



# Conclusion

The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) measures the extent to which 15-year-olds near the end of compulsory education have acquired some of the knowledge and skills that are essential for full participation in modern societies. This triennial survey focuses on student performance in reading, mathematics and science.

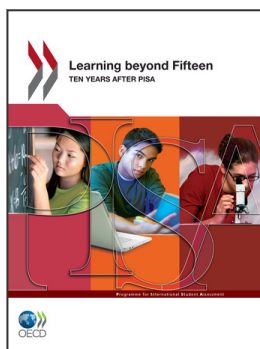
Canada added a dynamic element to the snapshot provided by PISA. Over ten years, its Youth in Transition Survey followed those students who were assessed by PISA in 2000. Every two years, YITS collected data on the educational and labour market pathways of these individuals. In 2009, Canada further enriched this database with a skills re-assessment of these young people, focusing on reading skills.

The result provides a rich source of data to support evidence-based policy making in Canada and in other countries involved in PISA. Understanding how skills develop over time is increasingly important as higher levels of skills foster economic and social prosperity.

The data Canada has generated shows the dynamic nature of learning during the critical period between the ages of 15 and 24. The development of reading skills during this period builds critically on the acquisition of skills earlier in life; such that reading proficiency among 24-year-olds tends to mirror that of their 15-year-olds selves. Many of the performance gaps observed at age 15 were still present at age 24. The one exception to this rule were those born outside of Canada, who at age 24 performed as well as those born in Canada, even if they had lower levels of performance at age 15. In fact, students with poor reading proficiency at age 15 were not necessarily saddled with this deficiency for life. That is, after compulsory education, transitions through education and the labour market, and particularly the opportunity to continue education, offered plenty of opportunities to develop and improve reading skills.

Educational attainment was strongly related to improvements in reading skills between the ages of 15 and 24, even when taking into account initial levels of skills and a host of other factors. The importance of education for improving reading skills was no surprise; indeed, this evidence supports the call for flexibility in education systems. Second-chance opportunities are vital for helping those with low levels of skills at the end of compulsory education to succeed later on in life.

How individuals use their skills and the extent to which a person regards his or her life chances as being under his or her own control were also strongly related to skills growth. The transition into adulthood generally involves a move from the controlled and relatively passive learning environments of school and compulsory education into the more diverse, complex, and autonomous learning contexts of post-secondary education and the labour market. Those 15-year-olds who reported feeling more in control of their own success showed greater improvements in their reading proficiency by the time they were 24 than did those individuals who were more passive and fatalistic learners at age 15.



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