



**International Association
for the Evaluation of
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CALL FOR PROPOSALS

Call no. IEA 01/09-2014

Thematic Report Using IEA PIRLS Data: The Home, Parental Involvement, and Literacy Achievement at Grade 4

1. Introduction

The International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) invites proposals for creating a thematic report based on secondary analysis of IEA's Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) data. The general theme for this report is the exploration of the influence of the home setting—home literacy activities, home–school relations, and pre-school attendance—on learning outcomes. The key deliverable for the project will be a report of 80 to 150 pages, including an executive summary, cited references, tables, and graphs.

2. Background

- 2.1 PIRLS has assessed the reading abilities of Grade 4 students around the globe every five years since 2001. In the most recently released cycle of 2011, 49 countries and nine benchmarking entities participated in PIRLS. The international report published in 2012 gave a very detailed overview of the results.¹
- 2.2 PIRLS assesses the reading comprehension of Grade 4 students in a test consisting of informational and literary texts. Different comprehension processes were captured and student abilities were measured on a scale that also enabled trend comparisons with previous PIRLS cycles. In addition, students as well as their reading teachers and principals completed a background questionnaire. A questionnaire was also administered to the students' parents asking questions about early literacy activities, pre-primary education, and parents' involvement in helping with homework, as well as requesting information on parental background—for example, about reading

¹ Mullis, I.V.S., Martin, M.O., Foy, P., & Drucker, K.T. (2012). *PIRLS 2011 International Results in Reading*. Chestnut Hill, MA: TIMSS & PIRLS International Study Center, Boston College (<http://timssandpirls.bc.edu/pirls2011/international-results-pirls.html>).

habits or attitudes toward reading.² Most of the background questions remained the same across PIRLS cycles, allowing also for the examination of trends for background information.

2.3 The TIMSS and PIRLS *Relationships Report* started exploring the effects of home background on student achievement in reading, mathematics, and science.³ Gustafsson et al. stated: “One of the most stable and consistently observed phenomena in the field of education is the impact of students’ home background on achievement. Students whose parents have a higher level of education, a more prestigious occupation, or greater income tend to have higher achievement than students whose parents have a lower standing on such socio-economic status (SES) indicators (e.g., Sirin, 2005). Many theories have been proposed to account for this phenomenon, but there is little consensus about which explanation is the most powerful.”⁴

2.4 What we already know from PIRLS:

- (1) “A supportive home environment and an early start are crucial in shaping children’s reading literacy. In PIRLS 2011, at the fourth grade, sixth grade, and for the benchmarking participants and prePIRLS, students had higher reading achievement if their parents reported that they themselves liked reading, often engaged in early literacy activities with their children, had more home resources for learning, and that their children had attended preprimary education. Children also had higher achievement if their parents reported that their children started school able to do early literacy tasks (e.g., read sentences and write some words).”⁵
- (2) “Internationally, on average, approximately one-third of the fourth grade students had parents that **Like** reading and another 57 percent had parents that **Somewhat Like** reading. In particular, students whose parents **Like** reading had substantially higher average reading achievement than the eleven percent of students whose parents reported they **Do Not Like** reading (535 vs. 487).”⁶
- (3) “Internationally, across the countries at the fourth grade, 37 percent of the students had parents that **Often** engaged them in early literacy activities, and an additional 60 percent had parents that **Sometimes** engaged them in early literacy activities. The fourth grade students whose parents **Often** engaged them had higher average achievement than the students whose parents only **Sometimes** engaged them in literacy activities (529 vs. 506).”⁷

² For details, please refer to Supplement 1 of the PIRLS 2011 user guide for the international database: http://timssandpirls.bc.edu/pirls2011/downloads/P11_UG_Supplement1.pdf.

³ Martin, M.O., & Mullis, I.V.S. (Eds.). (2013). *TIMSS and PIRLS 2011: Relationships Among Reading, Mathematics, and Science Achievement at the Fourth Grade—Implications for Early Learning*. Chestnut Hill, MA: TIMSS & PIRLS International Study Center, Boston College, Chapter 4 (http://timss.bc.edu/timsspirls2011/downloads/TP11_Relationship_Report.pdf).

⁴ Ibid, p. 181.

⁵ Mullis, I.V.S., Martin, M.O., Foy, P., & Drucker, K.T. (2012). *PIRLS 2011 International Results in Reading*. Chestnut Hill, MA: TIMSS & PIRLS International Study Center, Boston College, p. 109.

⁶ Ibid, p. 117.

⁷ Ibid, pp. 124–125.

- (4) “Preprimary education, in the form of preschool, kindergarten, or an early childhood education program, plays an important role in preparing children for primary school. PIRLS 2006 found a positive relationship between years of preprimary education and reading achievement in the fourth grade.”⁸

3. Contract objectives/research questions

3.1 Definitions

- (1) The thematic report tendered shall deepen our knowledge about the influence of the home and home support on student achievement. The authors shall explore the home as a setting from various angles to help create a more complete and in-depth overview of the subject at hand. Policymakers may draw upon the results to develop new strategies, stimulating positive influences for home support and parental investment.
- (2) For this investigation, we work with a broad definition of “home support” that includes home literacy practice, home investment in pre-school, and pre-school attendance. Parameters such as parental background and SES may help us understand how home support activities and the strength of the home–school relationship vary within and across countries over time.

3.2 Key questions to be explored could include:

- (1) What is the impact of early literacy activities on student achievement and attitudes/dispositions at Grade 4? How do such relationships vary across participating countries and over time?
- (2) What is the nature of parent–school interactions among participating countries, and what impact do they have on learning outcomes for students?
- (3) What influence does pre-school participation have on learning outcomes? How can policy strategies stimulate pre-school attendance and parental involvement in early reading acquisition, and what are the implications for schools working with parents from low SES households?

3.3 It is well known that parental background—especially socio-economic background—is a strong indicator for student achievement. However, in all three PIRLS cycles, the PIRLS home questionnaire provided much more detailed information on parents’ attitudes and activities with students, as well as on literacy-related activities in general. How strong is the impact of parental background and activities on students’ abilities and attitudes? Can stronger relationships be found for different activities and attitudes? Has this changed over time?

3.4 In many countries, schools are trying to involve parents in learning activities and connect schools and homes. Previous research has found a positive impact of parental involvement.⁹ PIRLS addressed this in questions assigned to school principals and teachers. But how

⁸ Ibid, p. 125.

⁹ See, for example: http://www.iea.nl/fileadmin/user_upload/Policy_Briefs/IEA_policy_brief_Mar2014.pdf.

successful are these activities in various cultures and background circumstances? Are there school policies or teacher activities that are related to a more positive parental background?

- 3.5 PIRLS also included questions on pre-school attendance. Positive relationships between pre-school attendance and student achievement have been found before.¹⁰ Can we find indicators for the importance of early learning at home and at pre-schools, and how they might relate to each other?

4. General guidelines for the proposal

- 4.1 The proposal must be submitted in English.
- 4.2 Extensive research has already been conducted on the topic of parental background and its impact on students. The proposal must demonstrate that the tenderer is familiar with the previous research and must include a sound literature review. The proposal must make clear what the contribution of the proposed publication is and how it expands the current state of research and knowledge.
- 4.3 Tenderers must clearly specify the research relevance and the policy relevance of the research questions and methods to be the focus of the thematic report, expanding and adding to the ideas set out in this Call for Proposals. The proposal must describe a general analytical framework that would guide the analyses and interpretation of the results. The framework must clearly show how the proposed analysis would address the policy-relevant research questions. This should include reference to the sources of data within PIRLS (questionnaire items, indices, or constructs from the PIRLS questionnaires) but also any non-PIRLS data sources that are proposed to be used in the analysis or any additional data collection that would be needed (e.g., system level characteristics). Brief descriptions of the types of statistical analyses to be utilized should be provided.
- 4.4 The proposal must outline a detailed timeline for all analyses and report writing activities as well as the budget needed to complete the proposed work. In developing their timelines, tenderers should assume a start date of January 2015 and an end date of September 2015, though there may be some degree of flexibility in implementing the timeline. The timeline must make provisions for a review of the draft report by IEA, and for related revisions to the report.
- 4.5 The budget must include the expected number of work days needed to complete each activity related to the project and a total budget in EUR or USD. The total budget should not exceed 40,000 EUR.
- 4.6 The proposal should not exceed ten pages in length and should include a short (500 words maximum) biographical note on the tenderer, highlighting experience relevant to the proposed activities.

¹⁰ See, for example: http://www.iea.nl/fileadmin/user_upload/Policy_Briefs/IEA_Policy_Brief_Dec2013.pdf.

4.7 IEA will review all proposals based on methodological quality, research and policy relevance, and the budget of the proposals. All tenderers will be informed of the outcome of these deliberations by 28 November 2014.

4.8 Tenderers may submit tenders:

4.8.1 either by post or by courier. The tender must be received no later than 3 November 2014 at 1:00 p.m. Please send it to the following address:

International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement
IEA Secretariat
Herengracht 487
1017 BT Amsterdam
The Netherlands

4.8.2 or by e-mail to department@iea.nl.