# PISA 2018 Results. Volume 6. Are Students Ready to Thrive in an Interconnected World?

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**Introduction**

Volume 6 of PISA 2018 focuses for the first time on the assessment of students' global competences. Countries had the ability to opt into the assessment. Sixty-six countries involved in the PISA 2018 took part in the global competencies assessment and 27 were OECD members. Well over half of the participating countries were non-OECD members. Those OECD members which did not take part included: Belgium, Czech Republic, Japan, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, the US and, (with the exception of Scotland), the UK.

There were two types of Global Competence assessment:  A specific global competence cognitive student test and a global competence module in the main PISA student questionnaire. Students in 27 countries completed both test and questionnaire and students in a further 39 countries completed solely the global competence module in the student questionnaire. In addition, the main PISA questionnaires- Principals, Parents and Teachers (optional questionnaire) included questions on global competence. The questions for teachers focused on professional development, their multicultural and egalitarian beliefs, training, self-efficacy in multi-cultural environments and attitudes towards immigrants.

The objective of the Global Competencies assessment was 'to examine students' ability to consider local, global, and intercultural issues, understand and appreciate different perspectives and world views, interact respectfully with others, and take responsible actions towards sustainability and collective well-being'.

Set out below are the Chapter headings which give a flavour of what is covered PISA 6.

Chapter 1 'Learning to Live Together' defines 'Global Competence.'

Chapter 2 'Examining Local, Global and Intercultural Issues' explores students' awareness of global issues.

Chapter 3 'Understanding and Appreciating the Perspectives and World Views of Others' explores students' ability to understand the perspectives of others and their interest in learning about other cultures.

Chapter 4 'Ability to Engage I Open, Appropriate and Effective Communication Across Cultures' explores the relationship of learnt languages to communication and positive student attitudes intercultural communication.

Chapter 5 'Taking Action for Collective Well-Being and Sustainable Development' analyses the levels of agency students feel they have to affect policies on such issues as collective well-being, sustainable development and climate change.

Chapter 6 'Links between the Knowledge, Skills and Attitudes needed to Thrive in an Interconnected World' explores the relationship between students' performance on the global

competence cognitive assessment and how their attitudes to responding to surrounding circumstances.

Chapter 7 'Education for Living in an Interconnected World' explores the prevalence of learning activities on a country by country basis and by student background.

Chapter 8 'Equity in Providing Learning Opportunities' examines inequalities in access to learning by gender and socio-economic background.

Chapter 9 'Learning to Live in an Interconnected World' contains OECD policy proposals on Global Competence.


**Education International's initial analysis**

PISA 2018 is being published in a record number of volumes. What separates PISA 6 from the previous published volumes is that the data it uses is not only drawn from the core PISA tests and questionnaires but from a unique separate test. The genesis of the Global Competence option was controversial with a number of OECD countries objecting to aspects of it. This controversy is reflected in the number of OECD countries which refused to take part.

A first draft was initially developed by Pearson but was replaced by OECD in-house developed instruments. Within the PISA Governing Board EI supported the concept of the assessments and the removal of Pearson from overall development work.

Probably the most direct and powerful argument that the OECD makes is contained in the OECD Secretary General's Preface. Noting that PISA 2018 had found that only 1 in 10 students in OECD countries could distinguish between fact and opinion he writes that 'the kind of things that are easy to teach are nowadays also easy to digitise and automate'. Describing Artificial Intelligence as 'ethically neutral' he writes that AI as being 'in the hands of those who are not neutral'. 'That is why...(he says)... education in the future is not just about teaching people, but also about helping them develop a reliable compass to navigate an increasingly complex, ambiguous and volatile world... whether AI will destroy or create more jobs will very much depend on whether our imagination, our awareness, and our sense of responsibility will harness technology to shape the world for the better.'

PISA 6 is very different to other PISAs. Correlations are rarely made between the results of the cognitive tests/student survey and the outcomes of the core PISA assessments. Instead it focuses mainly on the outcomes of the global competence findings although it notes that the results of the cognitive test suggest a correlation between high country performance against the core PISA domains and achievements in the cognitive test. As a result, the Volume contains a rich and dense set of findings, some of which need unpacking further and some which appear contradictory.

This can only be an initial evaluation. Member organisations (MOs) and EI itself will need to refer to and critique this volume over time when intervening on teacher policy and the curriculum. Most importantly MOs in the countries that took part could explore the comparative data as it affects them and whether they believe it is valid and worth using in policy development.

The Executive Summary focuses on comparative country performance. Probably the most optimistic findings are that 82% of students agreed with statement; 'I respect people from other cultures as equal human beings' and that '4 in 5 students were in schools whose curriculum covered global issues.' PISA reports a gender divide among students on respect for students from

other cultures with the OECD reporting that there is greater respect from girls than boys. The impact of disadvantage is apparent in the finding that advantaged students show greater respect than disadvantaged students.

It is in the greater detail within the chapters where there are new insights. Set out below are a small number of examples:

o   In data gathered before Covid 19, students' awareness of public health issues such as pandemics ranges between 60% and 90% in the majority of countries. (Page 74)

o   Student self-efficacy (students' self confidence in their abilities) is greater when students discussing different reasons why people become refugees than when making connections between textile prices and working conditions in producing countries. (Page 79)

o   More students are exposed to the global issue of global warming in their school lessons than migration issues and international conflicts (page 82)

o   The figures on page 96 and 99 show a wide country variation in the percentages of students showing an interest in learning about other cultures and people within them.

o   According to the OECD, cognitive adaptability in relation to its test refers to the ability to adapt one's thinking and behaviour to the prevailing cultural environment… and respond to new challenges..(and are) able to handle feelings of culture shock (Page 100) Page 104 shows a wide country variation in students' cognitive adaptability and their resilience to adversity. Similarly, there is a wide country variation in students' attitudes towards migrants (Page 106) and parents quite clearly have a strong influence on those attitudes (Page 109).

o   Page 130 provides the percentages of students who learn multiple foreign languages in schools on a country by country basis.

o   Page 196 describes on a country by country basis the countries the percentages of teachers who need professional development in teaching diverse classes.

o   Page 217 provides the percentages of students in each country who most perceived discrimination at school.

o   Page 219 examines, in an index of the mean, teachers' multi-cultural and egalitarian beliefs drawn from the PISA 2018 optional teachers' survey.


**Commentary**

Chapter 9 is probably one of the most radical statements the OECD has made in its affirmation of what it thinks should be the way forward for schools, teachers and parents. It puts it weight behind 'bridging social capital through which we can share experiences, ideas and innovation and build a shared understanding among groups with diverse experiences and interests thus increasing our radius of trust'. This requires 'deliberate and conscious efforts.' Criticising the 'algorithms behind social media (which sort) us into virtual bubbles of like-minded individuals that amplify our views and leave us insulated from divergent perspectives and which homogenise opinions while polarising our societies,' PISA 6 argues that tomorrow's schools will need to help students think for themselves…join others…and ,with empathy, in work and learning and help students develop a strong sense of right and wrong.'

It recommits the OECD to supporting the UN's Sustainable Development Goals which it describes as a 'robust vision of humanity'.

It is a vision for schools and teachers as communities which powerfully moves the narrative away from those that believe that the Covid 19 epidemic has signalled the end of schools and their replacement by remote learning. The OECD' subsequent proposals point in the right direction particularly in relation to enhancing multi-cultural learning and pluralism on a global basis. Its vision needs to be followed by equally radical proposals.

As the first experimental global survey of students' global competences there may be many aspects which could be criticised methodologically. However, PISA Volume 6 remains the first global research on student understanding and views about the global society we live in and in doing so it sets out social and moral values which, it believes, should positively enhance society well-being. PISA 6 should be seen as a key contribution to a global discussion about how to rebuild societies suffering from the pandemic and the economic and social hardship it has brought. The concept of global competences is an explicit rebuttal to the poisonous populist anti -democratic nationalism which has sprung up in a number of countries. This volume provides a powerful implicit support for the teaching profession' and its organisations' work in creating policies which enhance quality education for all.