



LITERACY - ACTION FOR THE FUTURE

**3rd Baltic Sea – 17th Nordic Literacy
Conference**

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Outline of the presentation

1. Concept of literacy
2. Key findings of international literacy assessments
3. Recent literacy policy activities in Finland



Literacy

- Key competence in most areas of life
- Has always affected and been affected by the changes and technologies within the society
 - Ubiquitous Internet: the percentage of adults using the Internet is below 90 % only among those aged 65 or older (Statistics Finland 2015)
 - Tool and object of lifelong learning (Binkley et al. 2012; Sulkunen 2013)
- Sociocultural ~ cognitive paradigms
 - Literacy as context-specific culturally defined practices ~ individual (sub)skills across contexts
- Functional literacy in the context of international literacy studies
 - Also HLG 2012: Baseline literacy – functional literacy – multiple literacy



Literacy definition of PIAAC

- Framed as a key-information-processing skill/competency:

ability to understand, evaluate, use and engage with written texts to participate in society, to achieve one's goals, and to develop one's knowledge and potential (OECD 2013)

- Reading processes measured:

- Access and identify
- Integrate and interpret
- Evaluate and reflect

(OECD 2012)

- Nearly identical to PISA (OECD 2010)



Key findings of international literacy assessments



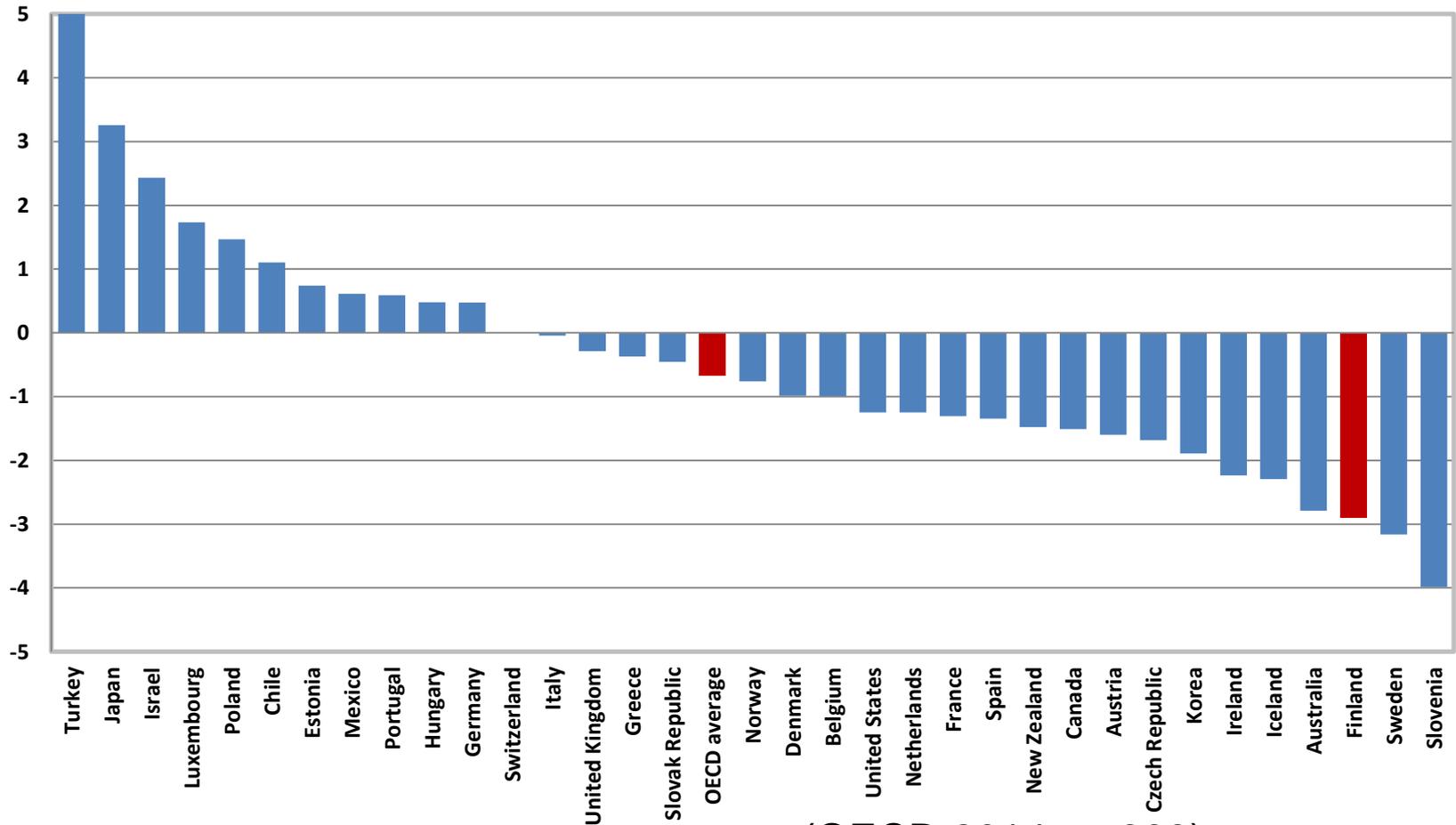
PIAAC & PISA

- International large-scale assessment programmes initiated by OECD
- Representative results on a national and international level
- Similar definitions of reading literacy / literacy
- Significant differences
 - Target group (overlap on population level)
 - Methods and content of assessment: mode of delivery, test items
 - Context of assessment

- Produce rankings – what else?



Changes in PISA reading performance: Annualised change in OECD countries



(OECD 2014, p. 383)

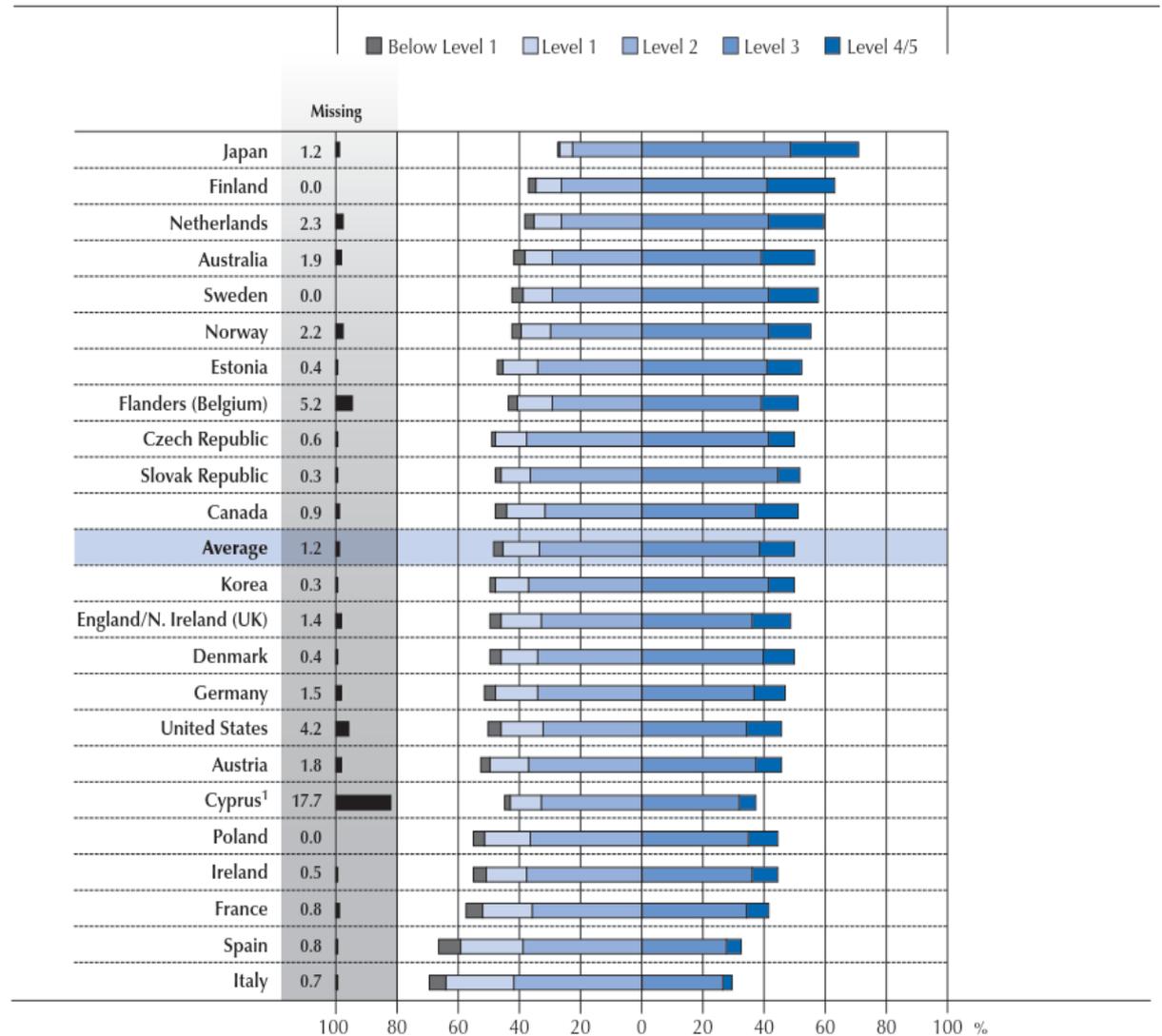
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Literacy proficiency among 16-65 year-olds

Percentage of adults scoring at each proficiency level in literacy

PIAAC:
average
results and
variation in
countries



(OECD 2013, p. 29)

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1. See notes at the end of this chapter.

Notes: Adults in the missing category were not able to provide enough background information to impute proficiency scores because of language difficulties, or learning or mental disabilities (referred to as literacy-related non-response).

Countries are ranked in descending order of the mean score in literacy.

Source: Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC) (2012), Tables A2.1 and A2.2a.



Key findings of PIAAC: main determinants of literacy in the Nordic countries

■ Age

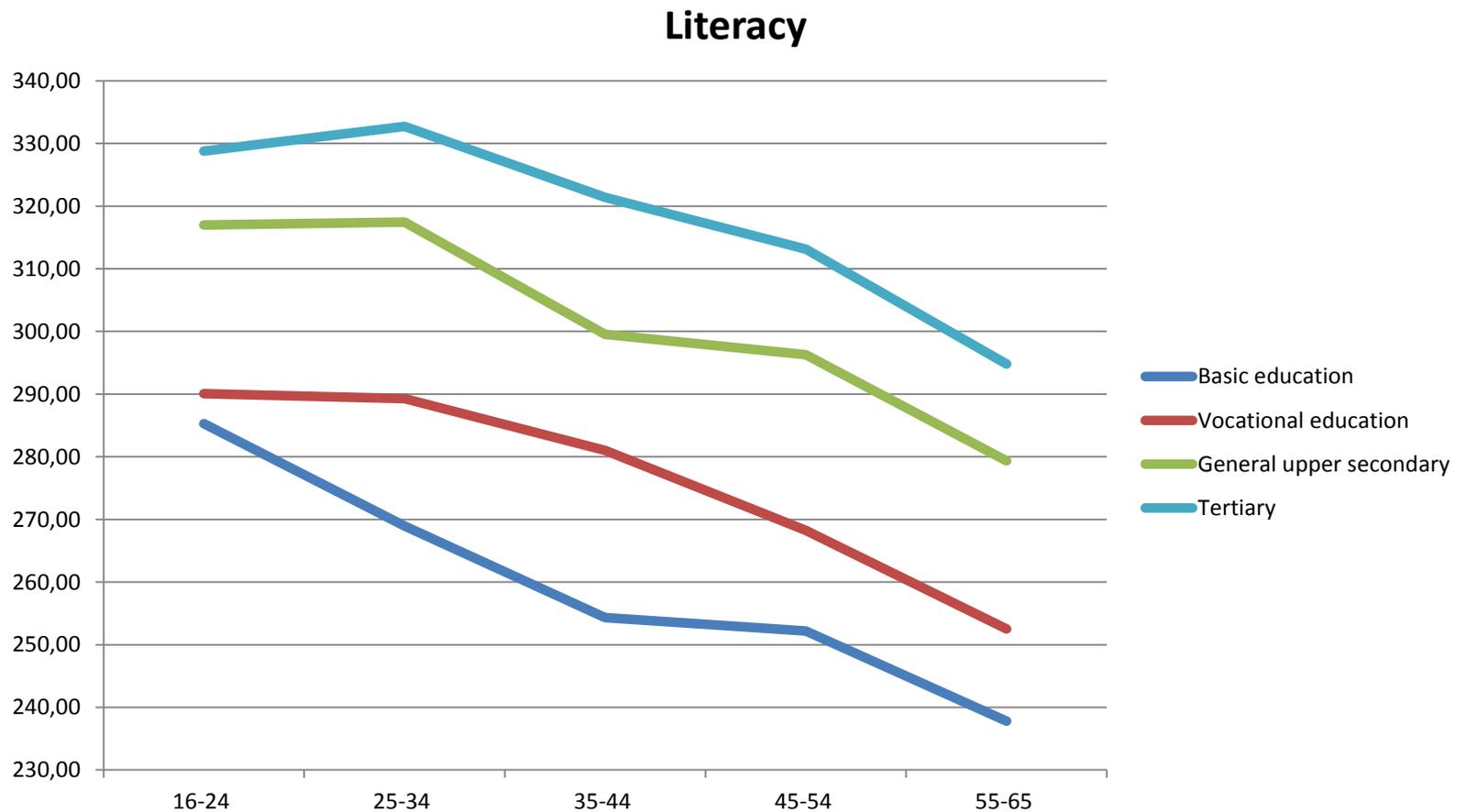
- Most proficient age group comprised adults aged 25–34 years (OECD 2013)
- In the adjusted results, the youngest ones (16–24) show highest proficiency
- Age group differences persist despite recent education and coincide with educational reforms (Sulkunen & Malin, forthcoming)

■ Education level is the main determinant of adult literacy among age, education- and work-related factors (Sulkunen & Malin, forthcoming)

- Based on ISCED-classification
- Note! causality



Finnish adults' literacy performance by education and age



Key findings of PIAAC, cont.

- Reading engagement as informal literacy learning
 - Reading engagement has a relationship to literacy proficiency – also in PISA – but among adults formal education is more important
 - Reading outside work seems to be more important type of informal literacy learning than reading at work (Sulkunen & Malin, forthcoming)
 - Using skills at work does not explain differences in adults' literacy proficiency (Albæk et al. 2014; also Mellander 2014)
 - Lifelong learning activities do complement the initial education
 - These results underline the need to support everyone's engagement in reading early on



Equity issues

- PIAAC shows that in the Nordic countries
 - The adjusted score difference in literacy between native language speakers and foreign language speakers is pronounced (OECD 2013, p. 271)
 - Socioeconomic gap is notable (based on parents' education) (OECD 2013, p. 271)
 - Gender gap is not significant in Finland and is modest in other Nordic countries – unlike in PISA
 - Note the PISA age groups in PIAAC (Lundetrae, Sulkunen et al. 2014)



Gender difference in literacy in PISA 2000 (aged 15) and PIAAC 2012 (aged 26–28)

	PISA 2000 (aged 15)			PIAAC 2012 (aged 26–28)		
	Diff.	SD	Cohen's d	Diff.	SD	Cohen's d
Denmark	24.8	98.1	0.25	-0.2	49.5	0.00
Finland	51.2	89.4	0.57	11.6	46.1	0.25
Norway	43.2	103.6	0.42	9.0	51.1	0.18
Sweden	37.0	92.2	0.40	1.0	55.7	0.02
Nordic Average	39.1	95.8	0.41	5.3	50.6	0.11
OECD Average	31.6	96.1	0.33	2.4	45.0	0.05

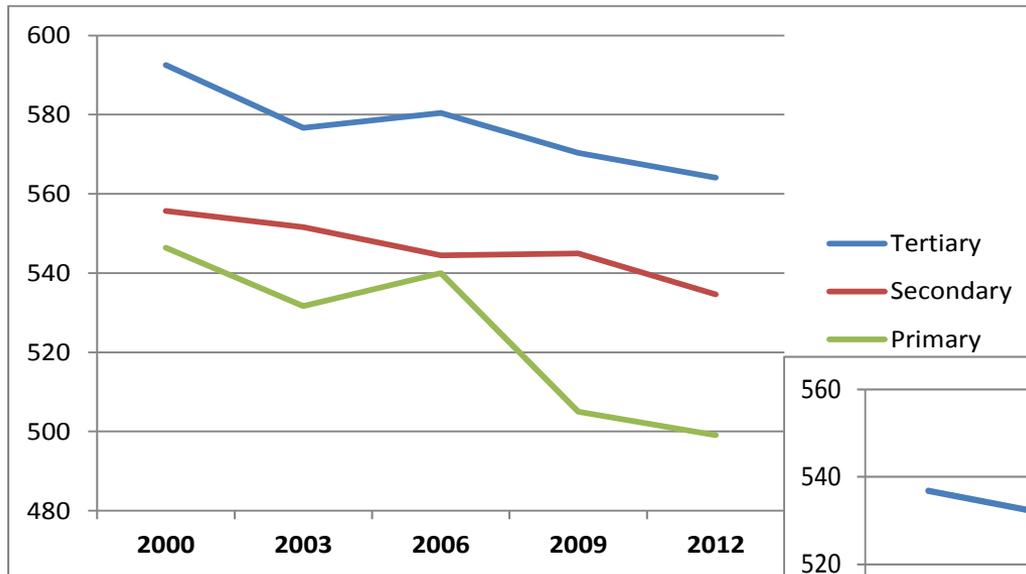
Note: Australia, Austria, Canada, Germany and the United States are not included in PIAAC OECD average values, due to lack of individual values of age.

(Lundetræ, Sulkunen, Gabrielsen & Malin 2014.)

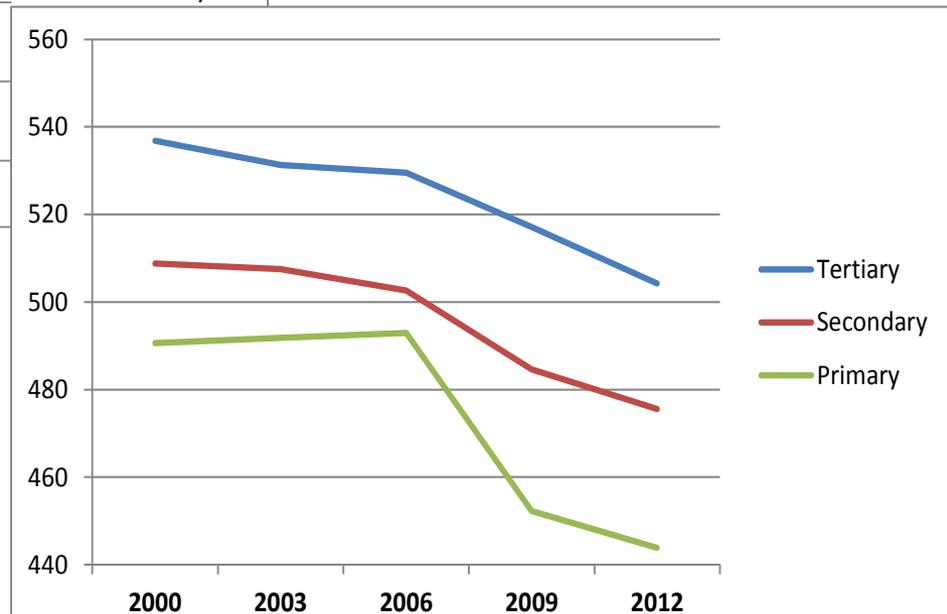


PISA reading performance in Finland in 2000-2012 by parents' education

Girls



Boys

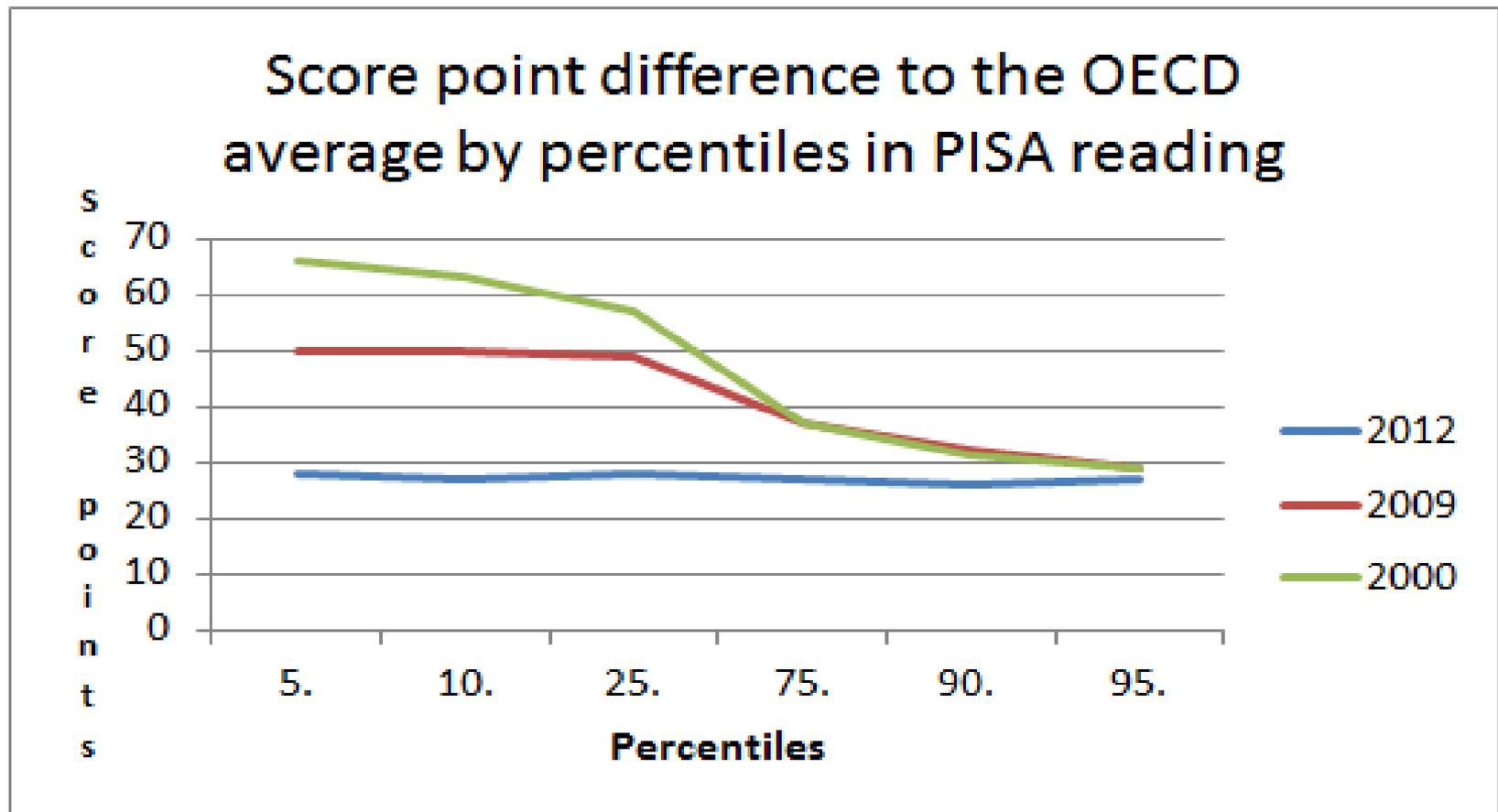


(Arffman & Nissinen 2015)

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Supporting low performers in Finland



Source: OECD 2000 database, Table 2.3a, OECD database 2009, Table I.2.3, 2013a, I.4.3a.



Finnish literacy policy

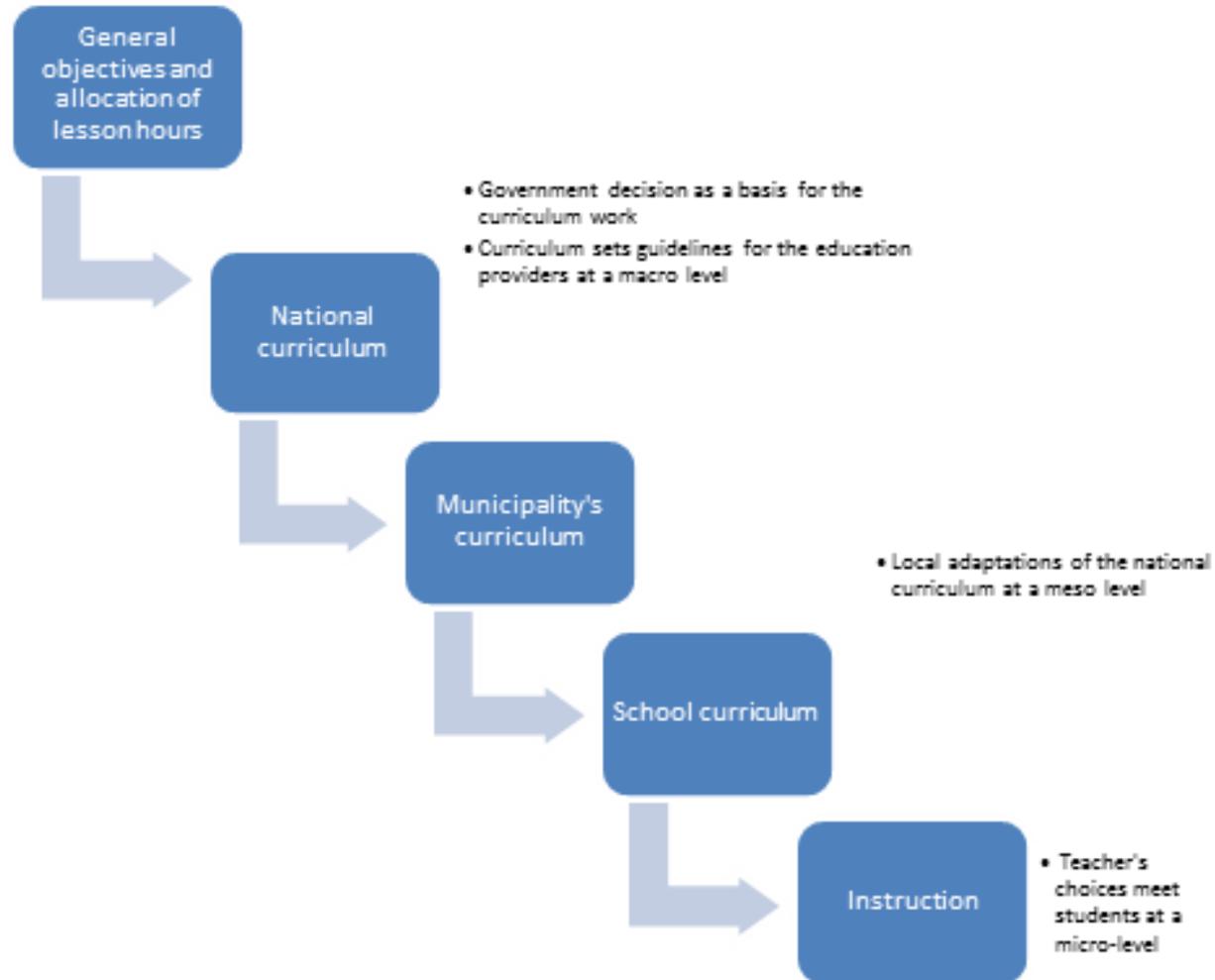


Evidence-based policy in Finland

- Broad evidence base needed – and often used
- Policy activities cannot and should not be reactions to one or few studies
 - Thorough and careful analyses required
- National values, contexts and needs as a basis for literacy policy development
- Domain-specific national programs may have narrow evidence-base
 - Note also the State budget!
- National curriculum and more holistic programs employ wider expertise



Curriculum development



New curriculum for the basic education

- High aims for all students & individualised approach
- New pedagogical culture
 - Learning as a holistic phenomenon-based process
 - Collaborative learning
 - Self-confidence and self-efficacy supported
- Multiliteracy as a cross-curricular competence
 - competence to interpret, produce and value various kinds of texts in order to understand multiple forms of cultural communication and build one's identity. This means searching, retrieving, integrating, editing, producing, presenting and evaluating information in its many forms in multiple situations and contexts. (NC 2014, p. 21–22.)
- Wide concept of text to all subjects
- Explicit attention to disciplinary literacy



Curriculum development at the upper secondary level

- General upper secondary schools ('lukio')
 - Strong emphasis on literacy
 - Also in matriculation examination
 - Multiliteracy as a cross-curricular topic -> disciplinary literacy
- Vocational schools
 - Strong emphasis on professional, vocational studies
 - Literacy integrated into vocational subjects and content
 - Lifelong learning and communication skills as cross-cutting themes
 - Only 5 + 3 credits (of 180) is mother tongue and communication
 - Learning-to-learn and entrepreneur's communication skills natural framework for literacy
 - Variation by education providers (amount of contact lesson)



Joy of Reading –programme (Lukuinto)

- A three-year (2012–2015) programme launched by MEC to address the decrease in literacy results and reading engagement
- Aimed at developing the literacy of 6–16-year-olds
 - A special target group was boys
- Network of schools and libraries in 30 municipalities around the country piloted activities, practices and methods to motivate and engage children and adolescents to read diverse materials
 - Some included families
 - Spirit of multiliteracy
- Developing and sharing good practices
- New Multiliteracy-programme about to start

See <http://www.lukuinto.fi/joy-of-reading/guides.html>



Main literacy challenges in Finland

- Equity
 - closing the gaps (SES, gender, migrant)
- Multiliteracy
 - meeting the current literacy requirements, including digital literacy
 - updating pedagogy accordingly
- "Hot" topics
 - disciplinary literacy
 - literacy learning in vocational schools
 - adult literacy
- Societal collaboration from "cradle to grave"



Action for the future

- Constant efforts to support everyone's literacy learning
 - Individualized approach
 - Low performers prioritized
 - Holistic well-being
 - My Path strategic research program: <http://omalinja.fi/in-english/>
- Literacy work on a wide front
 - Challenges faced at school reflect societal and global changes
 - Supporting struggling adolescent and adult readers
- Challenges
 - Economy
 - Variation between education providers & organizers



Main references

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Thank you 😊

