

47 Publishing companies for teaching aids (a selection) [www.fhnw.ch/ph/ife/netzwerk/lehrmittelverlage; 30.03.2016].
educational didactics, who are responsible for the conception and scientific support, as well as by teachers, and people from publishing companies. Such cooperation is complicated, but it guarantees that the teaching materials take into account the most recent scientific findings while they also integrate the practical side of teaching. So far, the resources for this cooperation have been available for the cantonal publishing companies for teaching aids. Private publishing companies for teaching aids adopt this practice, as it is the only way to ensure their ability to compete with the cantonal ones.

6.3 Performance Tests and Standardised Tests

On a cantonal and national level, TIMSS and especially PISA 2000\(^\text{48}\) caused the desire to advance the development of subject teaching and of schools in general through performance testing.

In addition to class-internal performance assessments, some cantons and regions of educational reforms have established standardised test procedures for the evaluation of performance. These fulfil different functions:

- Tests for the individual, promotion-oriented positioning
- Tests to prepare balanced performance assessment (certification and selection)
- Tests to evaluate the effectiveness of the education system (e.g. PISA)

6.3.1 Monitoring of Education

The Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education (EDK) and the State Secretariat for Education, Research, and Innovation (SBFI) have launched a monitoring system for education in Switzerland with the purpose of systematically and scientifically procuring, processing and analysing information on the Swiss education system (Education Report 14: 6). Based on this monitoring, a Report of National Education is published every four years (the last report was published in 2014). It describes the entire educational system, spanning from pre-school to university and further education, and includes relevant context conditions and institutional characteristics of all levels of education. Moreover, the performance of the educational system is evaluated on the basis of effectiveness, efficiency, and equity. However, the Monitoring of Education is primarily a basis for research and data-driven education policies of the cantons and the federal government.

In 2013, in order to verify the effectiveness of the educational system, the Cantonal Ministers of Education decided to examine whether the Swiss school system fulfils the basic skills (minimum standards) as defined in the Educational Standards (Überprüfung zur Erreichung der Grundkompetenzen ÜGK = verification of achievement of basic skills). Common tests for all three major language regions are being developed to this end (see Chapter 6.3).

A database structure for the promotion of the expected basic skills is being built for the same purpose.\(^\text{49}\)

Various Departments of Education have commissioned contracts for the development of tests for independent, individual positioning to publishing companies for teaching aids, universities of applied sciences, and universities. The binding nature of the tests is regulated differently depending on the canton.

\(^{48}\) Check 5, developed in 2004; Klassencockpit ZH, developed in 2003.

\(^{49}\) www.edk.ch/dyn/12928.php, 30.03.2016.
6.3.2 Language Assessment GSL

With «Sprachgewandt» an instrument exists to assess the institutionally organised funding support in the four language areas of action.

Since 2013, some cantons of German-speaking Switzerland have recommended (Bern) or declared mandatory (e.g. Zurich, Schwyz, Lucerne) the language level assessment «Sprachgewandt» to clarify the need for support in language teaching. It is used from pre-school level up to 9th grade. «Sprachgewandt» includes a standardised reading test and observation sheets on the four areas of language action, which help assess the need for support. The level that must be reached to be relieved from remedial classes may be determined by the cantons. Most cantons follow the recommendations by the authors, namely the level B – C according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), which roughly corresponds to the basic skills in school language of HarmoS and Lehrplan 21 (see Chapter 6.1).

6.3.3 Other Tests

Performance tests are used not only in school, but also in the process of career choice. Such tests are developed and performed by private providers and can be a precondition to apply for an apprenticeship.

Conclusion:
The coming years will see the implementation of a large national Monitoring of Education in Switzerland in four subjects, including the school language across language boundaries. Its aim is to assess the achievement of basic skills. In addition, there will be different cantonal developments that provide psychometrically validated tests for the schools. These tests are mandatory for all pupils and are a means of control; they are also carried out for promotional purposes. It is difficult to estimate which solutions will be established for which cantons in the long run. In any case, the different approaches offer the potential for a productive development.
C INCREASING PARTICIPATION, INCLUSION AND EQUITY
7 Early Literacy

The promotion of literacy and language begins long before school; in addition to the locus of the family, it takes place in nurseries, playgroups and generally in places where small children are cared for in everyday life. In German-speaking educational institutions, a situational language education integrated into the everyday life of 0- to 6-year-old children has established itself in the past few years. The focus of the linguistic and literal support is the successful communication through all means available – multimodal and multilingual. Through professionalisation, networking and research, this approach is to be further encouraged and strengthened in nursery schools.

Even small children acquire language and literal skills by communicating with competent others thus discovering, trying and developing (written) linguistic techniques. Caregivers of children (for example parents, siblings, or educational professionals) can support this acquisition processes by creating increasingly sophisticated linguistic action situations and allowing the children an ever more independent participation. The focal point is both on activities directly related to writing (for example «writing» a shopping list, or «reading» picture books) as well as on the understanding and producing of «oral texts» (e.g. experience reports, fantasy stories or explanations). Children from disadvantaged families can particularly benefit from such options at educational preschool institutions. Therefore, the actions of educational professionals in day care centres, home day care, playgroups, and nurseries must develop and coordinate the acquisition of linguistic and literal skills in real life situations.

Early Literacy: Literacy skills include low- and high-hierarchy dimensions. Their acquisition already begins in preschool:

- The basal progenitor skills include phonological awareness and the knowledge of first letter shapes and sound-letter assignments.
- High-hierarchy precursor skills may be taken to mean oral as well as textual capabilities. Oral texts are individual, globally structured, linguistically differentiated, and exemplary representations of content that is detached from situational context.

Already small children need access to media (including, but not limited to books), participation in media practice and discussions on media and their content in order to acquire literal skills through model learning.50

7.1 Changes of the Past Decade – Activism after the PISA Shock

Compared to the official education in nursery schools and schools, the area of early learning presents itself as a very heterogeneous field with various facilities – pre-schools, day care organisations, playgroups and libraries, as well as community work, religious and ethnic communities or sports and music clubs – a variety of learning opportunities for young children and their parents (see Chapter 4).

After the PISA shock in 2003, early language education quickly came into the focus of education policy. Since a scientific and a conceptual basis were still largely missing, initially a certain activism ruled, which showed in the following contexts:

- First educational and structure-building measures
- Publication of preliminary research results on the efficacy of good quality pre-school education services

50 C.f. Wiesner (2016)
• Expertise and reports for early education
• Creation of additional childcare places
• Projects to strengthen early language education and integration
• Creation of an orientation framework «Frühe Bildung, Betreuung und Erziehung in der Schweiz» («Early Education and Care in Switzerland ») (FBBE)
• Continuous quality development of educational institutions in the area of early learning
• New library concepts as places of encounter and interaction (see Chapter 4)
• Formation of a School Entry Level (4- to 8-year-olds, aside from pre-school and school education this also concerns the education of the respective teachers at teacher training universities of applied sciences) (see Chapter 5 and Chapter 6).

7.2 Projects for Early Linguistic Education and Literacy

The development projects in this area differ in how strongly they focus on the promotion of language and literacy. The only project specifically tuned to early literal education is «Schenk mir eine Geschichte» («Give me a story», see Chapter 4). In the other projects, the acquisition of German by multilingual or socially disadvantaged children is at the centre.

In addition to scientific bases there are also programmatic concepts and implementation-oriented materials for early language education, which are aligned with different emphases on a daily integrated language education and which are compatible with each other and with the guiding framework of the FBBE.

Conclusion and Outlook: In German-speaking Switzerland, recent years have seen substantial progress made on the road towards a coherent support of everyday integrated language at all levels – development, training, research, and documentation. In the field of early language education many actors at different levels have been working on and dealing with the following elements:

• Measures for the promotion of pre-school reading (e.g. the Foundation GFZ [Gemeinnützige Frauen Zürich, i. e.: Women’s Community Service Zurich])
• Measures for the further development of early language education (e.g. Department of Education Canton of Zurich)
• Training initiatives for early language education in playgroups (Lead: PH TG).

Nevertheless, several tasks – some of them fundamental – remain to be solved:

• Daily integrated language support needs to be developed with respect to multilingualism and (multimedia) literacy.
• The hitherto selectively acting measures for the professionalisation of educational action must be applied more widely in an appropriate form.
• There are tendencies towards separation between nurseries, play groups, early education centres and nursery schools, which must be overcome by a common understanding of language development and cooperation.
• The lack of legal basis on the side of the cantons for the coordination, quality development and financing of institutions for early learning represents a structural problem that should be tackled politically.
• The coordination and possible cooperation between the universities that deal with the research and development of early language and literal education should be strengthened.
There is as yet no systematic knowledge about the understanding of early language education mediated in these trainings. A comparative study of curricula and methods would be desirable.

With the introduction of the Lehrplan 21 many German-speaking cantons face a paradigm shift from a logic of stages to a logic of didactics on the level of nursery school. This bears some risk that the educational understanding of early learning and of nursery school may drift apart instead of moving towards one another, thus impeding the construction of an integrated language education. This challenge may require special attention and support.
8 The Promotion of Literacy in Adulthood

This chapter concentrates on the promotion of literacy after compulsory schooling. First, the focus is on the promotion of literacy for adults struggling with forms of dyslexia – in other words, people affected by illiteracy. Then the role of vocational schools will be discussed. Formally classified as secondary level schooling, these institutions often represent the last stage of formal education for young adults, where reading and writing skills may be improved.

8.1 Structures for the Prevention and Reduction of Illiteracy

While federal and cantonal authorities support further education in adulthood, it is mostly privately organised (see Chapter 2.2). Regarding the promotion of literacy, the Confederation and the cantons provide the legal framework and finance some of the campaigns for the reduction and prevention of illiteracy. This chapter explains the measures recently developed for the control of illiteracy.

What it is about: Coherent promotion of literacy in adulthood has so far been nearly impossible to realise. The new Law on Further Education should hopefully strengthen the funding practices in the field of basic skills.

What is Illiteracy?

Illiteracy describes a social phenomenon: people affected by illiteracy cannot accomplish basic tasks in reading and writing despite the fact that they speak the local language and have completed compulsory schooling. They are not able to read and understand simple texts and can therefore not use written information in their daily lives. They also have deficits in written language, preventing them from communicating adequately in writing. Modern information and communication technologies as well as an increasingly complex working environment also constantly increase the requirements regarding literal skills.

In Switzerland, around 800,000 people are affected by illiteracy. They only have restricted access to social life and face a higher risk of unemployment.

Based on the trend report «Illettrismus – Wenn Lesen ein Problem ist», the Confederation has initiated a network of actors working in the prevention and reduction of illiteracy. In this context, various measures were implemented.

Every year, the Federal Office of Culture puts around one million Swiss francs towards the eradication of illiteracy and the promotion of reading skills. The sum is used for structural and project funding. In 2017, the new Law of Further Education (WeBiG) will be introduced, transferring the responsibility for the prevention of illiteracy and thus also its financial support to the State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation SERI. The Law of Further Education regulates the promotion of the acquisition and preservation of the basic skills of adults, giving the federal government the opportunity to financially support cantonal measures. The aim of this support is the practical teaching

51 BAK (2015).
52 Guggisberg et al. (2007).
53 Grossenbacher/Vanhooydonck (2002).
54 See: www.lesenlireleggere.ch/Dokumentation.cfm.
56 SBFI (2016).
of basic skills in reading, writing and oral communication in one of the official languages, as well as that of numeracy and the use of ICT.

**What it is about:** The prevention and reduction of illiteracy in Switzerland is driven by private and state institutions. Besides raising awareness of issues, their aim is the practical support of the affected people.

**Dachverband Lesen und Schreiben (Umbrella organisation Reading and Writing)**

**Zentrum Lesen, PH FHNW (Reading Centre PH FHNW):** The Institute for Research and Development is in charge of the research focussed on reading, media and language at the university of applied sciences and arts FHNW. The aim of the Reading Centre is to support children, youngsters and adults in their language skills.

**Project «Literacy in Everyday Life and Profession – LAB» – Basic Skills in Reading, Writing and Numeracy:** The project «Literacy in everyday life and profession» was conducted between 2009 and 2013 by the university of applied sciences and arts FHNW and the University of Bern. It is aimed at adults with low skills in reading, writing and numeracy, who cannot meet the requirements of everyday life and profession. The aim of the project was to promote the basic skills of these adults, so that they could participate in regular further training. To that purpose, a web-based teaching and learning platform (with the domains of reading, writing, numeracy, ICT skills and individual learning) was established, together with the development of a competence grid and diagnostic tools for assessing levels of learning. These materials and instruments were used in further education and other courses and were scientifically evaluated, following two lead questions:

1) Which obstacles to learning do adults meet in literacy courses and which forms of learning do they choose?
2) Which reasons lead to an early departure or an over-long retention time in literacy courses?

**Schweizerischer Verband für Weiterbildung SVEB (Swiss Federation for Adult Learning SVEB):** The SVEB campaigns for further education in Switzerland and advocates high quality standards of courses as well as a perfect network of all actors involved.

**Bibliomedia Switzerland** (see Chapter 7).

### 8.2 Vocational Schools

In Switzerland, the dual vocational training system is well established: upon completion of compulsory schooling, two-thirds of young adults choose basic vocational training. This chapter describes the various efforts taken to promote literacy at vocational schools.

Regardless of which basic vocational training has been chosen, all learners have to take the subject «General Education» at their vocational school, where the focus is on language and communication along with issues such as law, politics, culture, ethics, etc. Here, language is not only the instrument to discuss social issues; it is also a learning object in its own right. The focus is on the promotion of communicative language skills, so that students are able to use language competently in personal, professional and social contexts.

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57 See: www.lesenschreiben.ch.
58 See: www.literalitaet.ch.
59 SBFI (2015: 4)
60 Schneider (2014)
Most vocational schools offer remedial courses for students who struggle with job specific subjects or general education because of language deficits. These options are partly aimed at young people with an immigrant background (GSL, DaZ), partly at German-speaking learners with a need for additional support.

At vocational schools efforts to promote reading are being, and have been, made. Since 2016 the federal government has begun to increasingly support individual projects that focus on the promotion of reading among young people in transition to vocational school.61

**Conclusion:**

By now, there are several opportunities to improve literal skills for adults who, despite having received school education, experience problems with reading and writing. However, the struggle against illiteracy is a difficult one because further education in Switzerland was previously regulated differently by individual cantons. Now that further education is to become part of the Federal Constitution, the prevention and reduction of illiteracy will be embedded in the newly developed legal frames of the Law of Further Education, which are to support the promotion of literacy in adulthood, especially financially: this marks another major step towards a coherent approach to the problem. Nevertheless, the question as to which forms of support demonstrate an enduring positive effect remains to be researched.

Equally, the promotion of literacy within the vocational schools is not regulated by the Federal Government, but handled differently from school to school. Here, the attention is mainly aimed at the importance of language skills for professional learning and for learning and working in a company. This means: the need for the promotion of literacy has been recognised at vocational schools, which is why various projects have been developed in order to further the promotion of literacy.

61 BAK (2016).
9 References


## 10 Appendix

Table «the 26 cantons in Switzerland»: 23 cantons and 3 cantons, each consisting of two half-cantons (AI+AR, BS+BL; NW+OW)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Canton</th>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Languages</th>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>g = swissgerman/german</td>
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<td>f = french</td>
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