



Back to PISA after 2009 poor show

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Highlights

- The Human Resource Development (HRD) Ministry has decided to participate in PISA, an international assessment of student ability, after a gap of almost 10 years .

Origin & purpose

- PISA, short for Program for International Student Assessment, was first administered in 2000.
- A triennial international survey, coordinated by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), it assesses the quality of education systems across the world by evaluating students in science, mathematics and reading.
- The two-hour computer-based test focuses on 15-year-old students as they have either completed or are near the end of their compulsory education in most countries.
- PISA requires the examinees to have finished at least six years of formal schooling.
- About 5.5 lakh students in 72 countries, which together make up nine-tenths of the world economy, took the test in 2015.
- Over the years, PISA results have begun to influence educational practices in many countries.
- However, many non-OECD members continue to stay away from the test.
- All SAARC nations, Greenland, Argentina and the entire African continent, except Algeria and Tunisia, are among those who either don't regularly participate or haven't participated at all in PISA.

India in PISA

- Till date, India has participated only once in PISA.
- The country made its debut in the "extended cycle" of the test for 2009, with 16,000 students from 400 schools in Himachal Pradesh and Tamil Nadu participating.
- The results were encouraging either.
- While China — also a first-timer in 2009 — stormed into the rankings with Shanghai schools topping maths and science, India was placed 72nd among the 74 participating countries.
- The then UPA government blamed "out of context" questions for the poor show and chose not to participate in the 2012 and 2015 cycles.
- Under the NDA government, the HRD Ministry first revisited this decision in 2016.
- The Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan, at the government's behest, set up a committee to review the matter and its report, submitted in December 2016, recommended that the country participate in the 2018 test cycle.
- A similar recommendation was made in 2017 by the group of secretaries on education

constituted by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

- Last month, HRD Minister Prakash Javadekar formally approved the decision to participate in the 2021 cycle of PISA.
- The government will request OECD to administer the test across all schools in Chandigarh in 2021.

The test

- PISA is a competency-based test designed to assess the ability of the 15-year-old candidates to apply their knowledge to real-life situations.
- Unlike most school examinations in India, it does not test a student's memory and curriculum-based knowledge.
- PISA's science test, for example, measures three competencies — the ability to explain scientific phenomena, scientific interpretation of data and evidence, and the ability to design and evaluate scientific query.
- Similarly, while reading is commonly understood as basic decoding of information or reading aloud, PISA defines it as an individual's capacity to understand, use and reflect on written information in a range of situations.
- Over the years, Asian education systems have come to dominate the upper rankings.
- The top seven spots for mathematics in the PISA 2015 results were all occupied by Asian countries — Singapore followed by Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan, Japan, China and South Korea. Finland, Estonia, Canada and Ireland are the only non-Asian nations to figure in the top five rankings of any of the three skills tested in PISA — reading, mathematics and science.
- The achievement of Asian countries is even more significant against the backdrop of performance of developed nations such as the United States and the United Kingdom.
- The US has never been in the top 10 in any of the subject categories.
- In 2015, American students ranked 40th in mathematics, 25th in science and 24th in reading.
- The UK, on the other, ranked 15th in science, 21st in reading and 27th in mathematics.

Criticism

- While PISA results have begun influencing education policies in participating countries, academicians have expressed concerns over the impact of such rankings.
- Detractors feel PISA has contributed to an obsession with standardised testing relying heavily on quantitative measures.
- America's 'Race to the Top' programme is often cited as an example in this context as it uses standardised testing for evaluating students, teachers and administrators.
- The triennial survey has also been criticised for shifting focus from long-term and enduring solutions to stop-gap measures.
- The latter, critics claim, are being increasingly adopted by countries to improve their ranking.
- OECD has responded to this criticism saying that there is no evidence to suggest PISA or any other educational comparison has caused a shift to short-term fixes.
- In fact, according to OECD, it has created opportunities for policy-makers and stakeholders to collaborate across borders.