

EMBARGO: 00:01 CEST 8 September 2020

Declining trends in reading attitudes: were students prepared for literacy at home in the pandemic?

This International Literacy Day, IEA (The International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement) reflects on data from PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study), in the context of the pandemic.

Recent analysis of PIRLS trend data in IEA's Compass Brief [*Troubling trends: An international decline in attitudes toward reading*](#) found that overall, attitudes to reading in grade four students and their parents have been declining over 15 years, since 2001. Students' attitudes to reading decreased in 13 out of the 18 countries participating in all study cycles and parents' reading attitudes also decreased in 14 out of 16 countries participating. This calls into question the willingness and propensity for reading at home during the pandemic. Furthermore in PIRLS 2016, on average, 36% of parents in the 46 countries answered there was not a device available at home for their child to read eBooks, and 62% of school principals responded that their school did not provide students access to digital books, highlighting some difficulties to address for studying literacy at home.

As the data was collected in 2016, prior to the pandemic, access to devices and eBooks will have undoubtedly changed as families and schools adapt to more virtual learning, raising important questions for future studies. Have student's and parent's attitudes to reading also changed during the pandemic?

Commenting on these findings, IEA Executive Director, Dr Dirk Hastedt said:

"Reading at home has never been more important than in the pandemic and declining reading attitudes call for policymakers to re-evaluate policies to encourage more reading, with wider campaigns which also involve parents. A key finding back from PIRLS 2011 was that children tend to share their parents' positive reading attitudes and behaviors. The pandemic has led to more time being spent at home between parents and children, which leads us to question whether this will have in turn led to more opportunities for parents to encourage positive attitudes toward reading."

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Notes to Editors

The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) started in 2001, surveying fourth graders, their parents' and school principals every five years, now arranging data for its fifth cycle, PIRLS 2021.

The [full Compass Brief](#) has more detailed information for each country's reading attitudes; the headline information is below:

- Trend results from the PIRLS study show a decline from 2001 through 2016 in most countries in fourth graders' and their parents' reading attitudes, as measured by students like reading and parents like reading scale scores.
- Average students like reading scale scores, as reported by the students themselves, decreased between 2001 and 2016 in 13 of the 18 countries that participated in all cycles of PIRLS.
- Students like reading scores, on average, only increased in England and Iran between 2001 and 2016 and remained essentially constant in the United States, New Zealand, and Hong Kong.
- Parents like reading scores, on average, also decreased in 14 of the 16 countries that participated in all cycles of PIRLS.

PIRLS survey questionnaires to students, parents and teachers can be [found online](#). This news release gathers information from the two questions below:

Parents survey: Q15B: Do you have a device that your child can use for reading ebooks? Yes / No

School principal survey: Q10 Does the school provide access to digital books? Yes / No

Countries who have participated in a PIRLS study since 2001 to 2016:

Argentina, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Belgium (Flemish), Belgium (French), Belize, Botswana, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Egypt, England, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Honduras, Hong Kong, Hungary, Iceland, Indonesia, Iran, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Macao, North Macedonia, Malta, Moldova, Morocco, Netherlands, New Zealand, Northern Ireland, Norway, Oman, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Romania, Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, Scotland, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Taiwan, Trinidad and Tobago, United Arab Emirates, United States.

Additional countries who will participate in PIRLS 2021:

Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Kosovo, Montenegro, Serbia, Uzbekistan

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