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INTERNATIONAL ASSESSMENT PIRLS

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Abstract: *The progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) is a large-scale, international assessment designed to measure the reading comprehension abilities of fourth-grade students worldwide. Administered every five years, PIRLS evaluates how well students can understand and interpret written texts, with the aim of providing a comparative analysis of educational systems across countries. PIRLS focuses on two key areas: reading for literary experience and reading to acquire and use information. It offers insights into instructional practices, home environments, and socio-economic factors that impact reading development. Countries participating in PIRLS use the data to inform educational policies and improve reading literacy programs. Since its inception in 2001, PIRLS has expanded to include prePIRLS, an easier version of the test for emerging readers, and ePIRLS, a digital reading component. The results offer critical insights into the strengths and weaknesses of reading education worldwide, making PIRLS a valuable tool for educators, policymakers, and researchers interested in improving reading outcomes for students globally.*

Key words: *PIRLS, reading literacy, international assessment reading comprehension, fourth-grade students, educational policy, prePIRLS, Epirls.*

Overview of PIRLS. PIRLS, conducted by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA), assesses reading literacy in children who are typically in the fourth grade. The main goal is to understand how well children can read to learn and how various factors, such as home environment, instructional practices, and national policies, affect student outcomes. PIRLS is not just a test; it also includes questionnaires for students, teachers, and parents, offering comprehensive data on how contextual factors influence learning.

Structure of PIRLS. PIRLS assesses reading literacy through a combination of two domains:

Reading for literacy experience: This domain evaluates students' abilities to understand and interpret fictional texts.

Reading to acquire and use information: this domain focuses on nonfiction texts and measures the ability to comprehend and use information from written sources. Each student is required to read a variety of texts and answer questions related to comprehension, interpretation, and critical evaluation of the materials.

Components of PIRLS. PrePIRLS: A simplified version aimed at countries where literacy levels are lower, designed for emerging readers. **Epirls:** Launched in 2016, Epirls assesses students' ability to read and comprehend online information, which reflects the growing importance of digital literacy.

Educational Impacts of PIRLS. PIRLS results are widely used by educational researchers, policymakers, and school administrators to inform national and local educational strategies. The data can identify strengths and weaknesses in reading literacy, leading to the development of targeted programs to improve student learning outcomes. Countries that participate in PIRLS use the findings to benchmark their students' performance against global standards.

Factors influencing performance. PIRLS collects data on multiple factors that affect student reading performance, including:

- **Socioeconomic Status (SES):** Higher SES is often correlated with better reading outcomes.

- **Home Literacy Environment:** The availability of books and reading resources at home plays a significant role in literacy development.
- **Instructional Time and Practices:** The amount of time teachers spend on reading instruction and the strategies they employ significantly impact students' reading abilities.

History of PIRLS. PIRLS was first conducted in 2001 by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA), marking an essential step toward understanding global reading literacy. It was created to fill a gap in the comparative international assessment of reading skills, focusing on early reading development at the fourth-grade level. Before PIRLS, there was limited data on how reading literacy was taught and developed in the early years of education. PIRLS was developed to be administered every five years, allowing for the measurement of trends in reading achievement over time. This periodicity helps countries monitor progress and assess the impact of educational reforms.

Methodology of PIRLS. PIRLS is unique in its comprehensive approach to measuring reading literacy. Its methodology includes several key elements that make it reliable and robust assessment: **Test Design:** The **PIRLS test design** is based on reading comprehension tasks derived from both fiction and non-fiction texts. These texts are carefully selected to represent the types of reading materials that students encounter in their everyday academic environments. The test is divided into two main sections: **Literary reading:** this section includes fictional stories, often narrative in nature, which are meant to engage students in understanding and interpreting characters, plotlines, themes, and motivations. **Informational reading:** This section involves non-fiction texts, such as scientific articles, biographies, or instructional pieces, assessing how well students can extract information, understand main ideas, and use the information to make informed decisions.

Assessment Process. Each country participating in PIRLS administers the test to a representative sample of students, typically those in their fourth year of formal schooling. Along with reading tests, PIRLS collects extensive background data through

questionnaires distributed to students, teachers, school administrators, and parents. These questionnaires provide context to the reading scores by gathering data on: **Home literacy environments** (e.g., parents' educational backgrounds, number of books in the home, frequency of reading activities at home). **Instructional practices** (e.g., reading strategies taught by teachers, time spent on reading instruction). **School resources** (e.g., access to libraries, availability of instructional materials). **Socioeconomic status** (e.g., family, income, employment of parents). The background data is crucial in identifying factors that contribute to reading performance and in comparing different educational systems.

PIRLS and the Digital Age. With the increasing role of digital media in education, Epirls was introduced in 2016 to assess online reading comprehension. This innovation reflects the changing nature of literacy in the 21st century, where students must navigate and interpret information from digital sources.

EPIRLS tests students' ability to read and understand texts in a simulated online environment. Students engage with interactive tasks, such as reading online articles, interpreting hyperlinks, and evaluating web-based information. The introduction of epirls is a response to the growing demand for digital literacy skills in both education and workplace.

Future directions for PIRLS. As education systems worldwide continue to evolve, PIRLS is likely to adapt and expand in several ways: **International of digital literacy:** with the rise of e-learning and online information access, future cycles of PIRLS will likely place greater emphasis on assessing students' digital literacy and online research skills. **Focus on Equity:** Addressing global disparities in reading literacy will remain a priority for PIRLS. Future reports may place more focus on examining how inequalities in access to education, technology, and resources affect reading outcomes. **Expanding Participation:** More countries, especially in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, are expected to participate in future PIRLS cycles, offering a more comprehensive view of global reading literacy.

Conclusion. PIRLS is an invaluable resource for understanding global reading literacy trends. It provides critical data for researchers, educators, and policymakers to analyze how various factors, such as instructional practices, home environments, and socio-economic conditions, impact reading performance. As educational demands evolve, particularly with the rise of digital media, PIRLS will continue to adapt, ensuring that it remains relevant in the assessment of modern literacy skills. Its role in shaping educational reforms worldwide underscores the importance of large-scale assessments in improving learning outcomes for all students.

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