

Strong Performers and Successful Reformers in Education

Lessons from PISA for Korea



Table of Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.....	15
CHAPTER 1 STRONG PERFORMERS, SUCCESSFUL REFORMERS: KOREA	17
A changing yardstick for educational success	18
Strong Performers and Successful Reformers in Education series	18
About this report.....	19
Methodology	19
Framework for analysis.....	19
What is PISA and what can we learn from it?	20
How can PISA be used to help improve education systems?	21
Research methods employed for the country chapters	23
Research methods employed to draw lessons for Korea	23
Background on education in Korea and comparisons with selected high-performing countries	24
▪ Country comparisons.....	24
▪ Shaping of Education in Korea	24
CHAPTER 2 VIEWING EDUCATION IN KOREA THROUGH THE PRISM OF PISA	31
Consistently high mean performance among 15-year-old	32
Relative shares of top-performing students: Above the OECD average and, in reading, an increase over time.....	35
Low proportion of poor-performing students: Consistently among the lowest in the OECD (with a decline in science)	39
Korea: A favourable context for student achievement	41
Equity in the distribution of learning opportunities	45
Changes in performance differences	46
Access to resources and socio-economic background.....	47
Below-average impact of socio-economic background on learning outcomes	48
Other factors related to poor student performance that emerge from PISA	49
What are the broader effects of a demanding education system?.....	50
Other learning outcomes: Student engagement, strategies and practices.....	50
Using effective learning strategies	54
Studying in a digital age: Digital reading performance and use of digital resources	55
▪ Relatively high proficiency in digital reading	55
▪ Differences in print versus digital reading	56
▪ Gender and digital reading	56
▪ Online reading practices.....	57
▪ Using computers and the Internet	59
The learning environment in Korea.....	60
The Korean education system and education policies that make a difference	65
▪ Participation in early childhood education with a reliance on private institutions and funding.....	65
Competition as a powerful source of innovation	67
Setting standards and accountability arrangements.....	74

Dealing with diversity in the student population: Low levels of vertical differentiation and medium levels of horizontal differentiation.....76

The balance between public and private education77

CHAPTER 3 SUPPLEMENTARY EDUCATION IN EAST ASIA 87

Towards a better understanding of supplementary education.....88

- Defining supplementary education 88
- Mapping supplementary education..... 88
- Who receives supplementary education? 89

The main drivers of supplementary education90

- A head start to enter prestigious universities..... 91
- More pressure and chances to succeed 91
- Mitigating the shortcomings of schools 92

The impact of supplementary education.....92

- The impact on the learning process..... 92

The impact on academic performance and spill over effects94

- The impact on academic performance is not clear-cut 94
- Exacerbates socio-economic inequalities 94
- A high cost for student well-being..... 94
- A sizeable market 95

Policy Responses to Supplementary Education95

- Policies to downsize and limit supplementary education 95
- Broaden access to supplementary education..... 96
- Foster research and public engagement for more effective policy responses 97

CHAPTER 4 SHANGHAI AND HONG KONG-CHINA: LEARNING TO LEARN 103

Introduction.....104

The cultural context104

- Cultural paradoxes..... 104

The historical context.....105

- Ideology-driven systems: 1905 to 1976..... 105
- The reconstruction of education: the late 1970s onwards..... 105
- The system today 106

Shanghai: A leader in reforms107

- How education is practised 108
- Reform strategies: from teaching to learning 110
- Achievements and challenges..... 115

Hong Kong-China’s education system: One Country, two systems.....117

- Evolution of Hong Kong-China’s education system..... 118
- The drive for reform 119
- Achievements and challenges..... 123

Lessons from Shanghai and Hong Kong-China 123

- Building legitimacy..... 124
- Breaking away from tradition 124
- Root and branch reform versus superficial improvement..... 124
- A focus on learning..... 125
- A holistic approach..... 125
- Accountability 125

Final observations: Education for economic success.....126



CHAPTER 5 SINGAPORE: THINKING AHEAD	133
Introduction	134
Singapore's education system: The path to becoming a learning nation	135
▪ The survival-driven phase (1959-1978)	135
▪ Efficiency-driven phase (1979-1996)	135
▪ Ability-based, aspiration-driven phase (1997-present)	136
▪ Current structure	137
Singapore's success in education	137
▪ A forward-looking, integrated planning system	137
▪ Close links between policy implementers, researchers and educators	139
▪ Policies and the means to implement them	139
▪ The advantages of a small scale	139
▪ Commitment to equity and merit	139
▪ A strong focus on mathematics, science and technical skills	140
▪ Human resource management that matches the demands of the system	141
▪ A system that is continuously being improved	143
Lessons from Singapore	143
Preparing Singaporeans for the future	145
▪ Curriculum 2015	145
▪ Teacher preparation for the 21st century	146
Challenges and needs	147
CHAPTER 6 ONTARIO: HARNESSING THE SKILLS OF TOMORROW	153
Introduction	154
Understanding the Canadian system	154
Canadian success factors	155
Ontario: reforming for the future	156
▪ Focusing on a few clear goals	156
▪ Building support among teachers, unions, and other stakeholders	157
▪ Creating the structures for solid implementation	157
▪ Reforming literacy and numeracy in elementary schools	157
▪ Reducing high school dropouts	157
▪ Avoiding top-down mandates and clarifying roles	158
▪ Cultural support for universal high achievement by a diverse population	158
▪ A coherent system based on shared understanding and common purpose	159
▪ A strong focus on educator quality	159
▪ Strong and persistent leadership	159
▪ Enhanced professional accountability	160
Harnessing the skills of tomorrow, in both students and teachers	160
▪ Strategies for developing critical thinking	160
▪ Allowing children to customise their education	161
▪ A focus on big ideas	161
▪ Collaborative inquiry for teachers' professional development	163
▪ An emerging focus on creativity in assessment	163
Lessons from Ontario	164

CHAPTER 7 FINLAND: A NON-COMPETITIVE EDUCATION FOR A COMPETITIVE ECONOMY	169
Introduction.....	170
Finnish education: A brief history.....	170
▪ Inauspicious beginnings: 1917-1970	170
▪ From backwater to watershed: Systemic reform in the 1970s	171
▪ A world-class education system: Finland today.....	172
Five drivers of successful reform.....	173
▪ A focus on equity and well-being	173
▪ Teachers who are highly valued and highly trained.....	174
▪ Smart accountability policies.....	175
▪ A culture of trust	176
▪ Sustainable leadership and political coherence.....	176
Education and national economic competitiveness	177
▪ Specific policies and desired practices for skills in a competitive knowledge economy.....	178
Lessons from Finland.....	181
▪ High-quality teachers.....	181
▪ Highly efficient policies.....	182
▪ Diagnosis and early intervention.....	182
▪ Creativity	182
▪ Deep sectoral reforms.....	183
The challenge ahead	183
CHAPTER 8 POLICY LESSONS FOR KOREA.....	189
Sustaining high performance: Strengths and policy challenges	190
Education is a national priority.....	190
Improving the transition from school to work and the labour-market outcomes of education.....	190
Ensuring the relevance of vocational education and training to the labour market	191
Developing and implementing a curriculum for the 21st Century.....	191
Attracting, supporting and retaining high quality teachers.....	192
Making the most of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for learning	194
Strengthening the use of evaluation and assessment for quality improvement	194
Equity in education for strengthening social cohesion.....	194
More effective policy responses to supplementary education	195
Improving equity and quality in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC).....	196
Involving parents in school and in children's learning.....	196
Conclusion	196