

PISA TESTS: LET'S STOP OBSESSING OVER RANKINGS AND ACTUALLY HELP KIDS LEARN

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Introduction

Education is very important. It helps kids get ready for life, jobs, and being part of society. Countries want to know how their schools are doing, so they use international tests like PISA. This test is from the OECD and checks 15-year-olds in reading, math, and science.

The main problem is that many countries care too much about PISA rankings instead of looking at students' real skills and learning challenges. People get excited or worried about positions on the list, but few look at what the scores really tell about learning. In this essay, I will explain what PISA is, why focusing only on rankings is a problem, and how we can use the results to improve schools.

What PISA Really Does

PISA started in 2000 and happens every three years. The last full results are from 2022, where math was the main focus. The 2025 round focuses on science.

PISA is not like regular school tests. It asks students to use what they know in real situations, not just remember facts. For example, they may read a chart, solve a problem, or explain a science idea. This tests thinking and problem-solving.

Students also answer questions about their home and school life. Do they have a quiet place to study? Are there enough books? This helps explain why scores are different. In 2022, many countries saw big drops in scores, especially in math.

Why Rankings Can Be a Problem

The main problem is that countries focus too much on rankings instead of real skills. Once results are out, news and politicians talk about positions, and schools feel pressure to “fix” things fast, usually with more test practice.

But this does not fix real issues. Kids who struggle with basic reading or math still fall behind. Students from low-income families or with fewer resources may get left out. Gaps between students often stay the same or get worse. The 2022 drops showed that chasing a higher rank does not make learning better.

Looking at the Real Data

Instead of only rankings, countries should study the full data. Look at how home life, teachers, and school resources affect results. See which groups of students struggle most, like newcomers or low-income students.

Checking results over time can show if changes work. This helps design real solutions, like better teacher training or more support for students who need it. It’s about fixing real problems, not just climbing the ranking list.

How Countries Can Use PISA Better

Countries should ask: What are students good at? What are they struggling with? Then make plans that fit local needs, not just copy top countries.

If done right, PISA can help schools be fairer, teaching can improve, and all students can learn better.

Conclusion

PISA is useful. It shows how teens use reading, math, and science in real life and what helps or hinders learning. But the main problem is that many countries care too much about rankings instead of real skills.

If countries focus on understanding the data and making smart changes, schools can really improve. PISA should not just be a scoreboard—it should help students learn better.

References

OECD. (2023). PISA 2022 Results (Volume I and II). OECD Publishing.

Various OECD reports and summaries on PISA cycles and findings.