

Reading and Math Skills of 15-year-old Students in Official Language Minority Schools (OLMSs)

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Summary

This report uses 2022 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) data to analyze differences in reading and math skills among 15-year-old students attending official language minority schools (OLMSs) and those attending official language majority schools. Furthermore, it examines which students, parents, teachers or school characteristics help explain the skill gaps.

OLMSs are defined as schools that have English as the language of instruction in Quebec and French as the language of instruction outside of Quebec. By means of this definition, an OLMS is also located in an Official Language Minority Community (OLMC). It is important to note, that non-OLMSs can also be located within an OLMC, however this nuance cannot be disentangled in the data.

Skill gaps between minority and majority schools are defined as the differences in performance in reading and math on the PISA assessment. Performance is measured by student's average scores, but it can also be ranked in six different proficiency levels. Students who reach a level below 2 are low performers.

Which Factors Help Explain Skill Gaps in Reading in OLMSs outside of Quebec?

The average reading score in minority schools is 63 points lower than in majority schools. Five characteristics of minority schools help explain part of this gap:

- **more students work** at least one day per week (explaining 7 points of the gap)
- larger shares of non-immigrant students who **speak a different language at home than the language of instruction at school** (5 points of the gap)
- lower proportions of **second-generation immigrant students** who speak the same language at home than the language of instruction at school (2 points of the gap)
- more students attending **rural schools** (2 points of the gap)
- more students having **parents who show low levels of interest** in their children school lives (1 point of the gap).

Most of the same characteristics identified for the reading skill gap help explain in part why minority schools have twice as much low performers (36% are low performers) compared to

majority schools. The same five characteristics, along with an additional one, also help explain reading differences at the provincial level.

Which Factors Help Explain Skill Gaps in Math in OLMS outside of Quebec?

The average math score in minority schools outside of Quebec is 17 points lower than in majority schools. This gap is explained by three factors: **students working** (4 points), **low parental interest** (1 point) and by **second-generation immigrant students** who speak the same language at home as the language of instruction at school (1 point). After taking characteristics into account, no statistically significant differences in math performance persist between students in French minority and English majority schools.

Which Factors Help Explain Skill Gaps in Math in OLMS in Quebec?

It's worth noting first, that there is no reading skill gap in Quebec. However, the average math score in minority schools is 15 points lower than in majority schools. Two factors help explain this difference. First, more students attend **public schools** in the minority education system (4 points of the gap). Second, minority schools have higher proportions of non-immigrant **students who speak a different language at home** than the language of instruction at school (2 points of the gap).

Overall, the results of this study provide insights that may be used when supporting minority language populations and communities. It is also acknowledged that other factors (not available in PISA data) may explain remaining gaps in reading or math, such as funding disparities between minority and majority schools or teachers' proficiency in the minority language.