



Introduction

Trends in Children's Reading Literacy Achievement 1991–2001

Integral to its mission of improving education and the understanding of educational processes by conducting international comparative studies of student achievement in key school subjects, the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) has conducted a series of large-scale surveys of student reading achievement over the past 30 years.

The 1991 reading literacy test was designed to measure reading achievement in three domains: narrative texts, expository texts, and documents; using a range of reading passages and non-continuous texts and with questions almost exclusively in multiple-choice format. The 2001 data collection also included a student questionnaire used in 1991, which asked students about home support for literacy and their reading at home and in school. The target population was the grade containing the most nine-year-olds, which was third or fourth grade in most countries.

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, in order to gain a deeper understanding of the effects policies and practices have within and across systems of education.

Which Countries Participated?

Nine countries participated in the Trends in IEA's Reading Literacy Study to examine how primary/elementary-school students' achievement in reading literacy had changed since 1991. Generally, these countries performed very well in 1991 – with six of them (the United States, Sweden, Italy, New Zealand, Iceland, and Singapore) scoring above the international average for the 27 countries participating in 1991; the remaining three (Greece, Hungary, and Slovenia) scoring at about the average. Each country had been working to improve students' reading achievement and was interested in seeing how this was reflected in performances on the 1991 reading literacy test.

In participating in PIRLS 2001 and the trend study, each country designated a national center and appointed a National Research Coordinator (NRC) to implement the studies in accordance with international procedures – a considerable responsibility given the complexity of the data collection and the measurement instruments. Appendix B contains a list of the PIRLS 2001 National Research Coordinators participating in the trend study. For efficiency in sampling and operations, the two studies were conducted in parallel as

much as possible. In choosing the sample for the trend study, participants used half of the schools sampled for the PIRLS 2001 data collection – sampling an additional class from the target grade for the 1991 literacy test data collection.

For the sake of comparability across countries, all testing was conducted at the end of the school year (most often in April through June of 2001 for countries in the Northern Hemisphere). The two countries on a Southern Hemisphere school schedule (New Zealand and Singapore) tested in September and October 2001, which was the end of the school year there. To ensure comparability over time, the 2001 data collection was scheduled in each country for the same time of year, as in 1991.⁴

Conducting the Trends in IEA's Reading Literacy Study

As described in the *PIRLS Technical Report*,⁵ PIRLS 2001 and the Trends in Reading Literacy Study were conducted according to the highest quality standards – with careful planning and documentation, cooperation among the participating countries, standardized procedures, and rigorous attention to quality control throughout. Countries used the same translated version of the 1991 test and student questionnaire in 2001, for example, and followed the same procedures for test administration and data collection. The stringent requirements for sampling documentation necessary to meet the PIRLS sampling standards also were applied in the trend study. Appendix A contains an overview of the procedures used.

This report summarizes performance on the IEA 1991 reading literacy test in 1991 and 2001, as well as responses to selected questions from the 1991 student questionnaire. Its purpose is to provide information on changes during that period. A more complete description of students' reading literacy achievement in 2001 is provided in the *PIRLS 2001 International Report*,⁶ which describes performance on the PIRLS assessment of students from 35 countries – including the nine trend countries – as well as a wealth of information on home and school contexts.

Additional information about the countries participating in the trend study may be found in the *PIRLS 2001 Encyclopedia*,⁷ a volume providing general information on the cultural, societal, and economic situation in each

4 In the 1991 study, Southern-Hemisphere countries tested in September-October 1990, before Northern-Hemisphere countries who tested in the first half of 1991. However, in PIRLS 2001, testing for Southern-Hemisphere countries followed Northern-Hemisphere testing, and so for New Zealand and Singapore the interval between data collections was eleven years.

5 Martin, M.O., Mullis, I.V.S., & Kennedy, A.M. (Eds.). (2003). *PIRLS 2001 technical report*. Chestnut Hill, MA: Boston College.

6 Mullis, I.V.S., Martin, M.O., Gonzalez, E.J., & Kennedy, A.M. (2003). *PIRLS 2001 international report: IEA's reading literacy achievement in 35 countries*. Chestnut Hill, MA: Boston College.

7 Mullis, I.V.S., Martin, M.O., Kennedy, A.M., & Flaherty, C.L. (Eds.). (2002). *PIRLS 2001 encyclopedia: A reference guide to reading literacy achievement in IEA's Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS)*. Chestnut Hill, MA: Boston College.

