

10

Analyses with School-Level Variables

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INTRODUCTION

The target population in PISA is 15-year-old students. This population was chosen because, at this age in most OECD countries, students are approaching the end of their compulsory schooling. Thus, PISA should be able to indicate the cumulative effect of a student's education.

As described in detail in Chapter 3, a two-stage sampling procedure is used in PISA. After the population is defined, school samples are selected with a probability proportional to size. Subsequently, 35 students are randomly selected from each school. As the target population is based on age, it is possible that students will come from a variety of grades.

Table 10.1 presents the distribution of 15-year-olds in each country, by grade and by the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) level in PISA 2006.

In a few countries, most of the 15-year-old population tends to be in a modal grade, whereas in others, the 15-year-old population is spread across several grades.

Table 10.1
Percentage of students per grade and ISCED level, by country (PISA 2006)

	Grade							ISCED 2	ISCED 3
	7	8	9	10	11	12	13		
AUS		0.1	9.2	70.8	19.8	0.1		80.1	19.9
AUT	0.3	6.4	44.6	48.7	0			6.7	93.3
BEL	0.4	4.4	31.1	63.2	1			6.8	93.2
CAN	0	1.7	13.3	83.8	1.2	0		15	85
CHE	0.8	16.1	62.6	20.3	0.3	0		82.8	17.2
CZE	0.6	3.5	44.3	51.5				50.4	49.6
DEU	1.6	12.3	56.5	29.3	0.3			97.3	2.7
DNK	0.2	12	85.3	1.4	1.1			98.9	1.1
ESP	0.1	7	33	59.8	0			100	0
FIN	0.2	11.7	88.1	0				100	0
FRA	0	5.2	34.8	57.5	2.4	0		40	60
GBR			0	0.9	98.4	0.7		0.5	99.5
GRC	0.5	2.1	5.3	78.8	13.3			8	92
HUN	2.2	5.5	65.7	26.6	0			7.7	92.3
IRL	0	2.7	58.5	21.2	17.5			61.3	38.7
ISL			0.2	99.2	0.6			99.4	0.6
ITA	0.3	1.5	15	80.4	2.8			1.7	98.3
JPN				100					100
KOR			2	97.3	0.7			2	98
LUX	0.2	11.8	53.4	34.4	0.1			64.2	35.8
MEX	2.3	8.1	33.5	48.9	5.1	2		44.5	55.5
NLD	0.1	3.7	44.9	50.7	0.4	0		73.5	26.5
NOR			0.5	99	0.5			99.5	0.5
NZL			0	6.2	89.4	4.4	0	6.2	93.8
POL	0.6	3.8	95	0.6				99.4	0.6
PRT	6.6	13.1	29.5	50.7	0.2			50.2	49.8
SVK	0.7	2.2	38.5	58.7				38.6	61.4
SWE		1.9	95.9	2.2				97.8	2.2
TUR	0.8	4.5	38.4	53.7	2.6			5.3	94.7
USA	0.8	1	10.7	70.9	16.5	0.1		12.4	87.6



The PISA target population can be spread over several grades for different reasons:

- If the student does not pass a particular grade examination, he or she has to repeat the grade. For example in some countries there may be up to about 35% of students who have already repeated at least one grade.
- Even if grade retention is not used, the 15-year-old population might be separated at the time of testing into two grades. For logistical reasons, PISA testing takes place in a single calendar year. As the recommended testing window is around April (in the northern hemisphere), the PISA target population is defined as all students between 15 years and 3 months old and 16 years and 2 months old at the beginning of the testing period. If the entrance rules for compulsory education are defined in terms of complete calendar years, then the PISA target population will attend just one grade.

Further, in most countries, the PISA population is spread across the two levels of secondary education, *i.e.* lower secondary (ISCED 2) and upper secondary (ISCED 3).

As the 15-year-old population attends different grades in most OECD countries, the within-school samples can only consist of a random sample of students. Consequently, the PISA participating students are attending several grades and within a particular grade, are in several classes, depending on the school size. Largely because the PISA sample is not class-based, PISA collects data at the school level. This chapter describes how and why school-level data should be analysed.

Since the PISA target population attends several grades in most countries, it would be interesting to compute the average performance growth between two adjacent grades, so that performance differences between countries could be translated into school-year effect. However, this would certainly lead to an overestimation of the performance growth: 15-year-olds attending lower grades are either lower achievers or younger students, and 15-year-olds attending higher grades are either high achievers or older students. Therefore, caution is required in comparing subpopulations in different grades.

LIMITS OF THE PISA SCHOOL SAMPLES

As mentioned earlier, the following statement is valid for both PISA and other international studies:

Although the student's samples were drawn from within a sample of schools, the school sample was designed to optimize the resulting sample of students, rather than to give an optimal sample of schools. For this reason, it is always preferable to analyse the school-level variables as attributes of students, rather than as elements in their own right. (Gonzalez and Kennedy, 2003)

This advice is particularly important in PISA as the target population is not defined as a grade, but as students of a particular age.

In some countries, lower secondary and upper secondary education are provided by the same school, whereas in others, this is not the case. In these countries, usually, the transition between lower and upper secondary education occurs around the age of 15, *i.e.* at the end of compulsory education (in most cases). As PISA focuses on the 15-year-old population, it means that one part of the target population is attending upper secondary education, while the other is attending lower secondary education (see Table 10.1 for the percentages of student by level of secondary education). Consequently, in several countries, 15-year-olds can be in different educational institutions.

As discussed in Chapter 3, schools are selected from the school sample frame by the probability proportional to size (PPS) sampling method, *i.e.* proportionally to the number of 15-year-olds attending the school.



This might mean, for example, that upper secondary schools only attended by students over the PISA age of 15 should not be included in the school sample frame. Similarly, lower secondary schools without any 15-year-olds should not be included in the school sample frame.

Thus, neither the lower secondary school population, nor the upper secondary school population represents the 15-year-old school population. In other words, the PISA school target population does not necessarily match the school population(s) within a particular country.

This lack of perfect match between the usual school population(s) and the PISA school population affects the way school data should be analysed. To avoid biases for the population estimates, school data have to be imported into the student data files and have to be analysed with the student final weight. This means, for example, that one will not estimate the percentage of public schools versus private schools, but will estimate the percentage of 15-year-olds attending private schools versus public schools. From a pedagogical and/or policy point of view, what is really important is not the percentage of schools that present such characteristics, but the percentage of students who are affected by these characteristics.

MERGING THE SCHOOL AND STUDENT DATA FILES

Box 10.1 provides the SPSS® syntax for merging the student and school data files. Both files need first to be sorted by the identification variables, *i.e.* CNT, SCHOOLID and STIDSTD in the student data file and CNT and SCHOOLID in the school data file. Afterwards, the two sorted data files can be merged according to the common identification variables, *i.e.* CNT and SCHOOLID.

Box 10.1 SPSS® syntax for merging the student and school data files (e.g. PISA 2006)

```
GET FILE="C:\PISA\2006\DATA\INT_SCH06_DEC07.SAV" .
SORT CASES BY CNT (A) SCHOOLID (A) .
SAVE OUTFILE="C:\TEMP\SCHOOL.SAV" .

GET FILE="C:\PISA\2006\DATA\INT_STU06_DEC07.SAV" .
SORT CASES BY CNT (A) SCHOOLID (A) STIDSTD (A) .
SAVE OUTFILE="C:\TEMP\STUDENT.SAV" .

MATCH FILES /FILE=*
  /TABLE="C:\TEMP\SCHOOL.SAV"
  /RENAME (SUBNATIO COUNTRY OECD STRATUM = D0 D1 D2 D3)
  /BY CNT SCHOOLID
  /DROP= D0 D1 D2 D3 .
EXECUTE .

SAVE OUTFILE="C:\TEMP\ALLDATA.SAV" .
```

ANALYSES OF THE SCHOOL VARIABLES

After merging the student and school data files, school data can be analysed as any student-level variables since the school-level variables are now considered as attributes of students. However, in this case, it is even more critical to use the replicate weights to compute sampling errors. Failure to do so would give a completely misleading inference.



The remainder of this chapter explains the methods for computing the percentage of students by school location, and their respective standard errors, as well as the student average performance in science, by school location.

Box 10.2 sets out the school-location question found in the school questionnaire.

Box 10.2 Question on school location in PISA 2006

Q7 WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING BEST DESCRIBES THE COMMUNITY IN WHICH YOUR SCHOOL IS LOCATED?

Tick only one box in each row.

A <village, hamlet or rural area> (fewer than 3 000 people)	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁
A <small town> (3 000 to about 15 000 people)	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂
A <town> (15 000 to about 100 000 people)	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃
A <city> (100 000 to about 1 000 000 people)	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄
A large <city> with over 1 000 000 people	<input type="checkbox"/> ₅

Box 10.3 provides the SPSS® syntax for computing the percentage of students and the average performance in science, by school location. As previously indicated, the SPSS® macro might be CPU-consuming; thus it is advised to keep only the variables indispensable for the analyses.

Box 10.3 SPSS® syntax for computing the percentage of students and the average performance in science, by school location (e.g. PISA 2006)

```
GET FILE="C:\TEMP\ALLDATA.SAV" .
SELECT IF (CNT="DEU") .
SELECT IF NOT MISSING(SC07Q01) .
SAVE OUTFILE="C:\TEMP\DEUALL.SAV"
/ KEEP = CNT SCHOOLID STIDSTD PV1SCIE TO PV5SCIE W_FSTUWT W_FSTR1 TO W_FSTR80
SC07Q01 .

INSERT FILE="C:\PISA\MACRO\MCR_SE_GRPCT.SPS" .

GRPPCT WITHIN=CNT/
      GRP=SC07Q01/
      INFILE="C:\TEMP\DEUALL.SAV" / .
EXEC .

INSERT FILE="C:\PISA\MACRO\MCR_SE_PV.SPS" .

PV STAT=MEAN/
  DEP=PV1SCIE PV2SCIE PV3SCIE PV4SCIE PV5SCIE/
  INFILE="C:\TEMP\DEUALL.SAV" /
  GRP=CNT SC07Q01/ .
```



Table 10.2 and Table 10.3 present the structure of the output data files.

Table 10.2
Output data file from the first model in Box 10.3

CNT	SC07Q01	STAT	SE
DEU	1	3.8	1.1
DEU	2	27.6	2.9
DEU	3	45.0	3.5
DEU	4	15.7	2.6
DEU	5	7.9	1.6

Table 10.3
Output data file from the second model in Box 10.3

CNT	SC07Q01	Statistic	STAT	SE
DEU	1	MEAN	453.1	14.9
DEU	2	MEAN	515.9	7.7
DEU	3	MEAN	526.4	7.7
DEU	4	MEAN	521.1	13.6
DEU	5	MEAN	487.5	17.8

As a reminder, the school data was analysed at the student level and weighted by the student final weight. Therefore, results should be interpreted as: 27.6% of the 15-year-olds are attending a school located in a village with less than 3 000 people. The students attending a school located in a small village on average perform at 515.9.

As the percentages for some categories might be small, the standard error will be large for the mean estimates.

All the SPSS® macros described in the previous chapters can be used on the school variables once they have been imported in the student data file.

CONCLUSION

For statistical and pedagogical reasons, the data collected through the school questionnaire, as well as the variables derived from that instrument, have to be analysed at the student level.

All the SPSS® macros developed can be used without any modifications. The interpretation of the results should clearly state the analysis level, *i.e.* for instance the percentage of students attending a school located in a small village and not the percentage of schools located in a small village.



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User's Guide

Preparation of data files

All data files (in text format) and the SPSS® control files are available on the PISA website (www.pisa.oecd.org).

SPSS® users

By running the SPSS® control files, the PISA data files are created in the SPSS® format. Before starting analysis in the following chapters, save the PISA 2000 data files in the folder of "c:\pisa2000\data\", the PISA 2003 data files in "c:\pisa2003\data\", and the PISA 2006 data files in "c:\pisa2006\data\".

SPSS® syntax and macros

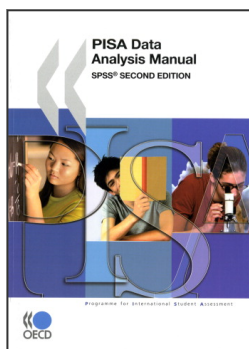
All syntaxes and macros in this manual can be copied from the PISA website (www.pisa.oecd.org). These macros were developed for SPSS 17.0. The 19 SPSS® macros presented in Chapter 17 need to be saved under "c:\pisa\macro\", before starting analysis. Each chapter of the manual contains a complete set of syntaxes, which must be done sequentially, for all of them to run correctly, within the chapter.

Rounding of figures

In the tables and formulas, figures were rounded to a convenient number of decimal places, although calculations were always made with the full number of decimal places.

Country abbreviations used in this manual

AUS	Australia	FRA	France	MEX	Mexico
AUT	Austria	GBR	United Kingdom	NLD	Netherlands
BEL	Belgium	GRC	Greece	NOR	Norway
CAN	Canada	HUN	Hungary	NZL	New Zealand
CHE	Switzerland	IRL	Ireland	POL	Poland
CZE	Czech Republic	ISL	Iceland	PRT	Portugal
DEU	Germany	ITA	Italy	SVK	Slovak Republic
DNK	Denmark	JPN	Japan	SWE	Sweden
ESP	Spain	KOR	Korea	TUR	Turkey
FIN	Finland	LUX	Luxembourg	USA	United States



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