

STUDENTS' ENGAGEMENT IN READING

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

In the United States, 15-year-olds achieving at the lowest level on the PISA proficiency scale reported lower levels of engagement in reading than their peers who achieved at the highest level, a pattern that was found in all other G8 countries.

In order to investigate engagement in reading and achievement, the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2000 asked students whether or not they agreed with statements like: "Reading is one of my favorite hobbies," or "I enjoy going to a bookstore or a library." These questions were used to design an index of reading engagement. This index had an average of zero, based on the average of 27 of the countries that participated in PISA 2000, with higher index values implying higher levels of reading engagement.

In 2000, 15-year-olds in the United States reported a lower index value (-0.14) for engagement in reading compared to their peers

in Japan (0.20), and the Russian Federation (0.17), though they reported higher engagement in reading compared to their peers in Germany (-0.26) (figure 17).

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. Fifteen-year-olds achieving at level 1 or below in the United States reported lower engagement in reading (-0.57) than the national average (-0.14) as well as compared to their U.S. peers achieving at level 5 (0.52). This pattern is also found in all of the other G-8 countries.

The size of the gap between the engagement scores of U.S. 15-year-olds scoring at level 1 or below compared to their peers at level 5 is smaller than the corresponding gap across these two proficiency levels in Germany and larger than the gap in the Russian Federation. The U.S. gap is not measurably different from the gap in the other G8 countries.

Definitions and Methodology

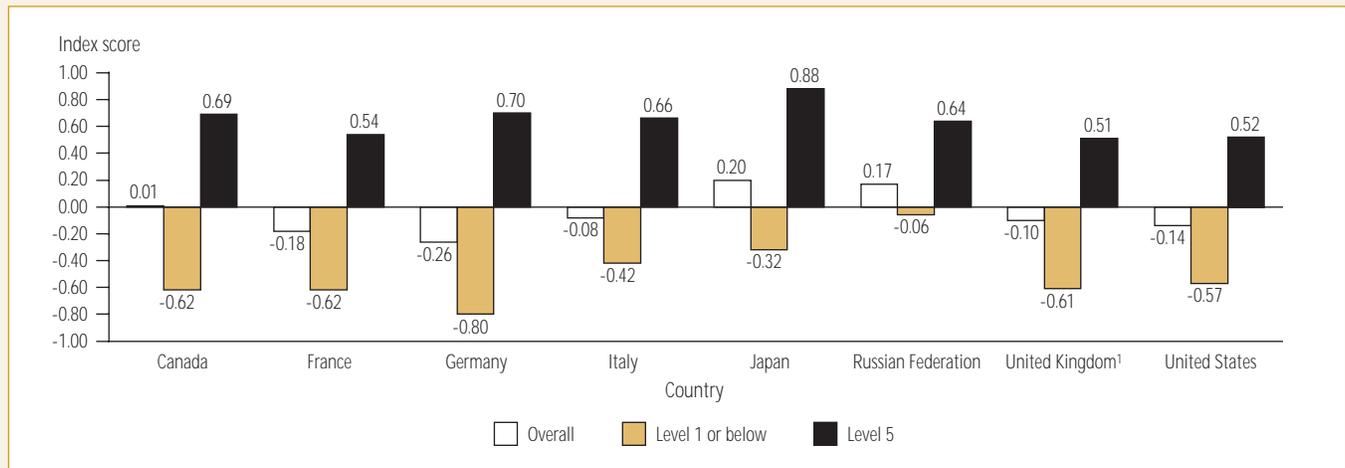
PISA 2000 measured students' engagement in reading by asking students for their level of agreement with several statements about their enjoyment of reading and reading-related activities, such as going to the library. See figure 17 for a complete list of items used to create the engagement in reading index.

The engagement in reading index was constructed in such a way that the average index score of the 27 Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries that participated in PISA 2000 was set to zero. (Overall 31 countries participated in PISA, an assessment run by the OECD, in 2000. The scores of non-OECD countries were not included in the calculation of the average index score). The standard deviation of the index was set to

one; therefore, approximately two-thirds of the OECD student population scored between -1 and 1.

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.

Figure 17. Average index scores of 15-year-old students' sense of engagement in reading, by 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: The engagement in reading index was constructed in such a way that the mean index score of the 27 Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries that participated in PISA 2000 was set to zero. A negative index value implies a lower than average engagement in reading, while a positive index value suggests a higher than average engagement in reading. PISA 2000 measured students' engagement in reading by asking for their level of agreement (strongly disagree, disagree, agree, strongly agree) with the following statements: I read only if I have to (reverse coded); reading is one of my favorite hobbies; I like talking about books with people; I find it hard to finish books (reverse coded); I feel happy if I receive a book as a present; for me, reading is a waste of time (reverse coding); I enjoy going to a bookstore or a library; I read only to get information that I need (reverse coded); and I cannot sit still and read for more than a few minutes (reverse coded). In order to reach a particular proficiency 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), PISA 2000.