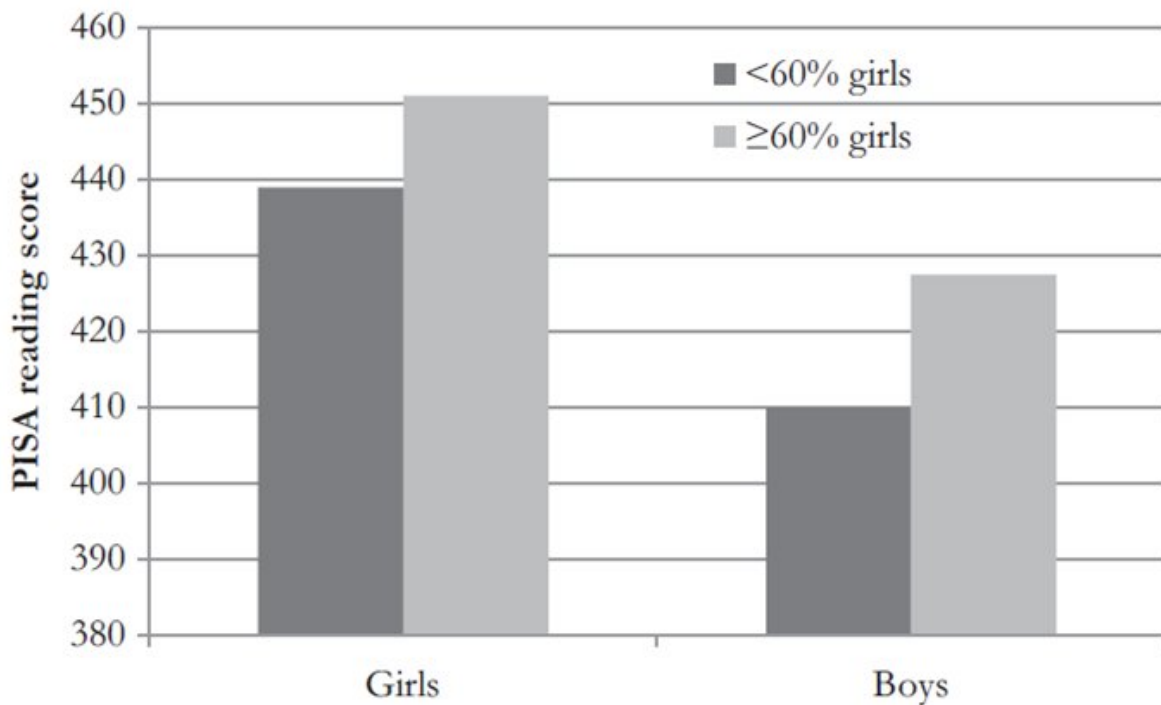


Boys benefit from greater numbers of girls in schools

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This graph shows that boys primarily score better on a reading test if the percentage of girls in their school is above sixty percent. Credit: Radboud University

Boys are more likely to perform well in schools with a higher proportion of girls. This is shown in a new study by sociologists from Radboud University, which was published in School Effectiveness and School

Improvement. The study shows the importance of gender distribution in schools.

Sociologists investigated how the school environment influenced [boys'](#) and [girls'](#) educational performance in secondary schools. Studying the reading test scores of more than 200,000 15-year-olds from over 8,000 mixed-sex schools around the world, researchers discovered that boys' performance was significantly better in schools where more than 60% of the pupils were girls.

Why do boys specifically profit from a higher percentage of girls in their school? The authors point to the implication of the current study: the higher the number of girls in the school, the more productive the learning environment. Since boys have previously been shown to be more heavily influenced by the school learning environment, they are therefore more likely to benefit from having higher numbers of girls in their school. "A possible explanation for the positive influence of girls is that certain characteristics, such as higher levels of concentration and motivation to perform well, are more commonly associated with girls' academic behaviour," says Margriet van Hek.

Van Hek: "Boys' poorer reading performance really is a major, but unfortunately also understudied, problem. Our study shows that schools can help improve this situation by ensuring a balanced gender distribution in their student population." Not only schools can improve this situation, policymakers could also contribute. Professor of Sociology Gerbert Kraaykamp: "It might be interesting for policymakers to consider introducing measures which encourage more equal gender distribution in schools. Especially options to counteract vocational education, where subjects are often heavily weighted towards a particular [gender](#). However, we call for further research to establish how far the [school](#)-level discrepancies are replicated within the classroom."

More information: Margriet van Hek et al. Do schools affect girls' and boys' reading performance differently? A multilevel study on the gendered effects of school resources and school practices, *School Effectiveness and School Improvement* (2017). DOI: [10.1080/09243453.2017.1382540](https://doi.org/10.1080/09243453.2017.1382540)

Provided by Radboud University

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