

The Impact of PISA on the Development of Educational Research and Evidence-Based Decision-Making

Abstract

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Feedback is an essential component of regulation processes; collecting data about the outcomes of school learning in its context and utilizing them for the improvement of the system are crucial for the development of education. The Programme for International Assessment (PISA) is the best known initiative of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) designed to fulfill this role. When it was conceived in the late 1990s, the main aims were to create an assessment system for the best developed countries and to provide them with regular system-level feedback.

By learning from previous experiences, PISA overcame the shortcomings of former large-scale assessments (e.g., the early IEA studies) and now it provides decision makers with data that are scientifically sound and relevant for policy. However, the direct impact, the immediate utilization of PISA results, varies broadly from country to country, depending on how expert knowledge is locally available and what the culture of evidence-based decision-making in education is. However, PISA has a great indirect long-term impact on the development of education through advancing educational science and building a knowledge base for further utilization.

This presentation outlines how PISA has influenced educational research and development in the past two decades by integrating the current approaches of several social science disciplines. The impact included the renewed framework-development, the foundation of a new conception of knowledge (literacy, based on the results of cognitive psychology), sophisticated analysis of the socio-economic context of learning (sociology), the role of adequate financing of education and the economic impact of learning (economy). PISA assesses reading, mathematics and science in a unified framework applying a new sampling approach, a new design by varying the major and minor domains, integrating a fourth 'innovative' domain (measuring a new construct in every assessment cycle, e.g., learning strategies, problem solving, collaboration). PISA created a number of new indicators for characterizing equity, equality and equal opportunities to learn (e.g., between-school and within-school differences, resilience).

The presentation discusses not only the achievements but also the limitations of PISA and the recent threats that may endanger its declared mission and scientific foundations, including the growing number (and diversity) of participating countries, the increasing impact of the private sector and politics, the distorting media attention and the current science-denial movement.