

ACHIEVEMENT DIFFERENCES IN READING BY SEX

Key Findings: Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russian Federation, United Kingdom, United States

Reading literacy scores for 15-year-olds were higher for females than for males in all of the G8 countries, including the United States.

This indicator, based on the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) conducted in 2000, examines differences in reading literacy between males and females. Particular attention is given to achievement at low and high levels of performance.

For PISA 2000, 15-year-olds from 32 countries were tested and their scores were grouped into levels from 1–5, with level 1 or below being the lowest and level 5 being the highest.

On average, females outperformed males in every G8 country on the combined reading literacy scale (table 8). In the United States, females scored an average of 29 points higher than males on the

combined reading literacy score of PISA 2000. In comparing the United States to the other countries reporting data, no differences were detected in the size of the performance gap by sex.

Males in the United States were overrepresented among 15-year-olds scoring at level 1 or below compared to their representation in the overall population: 62 percent of 15-year-olds scoring at level 1 or below were male, while males were 48 percent of the overall population of 15-year-olds (figure 14). Likewise, females were underrepresented at level 1 or below in the United States as compared to their representation in the overall population.

At level 5, males and females were not found to be significantly overrepresented or underrepresented in the United States compared to the overall population. However, at level 5 in the other G8 countries, females were overrepresented while males were underrepresented compared to the overall population.

Definition and Methodology

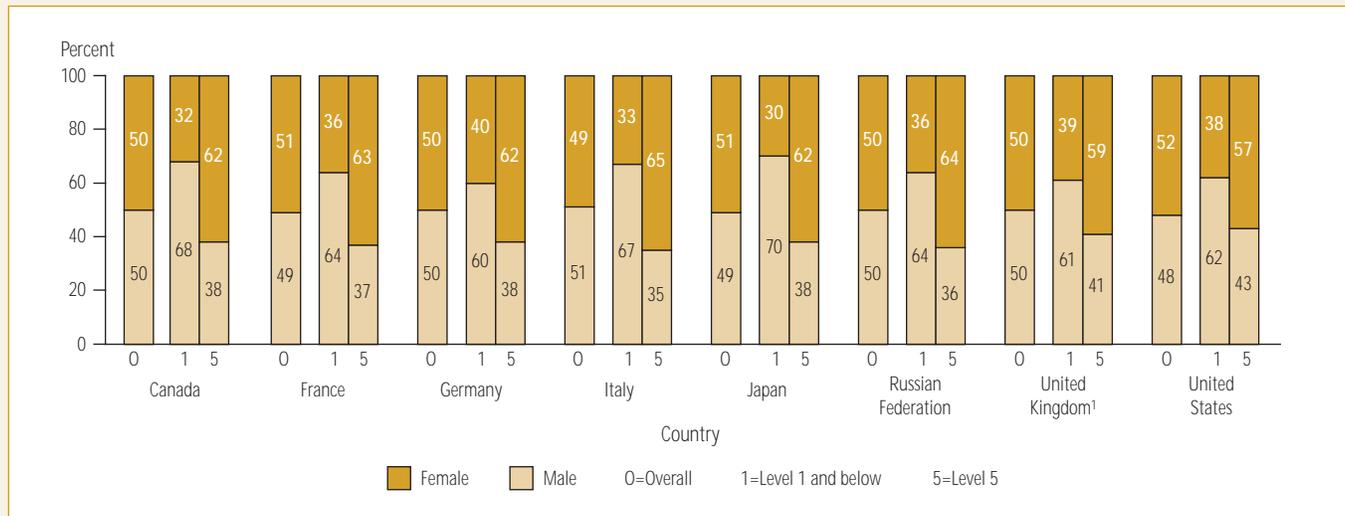
In order to better describe performance in reading literacy, PISA 2000 examined the proportion of students who could accomplish tasks at particular levels. In order to reach a particular level, a student must have been able to answer correctly a majority of test items at that level. Students were classified into six reading levels according to their scores. Students scoring below 335 were classified as below level 1, students scoring 335 to 407 were at level 1, and students scoring 626 and above were classified at

level 5. For the purpose of this report, students scoring at level 1 or below have been combined into a single proficiency level.

A population subgroup is overrepresented in a level if the percentage of the subgroup in that level is statistically higher than the percentage of the population overall in that level.

The combined reading literacy scale is made up of 3 subscales: retrieving information, interpreting texts, and reflecting on texts.

Figure 14. Percentage distribution of 15-year-olds, by sex, reading proficiency level, and country: 2000



¹The United Kingdom includes England, Northern Ireland, and Scotland. Wales did not participate in the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2000.

NOTE: Students were classified into reading levels according to their scores on the PISA 2000. In order to reach a particular level, a student must have been able to answer correctly a majority of items at that level. Students scoring below 335 were classified as below level 1, students scoring 335 to 407 were at level 1, and students scoring 626 and above were classified at level 5. The overall percentage refers to the percentage of the total 15-year-old student population.

SOURCE: Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2000.

Table 8. Combined reading literacy average scores of 15-year-old students by sex and female-male score point difference, by country: 2000

Country	Average scores		Female-male score point difference
	Female	Male	
Canada	551	519	32
France	519	490	29
Germany	502	468	35
Italy	507	469	38
Japan	537	507	30
Russian Federation	481	443	38
United Kingdom ¹	537	512	26
United States	518	490	29

¹ The United Kingdom includes England, Northern Ireland, and Scotland. Wales did not participate in the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2000.

NOTE: The female-male score point difference is calculated by subtracting average scores of males from average scores of females.

SOURCE: Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), PISA Assessment Items and Student Questionnaire, 2000.