

5. SPECIAL SECTION: EQUITY

Integrating immigrants' children

- In many countries, the level of reading performance of immigrant students is lower than that of non-immigrant students.
- The educational attainment of mothers has a stronger impact on the reading performance of students in a school than the primary language at home or the proportion of immigrant students in that school.
- In many countries and for all students – not only immigrant students – being in an advantaged versus a disadvantaged school has a stronger impact on reading scores than family background.

Significance

A country's success in integrating immigrant students is a key measure of its education system's quality and equity and also sheds light on the efficiency of its broader social policies. Designing education policies to address the needs of immigrant students is often difficult and expensive and education policy alone is unlikely to address these challenges fully. Reducing the concentration of educational disadvantage in schools may imply changes in other areas of social policy – for example, housing policies that promote a more balanced social mix in schools at an early age.

Findings

In many countries, the performance level in reading of immigrant students is lower than that of non-immigrant students. Non-immigrant students outperformed immigrant students by more than 40 score points on both 2000 and 2009 PISA assessments.

The school's composition – that is, the characteristics of the student population – can exert a significant influence on a student's performance. Three measures can define a school's composition: the percentage of immigrant students, the percentage of immigrant students in a school speaking another language at home and the percentage of students (whatever their origin) in a school who have mothers with low educational attainment. The greatest impact on reading performance comes from the percentage of students from disadvantaged backgrounds, i.e. schools that have a high concentration of students with mothers with low educational attainment. Across OECD countries, the gap between students attending disadvantaged *versus* advantaged schools is nearly the equivalent of two school years. The percentage of children who mostly speak a foreign language at home is next in terms of correlation while the percentage of immigrant students is last.

Across OECD countries, more than one third of immigrant students attend schools with the highest concentrations of students with mothers with low educational attainment. There are very large differences in scores between schools, except in nordic and eastern European countries and some countries with a long tradition of attracting immigrants such as Australia, Canada and New Zealand.

Immigrant students from socio-economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods but with highly educated mothers are overrepresented in “disadvantaged schools”. Across OECD countries, more than a quarter of students with highly educated mothers in disadvantaged schools are immigrant students. In the European Union, these students are more than twice as likely to attend disadvantaged schools as their non-immigrant counterparts. There is strong overrepresentation of immigrant students with highly educated mothers in disadvantaged schools in all countries except Brazil, Estonia, Israel and Norway.

Trends

On average among OECD countries with comparable data, the percentage of immigrant students increased by two percentage points between 2000 and 2009. The performance difference between immigrant and non-immigrant students remained broadly similar. Non-immigrant students outperformed immigrant students by more than 40 score points on both 2000 and 2009 PISA assessments.

Definitions

Items in this section are taken from the PISA 2009 assessment of students' competence in reading. PISA covers students who are between 15 years 3 months and 16 years 2 months of age at the time of assessment, and who have completed at least 6 years of formal schooling, regardless of the type of institution in which they are enrolled and of whether they are in full-time or part-time education, whether they attend general or vocational programmes, and whether they attend public, private or foreign schools within the country.

For information on the PISA assessment instruments and the methods used in PISA see the PISA website, www.pisa.oecd.org.

Information on data for Israel:

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932315602>.

Going further

For additional material, notes and a full explanation of sourcing and methodologies, see *Education at a Glance 2012* (Indicator A5).

Further reading from OECD

OECD (2010), *Closing the Gap for Immigrant Students*.

OECD (2012), *Untapped Skills: Realising the Potential of Immigrant Student*, PISA.

Figure 5.13. **Factors affecting reading performance**

These figures show that having more students with a low-educated mother has a greater negative effect on reading performance than having more immigrants or students who speak a foreign language at home.



Source: OECD (2012), *Education at a Glance 2012*, Table A5.1, available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932664860>.



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