

PIRLS

Introduction



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PIRLS 2001

International Report

Since a literate population provides the foundation for any nation's social and economic health and the ability to read is essential for the personal growth of its citizens, it is crucial to have easily accessible information about students' achievement in reading. The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) provides a vehicle for countries to obtain international and comparative data about the reading achievement of their primary school students (the fourth grade in most participating countries).

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PIRLS is the first in a continuing five-year cycle of trend studies in monitoring reading progress internationally, and has been designed at the outset to assess changes into the future.

Conducted under the auspices of IEA, the International Association for the Evaluation of Education, PIRLS data collection took place in 2001 in

35 countries around the world. To provide a blueprint for IEA's continuing work in assessing reading literacy, the PIRLS assessment was based on a collaborative effort of the participating countries. The goal was to conduct the most innovative and comprehensive measure of reading achievement possible within the constraints of a large-

scale international data collection. As such, PIRLS is based on a newly developed framework, describing the interaction between two major reading purposes (literary and informative) and a range of four comprehension processes.¹ The assessment itself was based on a variety of texts, and included a special PIRLS Reader printed in color (see back pocket of report), as well as a significant proportion of questions asking students to write out their answers.

The IEA is an independent international cooperative of national research institutions and governmental agencies with a permanent secretariat based in Amsterdam, The Netherlands. Its primary purpose is to conduct large-scale comparative studies of educational achievement to gain a deeper understanding of the effects of policies and practices within and across systems of education. During its nearly 50-year history of educational research, IEA assessed reading most recently in 1990-91.² In fact, the PIRLS data collection coincided with the 10th anniversary of IEA's 1991 Reading Literacy Study, providing participants in the 1991 study the additional opportunity to replicate that study and obtain a 10-year measure of the trends from 1991. Nine countries took advantage of that opportunity, and the results are reported in *Trends in Children's Reading Literacy Achievement 1991-2001*.³

Consistent with IEA's primary purpose of providing policy and instructionally relevant information, PIRLS included a full range of context questionnaires. Most notably, since the home environment plays such an

1 Campbell, J.R., Kelly, D.L., Mullis, I.V.S., Martin, M.O., & Sainsbury, M. (2001). *Framework and specifications for PIRLS assessment 2001* (2nd ed.). Chestnut Hill, MA: Boston College.

2 Elley, W.B. (Ed.). (1994). *The IEA study of reading literacy: Achievement and instruction in thirty-two school systems*. Oxford, England: Elsevier Science Ltd.

3 Martin, M.O., Mullis, I.V.S., Gonzalez, E.J., & Kennedy, A.M. (2003). *Trends in children's reading literacy achievement 1991-2001: IEA's repeat in nine countries of the 1991 Reading Literacy Study*. Chestnut Hill, MA: Boston College.

important role in providing children with early language and literacy experiences, parents and caregivers were asked to complete a questionnaire about various aspects of fostering reading development. Additionally, school administrators were asked about their reading curricula, programs, and resources; teachers about their professional development and different types of reading instruction; and the students, themselves, about their reading, in and outside of school. By gathering information about children's experiences in learning to read, together with reading achievement on the PIRLS test, it is possible to identify factors or combinations of factors associated with high levels of reading literacy.

Which Countries Participated?

The map on the next page shows the 35 countries that participated in PIRLS 2001. ich 1uu-1.3333 6[ompl



into consideration to maximize comparability across the grades tested in each country, the effect being that a few students were in the third grade while some were in the fifth grade. Exhibit 1.1 in Chapter 1 contains information for each country about the years of formal schooling and average age of the students tested.

For the sake of comparability across countries, all testing was conducted toward the end of the school year, most often in April through June of 2001, for countries in the Northern Hemisphere. The four countries on a Southern Hemisphere school schedule (Argentina, Colombia, New Zealand, and Singapore) tested in September through December 2001, which was the end of the school year there.

The PIRLS 2001 Encyclopedia

To provide a rich context for interpreting the results, the NRCs for PIRLS 2001 agreed at an early stage of the project to work together to produce a publication to complement the data collected by the study. Entitled the *PIRLS 2001 Encyclopedia*,⁴ the resulting volume provides general information on the cul-

issues through careful planning and documentation, cooperation among the participating countries, standardized procedures, and rigorous attention to quality control throughout. For example, an extensive series of verification checks was conducted to ensure the comparability of the test translations, and detailed documentation was required to satisfy adherence to the sampling standards. Appendix A contains an overview of the procedures used. More detailed information is provided in the *PIRLS Technical Report*.⁵

The PIRLS International Study Center at Boston College, directed by Ina V.S. Mullis and Michael O. Martin, was responsible for all aspects of the design, development, and implementation of the study, working closely with the PIRLS advisory committees, the NRCs, and partner organizations responsible for particular aspects of the study. These included the IEA Secretariat, which provided guidance in all aspects of the study and was responsible for verification of all translations produced by participating countries; Statistics Canada, which was responsible for school and student sampling activities; the National Foundation for Educational Research in England and Wales, which had major responsibility for developing the reading assessment; the IEA Data Processing Center, responsible for processing and verifying the data from the 35 countries; and Educational Testing Service, which provided software and support for scaling the achievement data.

Funding

A project of this magnitude requires considerable financial support. IEA's major funding partners for PIRLS included the World Bank, the U.S. Department of Education, and the National Science Foundation.