# PISA IN FOCUS 8

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## Do students today read for pleasure?

- Across OECD countries, around two-thirds of students reported that they read for enjoyment on a daily basis.
- The percentage of students who reported that they read for enjoyment daily dropped in the majority of OECD countries between 2000 and 2009, but in some countries, that proportion increased.
- Reading for enjoyment every day is associated with better performance in PISA.
- Girls and socio-economically advantaged students read more for enjoyment than boys and disadvantaged students, and there is evidence that the gap in reading patterns widened between 2000 and 2009.

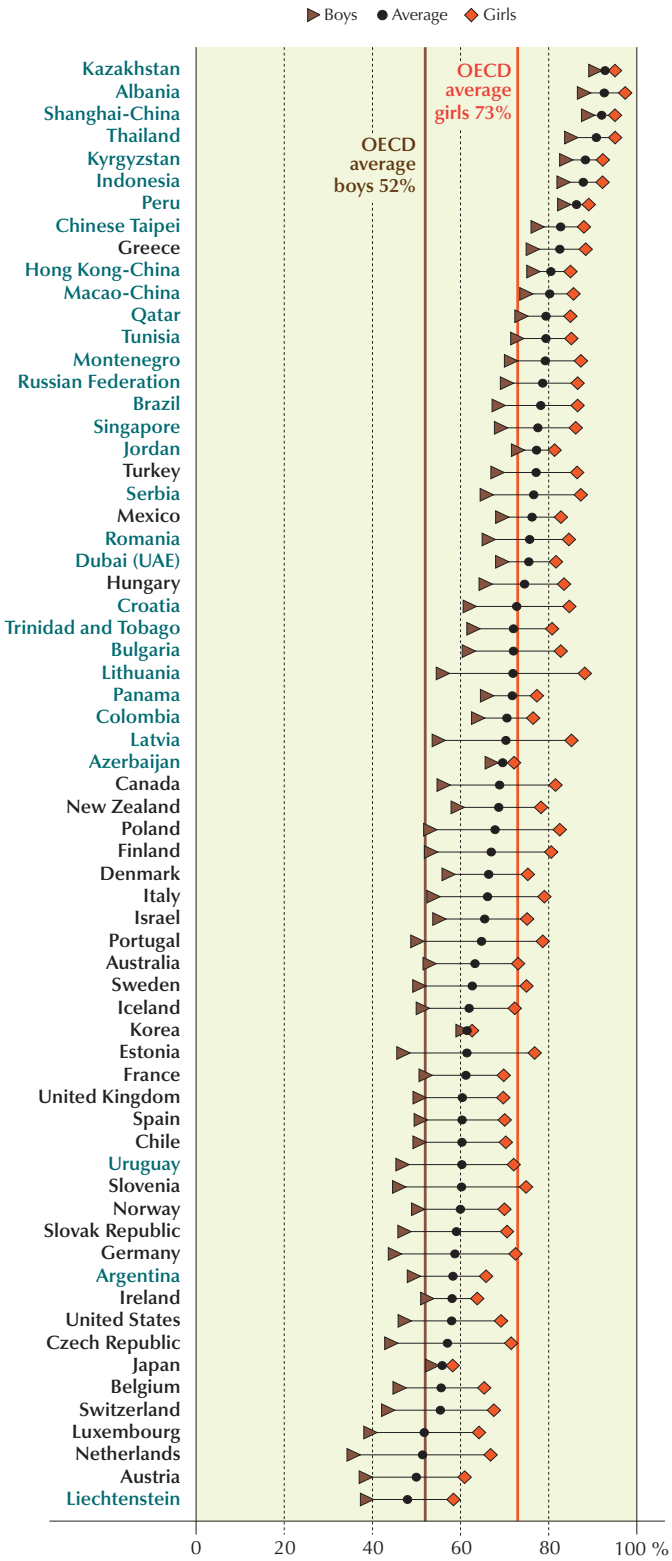
Students who are highly engaged in a wide range of reading activities are more likely than other students to be effective learners and to perform well at school. Research also documents a strong link between reading practices, motivation and proficiency among adults. Proficiency in reading is crucial for individuals to make sense of the world they live in and to continue learning throughout their lives.

Reading for pleasure is associated with girls…

On average across OECD countries, in 2009, 37% of students reported that they do not read for enjoyment; in Austria and the partner country Liechtenstein, more than half of the 15-year-olds surveyed reported as such. In contrast, more than 90% of students in the partner countries Albania, Kazakhstan and Thailand and the partner economy Shanghai-China said that they read for enjoyment. Girls read more for enjoyment than boys in all countries and economies, except Korea. On average across OECD countries, there is a 20 percentage-point gender gap in reading for enjoyment. In Canada, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, and the partner countries Latvia, Lithuania and Uruguay, the gender gap in reading for enjoyment is 25 percentage points or larger. In Korea, boys and girls are equally likely to read for enjoyment; and gender differences in reading for enjoyment are also relatively small in Japan, in the partner countries Albania, Azerbaijan, Indonesia, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Peru and Thailand, and in the partner economies Hong Kong-China and Shanghai-China.

# PISA IN FOCUS

**Percentage of students who read for enjoyment**




*Countries are ranked in descending order of the percentage of students who read for enjoyment.*

Source: OECD, *PISA 2009 Database*, Table III.1.4.

## ...socio-economic advantage...

On average across OECD countries, 72% of socio-economically advantaged students – students in the top quarter of the *PISA index of economic, social and cultural status* in the country of assessment – reported that they read daily for enjoyment while only 56% of disadvantaged students reported doing the same. In general, the difference in whether socio-economically advantaged and disadvantaged students read for enjoyment is greater among OECD countries than among partner countries and economies. In ten OECD countries – Australia, Austria, Belgium, Estonia, France, Germany, Ireland, Korea, Luxembourg and Switzerland – the difference in the share of socio-economically advantaged and disadvantaged students who read for enjoyment is more than 20 percentage points.

## ...and better scores in the PISA reading assessment.

Reading for enjoyment is associated with reading proficiency: PISA finds that a crucial difference between students who perform well in the PISA reading assessment and those who perform poorly lies in whether they read daily for enjoyment, rather than in how much time they spend reading. On average, students who read daily for enjoyment score the equivalent of one-and-a-half years of schooling better than those who do not.

## But in most countries, the trends are not encouraging.

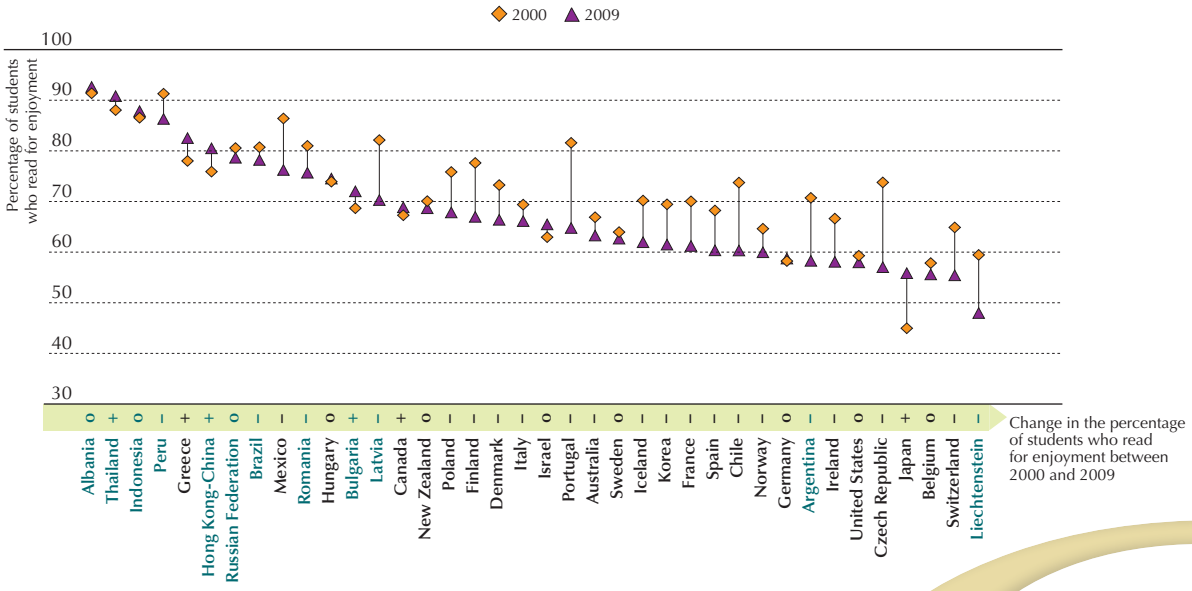
Fifteen-year-old students in 2009 tended to be less enthusiastic about reading than students in 2000. Enjoyment of reading tends to have deteriorated, especially among boys. On average across OECD countries, the percentage of students who reported reading daily for enjoyment decreased by five percentage points during the period. In 2000, 69% of students reported reading for enjoyment daily, but in 2009, only 64% of students did so. As many as 22 countries saw a decrease in the percentage of students who read for enjoyment between 2000 and 2009.

But in 10 countries, reading patterns have remained the same over the period; and in Canada, Greece, Japan, the partner countries Bulgaria and Thailand, and the partner economy Hong Kong-China, more students read daily for enjoyment in 2009 than their counterparts did in 2000.

Some of the countries where the share of students who read for enjoyment decreased between 2000 and 2009 are those with comparatively high proportions of students who read for pleasure. In Finland, Mexico, Portugal and the partner country Latvia, the percentage of students who read for enjoyment decreased by more than 10 percentage points from the relatively high levels of more than 75% in 2000.

Japan is the only country where fewer than two-thirds of students read for enjoyment daily in 2009 and where this proportion represented a large increase over levels observed in 2000. Japan was the country with the smallest share of students who read for enjoyment in 2000, so even with an increase of 11 percentage points, the share of students who read for pleasure in 2009 is smaller than that in most other countries.

**Percentage of students who read for enjoyment in 2000 and 2009**




| 2009 higher than 2000 | 2000 higher than 2009 | No statistically significant difference | |
|---|---|---|---|
| + | – | o | 95% confidence level |

*Countries are ranked in descending order of the percentage of students who read for enjoyment in 2009.*
Source: OECD, *PISA 2009 Database*, Table V.5.1.

Girls greatly outnumber boys among students who read for enjoyment, and the gap between boys and girls widened between 2000 and 2009 by three percentage points across the OECD area. In 2000, 60% of boys and 77% of girls read for enjoyment; by 2009, these percentages had dropped to 54% and 74%, respectively. Interestingly, the widening of the gender gap was due to the fact that while, on average, a smaller percentage of boys and girls read for enjoyment in 2009 than in 2000, the decline is greater among boys than it is among girls. While in most countries the proportion of boys who read for enjoyment decreased between 2000 and 2009, the trend among girls is less consistent.

The bottom line: Fewer students today are reading for pleasure, even though daily reading for pleasure is associated with better performance in school and with adult reading proficiency. The challenge for parents and educators is to instill a sense of pleasure in reading by providing reading materials that students find interesting and relevant.

**For more information**

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**See** *PISA 2009 Results: Learning to Learn: Student Engagement, Strategies and Practices* (Volume III) and *PISA 2009 Results: Learning Trends: Changes in Student Performance Since 2000* (Volume V)

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