

BACKGROUND

1. The International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) is an independent international cooperative of national research institutions and government agencies, with a permanent secretariat based in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. For the past 50 years, IEA has been conducting large-scale comparative studies of educational achievement to gain a deeper understanding of the effects of policies and practices within and across systems of education internationally.

2. PIRLS 2006 is the second, after PIRLS 2001, in a five-year cycle of assessments that measures trends in children's reading literacy achievement and reports on the background contexts for developing reading literacy. Data on the home and school contexts was collected through questionnaires to pupils, their parents, their teachers and the principals of their schools. The framework of PIRLS 2006 was built on four reading comprehension processes within two overarching reading purposes – literary and informational. The four processes are: a) Focus on and retrieve explicitly stated information, b) Make straightforward inferences, c) Interpret and integrate ideas and information, and d) Examine and evaluate content, language, and textual elements. Pupils were assessed on passages comprising literary texts (fictional stories) and/or informational texts (informative articles and instructional texts). For each passage, there were approximately 12 test items, with about half in the multiple-choice format and half in the constructed-response format (requiring pupils to write their own answers).