RUSSIA LEADS IN LITERACY STUDY

BOSTON (Reuters) - Ten-year-olds in Russia, China's Hong Kong and Singapore show the greatest reading ability among their peers, according to a global literacy study released on Wednesday.

The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study, conducted by Boston College, assessed 215,000 fourth-graders' ability to read both literary and informational texts.

Russia topped the 2006 PIRLS study, followed by Hong Kong and Singapore and researchers said students' reading ability in those places had improved dramatically since the last study period in 2001.

Rounding out the top 10 were Luxembourg, Italy, Hungary, Sweden, Germany, Netherlands and Flemish-speaking parts of Belgium.

The United States ranked 14th, followed by England at 15th.

The worst performances came from South Africa, Morocco, Kuwait, Qatar, Indonesia, Iran, Trinidad and Tobago, Macedonia, Georgia and Romania.

"Most of the highest-achieving countries in 2006 showed significant improvement since 2001," Ina Mullis and Michael Martin, directors of the Boston College research center that conducted the survey, said in a statement.

The study found that girls on average showed higher reading ability than boys, and that only half of students polled enjoyed reading, with few reading for fun.

Some 40 countries were involved in the 2006 study while the 2001 survey looked at reading performance in 26 countries, making ranks from five years ago not directly comparable.

The study considered students in Hong Kong, a special administrative region of China, but not China as a whole.