

Notes from Asia Pacific, July 2011

On Line tests

The results have been announced of the 2009 PISA tests entitled "Students On Line". Students were tasked with evaluating information on the Internet, assessing its credibility and navigating webpages to test their digital reading performance. Students from 16 OECD countries took part - Australia, Austria, Belgium, Chile, Denmark, France, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Japan, Korea (top), New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Spain and Sweden – as well as three non-member economies - Colombia, Hong Kong – China and Macao – China.

In most countries, students' results in digital reading were broadly in line with their performance in the PISA 2009 print reading tests. But in Korea, Australia, New Zealand, Sweden, Iceland and Macao-China, students performed significantly better in digital reading than print, while the opposite was true of students in Poland, Hungary, Chile, Austria, Denmark, Hong-Kong China and Colombia.

Girls performed better than boys in every economy, but the difference was less marked than in print reading: girls scored an average of 24 points more, compared to a difference of 39 points in print, the equivalent to one year of schooling. Harnessing boys' relatively strong digital reading performance may be a way to improve their overall reading ability and engagement, says the report.

The survey highlighted wide gaps between the highest and lowest performing students in some countries (particularly Hungary, Austria and Belgium). Computer use among 15-year olds has risen fast over the past decade. 94% of students in OECD countries who took part in PISA 2009 have at least one computer at home compared with 72% in 2000.

Computer use at school had little impact on results while using a computer at home had a more marked impact on results. To help students at school, computer use should be integrated into curricula and more invested in training teachers to use them for teaching and to help students learn, says the OECD. The report can be found at: http://www.oecd.org/document/57/0,3746,en_21571361_44315115_48265529_1_1_1_1,00.html

Buoyed by their "outstanding" profile in PISA Students On Line, the South Korean government has announced a plan (with investment of over GBP 1 billion) to digitise all textbooks by 2015. Ministry officials said that students of all ages would be able to access their textbooks on smartphones, computers and smart televisions under the 'Smart Education' scheme. The textbook plan will be implemented in primary schools by 2014 and expanded to secondary and high schools the following year. In the transition period, both printed and digital texts will be used. S Korean Ministers have talked of the need for a "paradigm shift in education" for a digital society.

World Competitiveness

The International Institute for Management Development has launched its 2011 World Competitiveness Yearbook which includes a competitiveness league table based on some 300 factors, including several related to education input and outcomes. The US and Hong Kong are ranked as the most competitive countries, both slightly ahead of last year's winner, Singapore. In 2010, the US ranked third,

losing the top ranking for the first time in decades. See <http://www.imd.org/news/IMD-announces-the-2011-World-Competitiveness-Rankings-and-the-results-of-the-Government-Efficiency-Gap.cfm>.