
Update on ILSAs: latest releases and upcoming publications

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Within the last year or so, the new results of four International Large-Scale Assessment (ILSA) programs were released. Let us consider what these programs are, what publications are already available, and what is coming next.

International Large-Scale Assessments in education are not only a reliable instrument to assess the effectiveness of education systems of participating countries, but also a provider of robust indicators and analysis of the situation with a focus for further improvement of various aspects of learning and schooling conditions. The study domains of ILSAs are broad: from the assessment of student learning outcomes and adults' skills to teachers' working conditions. The results of these studies help us indicate the areas where improvements are needed, learn from other education systems facing similar problems, and develop well-informed policies. What is more, due to the cyclic nature of the studies, it is possible to get trend indicators and measure the effects of certain reforms or other interventions. Having participated in different cycles, Kazakhstan has been now participating in all major ILSA's.

For example, OECD's PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment), while providing an international independent assessment of 15-year-old students' knowledge and skills in reading, mathematics, and science in more than 80 countries, explores how well they are prepared for today's society and how equity and equality in education can be ensured. It gathers evidence on, for example, the achievement gaps between rural and urban school students and students of different socio-economic backgrounds, student wellbeing, school resources, and policies. Most of the latest results of PISA, the data for which was gathered in 2018, were made available online on 3 December 2019. Additionally, on May 7, 2020, OECD released its IV volume entitled "Are students smart about the money?" shedding light on students' financial literacy. The remaining volumes – "PISA 2018 Volume V: Effective Policies, Successful Schools" and "PISA 2018 Volume VI: Are Students Ready to Thrive in Global Societies?" – will be published on 9 June 2020 and 22 October 2020, respectively. Other than extensive reports, short PISA-related thematic papers, "PISA in Focus", are published on a monthly basis. A national report with in-depth exploration of Kazakhstani results will be published in the second half of 2020.

Another study that also deals with the assessment of students' knowledge is TIMSS (Trends in Mathematics and Science Study). This study, by assessing 4th and 8th grade students' math and science knowledge along with administering school, parent, student, and teacher questionnaires, provides valuable insights into school policies and practices. An international launch of the results of the latest cycle is scheduled for December 2020.

The international results of a relatively new international study ICILS (International Computer and Information Literacy Study), which assesses 8th grade students' ICT skills, were also released last year in November. A detailed national report will be published in the second half of 2020. The results of the study question the common idea that teenagers are a priori extremely ICT literate. In the same period, the international release of PIAAC's (The Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies) results took place worldwide. The results for Kazakhstan were announced at a briefing in Nur Sultan city by an OECD expert. The results showed that, in Kazakhstan, adults' skills in math and reading are at the same level as adults in Spain and Italy; however, they are below the OECD countries' average. Both international and national reports are available online.

Last but not least, OECD's TALIS (Teaching and Learning International Survey), although it does not directly involve the assessment of skills and knowledge, assesses teaching and learning conditions by empowering teachers and school leaders in 48 countries to have their say in a range of teacher-related issues. It explores such topics as how teacher candidates are attracted to the profession, how they are prepared to teach, what their professional development needs are, what teaching practices employ in the classroom, and to what extent they are satisfied with their working conditions. The first volume of international and national reports was published in 2019. The results showed some strengths (e.g., high coverage and satisfaction with professional development activities), as well as weaknesses (e.g., heavy workload, which significantly exceeded the OECD average; job dissatisfaction in urban areas) in teachers' working conditions. The results significantly differ with regards to gender, age, work experience, and workplace (state and private schools). Differences are particularly evident between teachers in rural and urban areas in terms of workload, satisfaction with working conditions, and prestige of the professions,

with the latter group being less satisfied. The second and final volume of the international report was released in March 2020. It provides further insights into the prestige and standing of the profession, as well as on teacher collaboration and career advancement.

As can be seen, the ILSAs shed light on many aspects of education systems worldwide. With every new cycle, they equip participating countries with reliable, internationally comparable results to be used in assessing situations and defining ways forward. Their role in ensuring high quality education cannot be overestimated.

For further information:

- The official OECD website <http://www.oecd.org/education/> contains all information on OECD studies (PISA, TALIS, PIAAC), international reports and data
- Website for TIMSS and PIRLS <https://timssandpirls.bc.edu/>
- Website of Information Analytical Center contains project information and National reports <http://iac.kz/ru/projects>
- Website of IEA contains all ICILS related materials <https://www.iea.nl/news-events/news/icils-2018-results>
- ILS-gateway website presents collective information on ILSAs <https://ilsa-gateway.org/ilsa-in-education>