

Impact of PIRLS on Language Education Policies in Hong Kong

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Countries	Reading Achievement Scale Score				Average Scale Score	Years of Formal Schooling	Average Age
Sweden					561 (2.2)	4	10.8
[†] Netherlands					554 (2.5)	4	10.3
^{12a} England					553 (3.4)	5	10.2
Bulgaria					550 (3.8)	4	10.9
Latvia					545 (2.3)	4	11.0
* ¹ Canada (O,Q)					544 (2.4)	4	10.0
¹ Lithuania					543 (2.6)	4	10.9
Hungary					543 (2.2)	4	10.7
[†] United States					542 (3.8)	4	10.2
Italy					541 (2.4)	4	9.8
Germany					539 (1.9)	4	10.5
Czech Republic					537 (2.3)	4	10.5
New Zealand					529 (3.6)	5	10.1
[†] Scotland					528 (3.6)	5	9.8
Singapore					528 (5.2)	4	10.1
^{2a} Russian Federation					528 (4.4)	3 or 4	10.3
Hong Kong, SAR					528 (3.1)	4	10.2
France					525 (2.4)	4	10.1
^{2a} Greece					524 (3.5)	4	9.9
Slovak Republic					518 (2.8)	4	10.3
Iceland					512 (1.2)	4	9.7
Romania					512 (4.6)	4	11.1
^{2b} Israel					509 (2.8)	4	10.0
Slovenia					502 (2.0)	3	9.8
International Avg.					500 (0.6)	4	10.3

SOURCE: IEA Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) 2001.

Exhibit 1.1 Distribution of Reading Achievement

PIRLS 2006
4th Grade

Countries	Reading Achievement Distribution				Average Scale Score	Years of Formal Schooling*	Average Age	Human Development Index**
^{2a} Russian Federation					565 (3.4)	4	10.8	0.797
Hong Kong SAR					564 (2.4)	4	10.0	0.927
^{2a} Canada, Alberta					560 (2.4)	4	9.9	0.950
Singapore					558 (2.9)	4	10.4	0.916
^{2a} Canada, British Columbia					558 (2.6)	4	9.8	0.950
Luxembourg					557 (1.1)	5	11.4	0.945
^{2a} Canada, Ontario					555 (2.7)	4	9.8	0.950
Italy					551 (2.9)	4	9.7	0.940
Hungary					551 (3.0)	4	10.7	0.869
Sweden					549 (2.3)	4	10.9	0.951
Germany					548 (2.2)	4	10.5	0.932
[†] Netherlands					547 (1.5)	4	10.3	0.947
^{†2a} Belgium (Flemish)					547 (2.0)	4	10.0	0.945
^{2a} Bulgaria					547 (4.4)	4	10.9	0.816
^{2a} Denmark					546 (2.3)	4	10.9	0.943
Canada, Nova Scotia					542 (2.2)	4	10.0	0.950
Latvia					541 (2.3)	4	11.0	0.845
^{†2a} United States					540 (3.5)	4	10.1	0.948
England					539 (2.6)	5	10.3	0.940
Austria					538 (2.2)	4	10.3	0.944
Lithuania					537 (1.6)	4	10.7	0.857
Chinese Taipei					535 (2.0)	4	10.1	0.910
Canada, Quebec					533 (2.8)	4	10.1	0.950
New Zealand					532 (2.0)	4.5 – 5.5	10.0	0.936
Slovak Republic					531 (2.8)	4	10.4	0.856
[†] Scotland					527 (2.8)	5	9.9	0.940
France					522 (2.1)	4	10.0	0.942
Slovenia					522 (2.1)	3 or 4	9.9	0.910
Poland					519 (2.4)	4	9.9	0.862
Spain					513 (2.5)	4	9.9	0.938
^{2b} Israel					512 (3.3)	4	10.1	0.927
Iceland					511 (1.3)	4	9.8	0.960
PIRLS Scale Avg.					500	–	–	–

SOURCE: IEA Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) 2006

Background

- Complex language situation in Hong Kong
 - Linguistically homogeneous: Cantonese
 - Cantonese – a Chinese dialect, not a written language (unlike Putonghua)
 - British Colony for 1 ½ Centuries
 - An international city within China
 - Chinese language: very different from Western languages such as English
- Language policy: bi-literate (Chinese and English) and tri-lingual (Cantonese, Putonghua and English)

Measures to improve language education

- 1994: Standing Committee for Language Education and Research (*SCOLAR*)
- A Language Fund of HK\$300 million (US\$38.5 million) was set up, which was later topped-up to HK\$500 million (US\$64 million)
- Reading goals (2000): to read with comprehension for learning and pleasure
- Whole school approach – building a culture of reading

How we made use of PIRLS

- PIRLS findings widely reported in the press
- Reported to various personnel and committees of the Government
- Discussed in the Legislative Council
- Disseminated to schools through talks and workshops for (in 2001, >1600) teachers on concepts and theories of reading – integrated with the work of the Faculty
- Some schools adopted PIRLS reading skills into their curriculum
- Talks and workshops given to (in 2001, >5000) parents on how to set up a good home reading environment

Impact of PIRLS

- In 2004, Territory-wide School Assessment (TSA) adopted the PIRLS framework as the Chinese reading comprehension assessment framework
- Tests developed by the HK Examination and Assessment Authority
- **2006 PIRLS results confirms that reforms in the area of language education is moving in the right direction**