

This is not a word-for-word transcript.

Phil

Hello. This is 6 Minute English from BBC Learning English. I'm Phil.

Beth

And I'm Beth.

Phil

So, Beth, we're talking about the best education systems in the world today. You went to school here in Britain. What do you think of the British education system? Do you think it could be the best?

Beth

I think it's quite good, there's probably a couple of things that I personally would change about it, but I would say it's quite good, but maybe not the best in the world.

Phil

Well, in this programme, we are going to be talking about the Pisa rankings.

Beth

The rankings are based on tests carried out by the OECD, that's an international organisation, every three years. These tests attempt to show which countries are the most effective at teaching maths, science and reading. But is that really possible to measure? Well, here is former BBC education correspondent Sean Coughlan talking to BBC World Service programme 'The Global Story'.

Sean Coughlan

When they were introduced first of all, that was a very **contentious** idea, because people said 'how can you possibly compare big countries... how can you compare America to Luxembourg or to, you know, or to parts of China, or whatever?'

Phil

Sean said that the tests were **contentious**. If something is **contentious**, then it is something that people might argue about – it's controversial. So, at first, Pisa tests were contentious because not everyone believed it was fair to compare very different countries.

Beth

Phil, I've got a question for you about them. So, in 2022, Singapore was top of the reading rankings. But which of these countries came second? Was it:

- a) The USA?
- b) Ireland? or,
- c) The UK?

Phil

I think it might be b) Ireland.

Beth

OK. Well, we will find out if that's correct at the end of the programme. A common pattern in the Pisa rankings is that the most successful countries tend to be smaller. Talking to BBC World Service programme 'The Global Story', Sean Coughlan tells us that many large countries from Western Europe don't score that highly in the rankings.

Sean Coughlan

They're being **outpaced** and outperformed by these fast, upcoming countries – you know, Singapore, or Estonia, or Taiwan, or those sort of places which we don't historically think of as being economic **rivals**, but I suppose the argument for the PISA tests is, if you want to have a **knowledge economy**, an economy based on skills, this is how you measure it.

Phil

We heard that many large European countries are being **outpaced** by smaller nations. If someone **outpaces** you, they are going faster than you – at a higher pace.

Beth

We use the prefix 'out-' to say that someone or something is better at doing something. We also heard that smaller nations are 'outperforming' larger ones – they are performing better. Singapore, Estonia and Taiwan are described as economic **rivals** to large European nations – that means that they are competing with them, economically.

Phil

We also heard about a **knowledge economy**. This is an economy based on service industries that require workers to be highly educated, such as IT, finance or advanced engineering.

Beth

So, what makes countries perform better in these tests? Let's hear again from BBC World Service programme, 'The Global Story'. Sean Coughlan tells us that those countries that prioritise getting everyone to a certain level do well. We also hear from Rando Kuustik, an Estonian school principal.

Sean Coughlan

Countries which make sure that all their pupils get through a certain level of education to a certain standard, **regardless** of their background, do well.

Rando Kuustik

If you are teaching them by different level or abilities, then you are **segregating** them and we don't want to segregate any people in the world, why we are doing that in the schools? This one of the main things why Estonia is successful.

Phil

Sean said the most successful systems educate everyone to a particular standard, **regardless** of their background. If one thing happens regardless of something else, it means that the something else is not important, or not a problem.

Beth

Rando Kuustik said that Estonian schools do not want to **segregate** students. **Segregate** means to separate and keep apart.

Phil

So, we've just heard about Estonia, but what about your question, Beth? What about those countries?

Beth

I asked you which out of the USA, Ireland, and the UK came second for reading in the 2022 Pisa rankings. You said Ireland, and that was the correct answer. Well done!

OK, let's recap the vocabulary we've learned in this programme about education rankings, starting with **contentious** - argued about or controversial.

Phil

If you're **outpaced** by someone, they are going faster than you are.

Beth

Rivals are competitors.

Phil

A **knowledge economy** is one based on industries that need highly educated workers, such as IT, finance or advanced engineering.

Beth

If something happens **regardless** of a second thing, the second thing has no impact on it happening.

Phil

And finally, if people are **segregated**, different groups of people are separated and kept apart. Once again, our six minutes are up. Remember to visit our website, bbclearningenglish.com, where you'll find a worksheet and quiz related to this programme, and we'll see you again soon for more trending topics and useful vocabulary, here at 6 Minute English. Goodbye for now!

Beth

Bye!

VOCABULARY

contentious

argued about, controversial

outpace

go faster than

rival

a competitor

knowledge economy

A service economy based on highly skilled industries such as IT, finance or advanced engineering

regardless

without considering, or being influenced by

segregate

separate and keep apart