

THE ROLE OF PISA IN DEVELOPING NATIONAL READING LITERACY POLICY: TWO DECADES OF RESEARCH INSIGHTS FROM SLOVENIA

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AIM

- To explicate the role of PISA in education policy-making in the field of reading literacy in Slovenia in the last two decades.

RESEARCH QUESTION

- Whether and how PISA has been used in national political and policy discourses in Slovenia in the last two decades?

METHODOLOGY

- A review of scientific discussions on the use of international large scale assessments (ILSA) data in national education policy making;
- A review of the PISA results;
- A review of the main national education policy documents;
- A review of media reporting on PISA results;
- Survey on perceptions of different national actors (policy-makers, experts, practitioners) about the role of ILSA in national education policy making in two-time points (2012, 2021).

SLOVENIA AND ITS FEATURES IMPORTANT FOR UNDERSTANDING THE RECEPTION OF THE PISA RESULTS

- **Small education system**
- Selection of policy measures
- Limited institutional capacity

- **Post-socialist state**
- Openness towards the Western model of policy-making
- Weak tradition of evidence-based policy-making

- **One of seven EU successful PISA stories**
- European Commission (2022)

- **Research gap on examining PISA influence on the national education system**



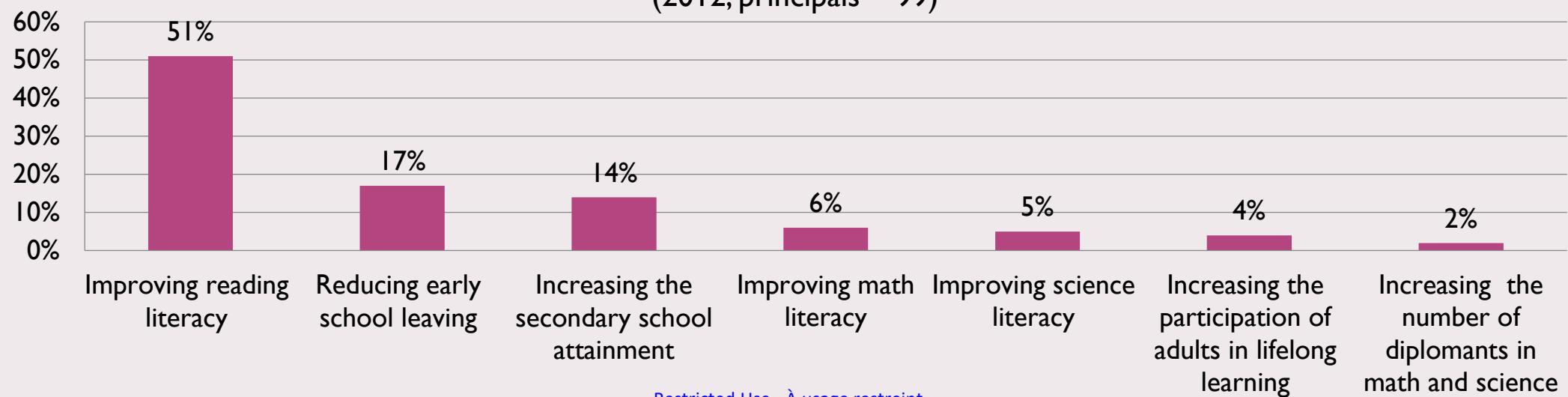
THE FOCUS ON READING LITERACY

- A high policy and political visibility

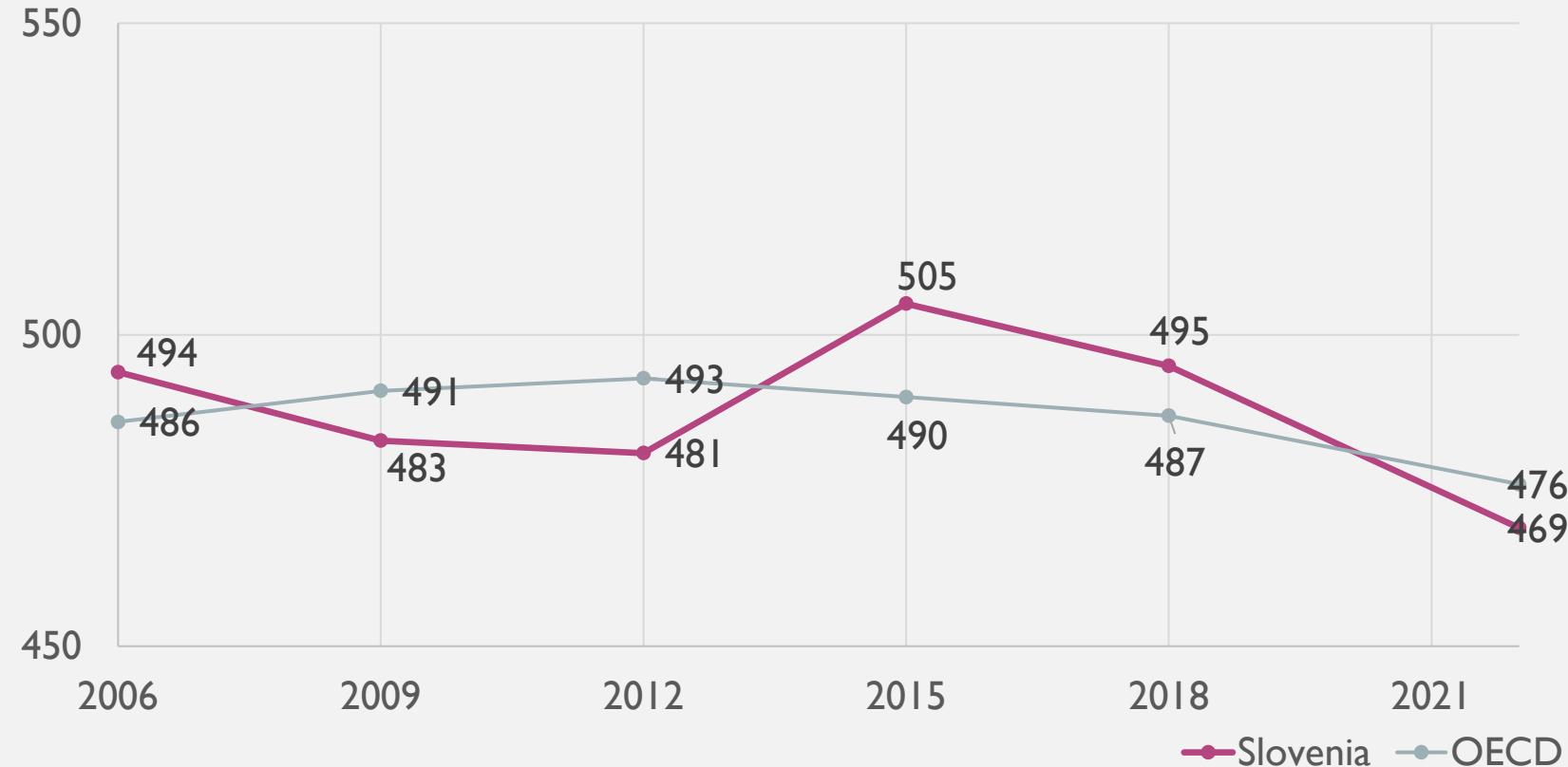
Reading literacy and reading culture are the basis for developing other specific literacies (Interview PM, 2021).

By fostering an environment conducive to effective reading literacy development, Slovenia can better position itself to drive economic growth, implement sustainable development initiatives, and enhance social cohesion (MoE, 2024).

Which of the EU benchmarks in E&T 2020 attract the most attention in Slovenia?
(2012, principals = 99)



TRENDS IN SLOVENIA'S PISA READING LITERACY RESULTS



1991 Independence
1996 White Paper
Curricula Reform
2004 EU

2010 OECD
2011 White Paper
Curricula Reform

2024 National Programme
Curricula Reform

PISA RESULTS AS LEGITIMATION OF CERTAIN POLICY

Year	Policy Document	Legitimation
2013	Resolution on the National Programme for Language Policy 2014-2018	The Action Plan for Language Education builds upon findings from prior research on reading literacy (PISA).
2019	National Strategy for Reading Literacy Development 2019-2030	The creation and updating of this strategy is also justified by the results of PIRLS, PISA, PIAAC surveys. The achievement of Slovenian pupils in the area of reading literacy have improved significantly, but the proportion of higher levels of reading literacy among Slovenian primary school pupils has not improved ,
2021	Resolution on the National Programme for Language Policy 2021-2025	Considering the significant improvement in PISA (2015, 2018) results, it appears prudent to sustain and further develop the recent direction and initiatives of language policy in education.
2023	National Education Programme 2030 – Draft	The declining trends in PISA reading literacy results highlight the need for the education system to accept effective policy measures aimed at reversing these trends .



The PISA results have been consistently used for legitimation of certain policies and acceptance of certain policy measures.

PISA RESULTS AS A NATIONAL POLICY GOAL

Year	Policy Document	Goal
1996	White Paper on Education	In Slovenia, a key objective of the reformed education system is to ensure that students attain knowledge standards at the end of primary school that are internationally comparable .
2011	White Paper on Education	At the national level, we must establish a clear pathway toward the goal of placing Slovenian students among the top performers globally in terms of demonstrated knowledge, aiming for achievement levels at least within the top third among students in developed countries .
2017	Slovenian Development Strategy 2030	PISA as one of six key goals of high quality of life for all. Maintain ranking in top quartile of EU countries in Mathematics, Reading and Science.
2023	National Strategy for Reading Literacy Development 2019-2030	Level of reading literacy at the end of primary school: - at least 90% of pupils reach at least the basic level of reading literacy; - at least 10% of pupils should reach the highest level of reading literacy.



The PISA results have consistently been used as a national political/policy goal.

PROJECTS FOR IMPROVING READING LITERACY OF SLOVENIAN STUDENTS

Year	Project	Schools Involved	Funds
2008	Enhancing Reading Literacy: Diagnostic Tools for Assessment and the Development of a Comprehensive Reading Literacy Model	/	0,153 mio
2009 - 2010	I read and create: I learn.	10 primary	/
2011 - 2013	Empowering students through enhanced reading literacy and improved access to knowledge.	43 primary	/
2016 - 2018	Reading Literacy and the development of Slovene language (tuition) (Awareness, Reading, Language, Evaluations, Models) (OBJEM)	14 pre-primary 23 primary 22 secondary	2,38 mio



Court of Audit (2020)

Recommendations for a more integrated approach to reading literacy development including the better transfer of expert findings and best practices into policy.

NATIONAL INITIATIVES TO PROMOTE A READING CULTURE AMONG STUDENTS AND WITHIN SOCIETY



POLICY-RELEVANT PROFESSIONAL AND SCIENTIFIC EVENTS

Year	Meeting
2011	National conference: Reading literacy in Slovenia and Europe
2011	Scientific conference: ILSA and activities for improving reading literacy
2011	Scientific conference: An Analysis of Vocabulary and Syntax in Literacy Assessments
2011 – 2012	14 Regional Discussions and Workshops (1.540 participants) Measures to Improve Reading Literacy in the Classroom
2014	Thematic discussion: Review of work on reading literacy
2024	Teacher conference: Reading literacy at the ISCED I level
Ongoing	Presentation of the PISA results at Expert Councils, professional meetings of principals, public, professional and scientific events
Ongoing	Catalogue of continuing education programmes and training of professionals in education and training

MEDIA RESPONSES

PISA cycle	Media titles
2006	PISA 2006: Behind us are Italy, America, Russia... PISA 2006: Good Results Can Be Even Better
2009	Pupils' reading literacy is getting worse every year Poor, lazy, stupid PISA 2009: Slovenian students lag behind EU peers in reading
2012	Lost Generations
2015	Schoolchildren achieve above average results, but 15% still leave primary school illiterate
2018	Young Slovenians Are Above-Average in Literacy Literacy Survey: Slovenian 15-Year-Olds Outperform Croatians and Austrians
2021	A quarter of 15-year-olds do not achieve basic literacy Concerning: Slovenian Teenagers Showing Declining Results in the PISA Survey



Sensationalized reporting that prioritizes country rankings over meaningful analysis of the results.

SCHOOL PRINCIPALS INSIGHTS ON THE ILSA USE IN THE NATIONAL EDUCATIONAL SPACE

ILSA influence on the Slovenian educational space (2012, n = 102)

The influence of ILSA in the Slovenian educational space is increasing.

ILSA in Slovenia are often used as an argument for politically motivated changes in the field of...

ILSA results have influence on changes in education practices in Slovenia..

ILSA results have influence on changes in education policies in Slovenia..

ILSA are an objective indicator of knowledge of Slovenian students.

I trust in the expertise and neutrality of ILSA..

■ Do not agree at all ■ Do not agree ■ Agree ■ Completely agree

ILSA influence on the Slovenian educational space (2021, n = 172)

The influence of ILSA in the Slovenian educational space is increasing.

ILSA in Slovenia are often used as an argument for politically motivated changes in the field of education.

ILSA results have influence on changes in education practices in Slovenia.

ICAS results have influence on changes in education policies in Slovenia.

ILSA are an objective indicator of knowledge of Slovenian students.

I trust in the expertise and neutrality of ILSA.

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CONCLUSIONS I

- Slovenia was identified as one of the successful PISA stories in the European Union, which was able to improve its performance over time (European Commission, 2022).
- The long-term research insights show that PISA results in Slovenia have not been used for initiating a particular education system reform, but are continuously referred to in education policy documents.
- Softer policy measures (targeted projects for improving the level of reading literacy among students along with organisation of national conferences, regional discussions and workshops with teachers) may considerably contribute to improving students' reading literacy.
- However, long-term coordinated systemic support for such policy measures is needed.

CONCLUSIONS II

- Instead of the classic/purist model, the interactive model of knowledge utilisation in the policy process (Weiss, 1991) is recognised.
- PISA (and other ILSA results) in Slovenia are still more used for external evaluation of the national educational system and less for developing national education policy.
- The new framework for identifying and ensuring quality in the field of education (Coordination and Analytical Centre of quality assurance at the Ministry of Education).



- More systematic scientific research is needed to examine the use of PISA in national education policymaking.