

Year 4 cohort

The numeracy, reading, and writing performance of year four students.

Introduction to the 2021 year 4 cohort

Year four students who participated in PILNA 2021 have had different schooling experiences from previous PILNA cohorts. Formal learning in Pacific countries has been significantly disrupted since 2019, when the Covid-19 pandemic resulted in periodic school closures throughout the region. Further learning disruptions were caused by health-related events and natural disasters, such as the measles outbreak in Samoa and the Hunga Tonga-Hunga Ha'apai volcanic eruption.

These events may have had wider impacts on school-age children, such as changes to their mental health, community commitments, and their access to education, although further research is needed to validate any wider effects of these events.

What is relatively unique for this 2021-year four cohort compared to the 2021-year six cohort is that the events between 2019 and 2021 cover a greater proportion of their formal schooling to date. Most of their formal schooling years have been subject to periodic education disruptions.

PILNA 2021 is the first large-scale regional assessment to show the consequences of these disruptions. It has collected the information necessary to link them to student performance and analysis of this information will be undertaken in the near future and provided alongside the PILNA 2021 results when available.

Conclusions for year 4

Year four students in Cook Islands performed worse in numeracy and reading than in 2018; performance in writing was slightly higher than in 2018, but still lower than in 2015. Average scores in numeracy and reading were also lower than any other PILNA cycle. Interestingly, average scores in reading (458) and writing (492) were higher than these scores across the region, but the average numeracy score (462) was lower than in the region (numeracy, 479; reading, 444; writing, 484). Year four students are performing better than the region in reading and writing but not as well as the region in numeracy.

Also, only about half of year four students are meeting the minimum expected proficiency standards in numeracy and reading; 58% of students were at or above the minimum expected proficiency levels in numeracy and 50% were at or above the minimum expected proficiency levels in reading. The minimum expected proficiency levels for writing have not yet been established but writing performance increased slightly compared with 2018. Many students are not performing to the minimum expected standards.

In year four, girls tended to score higher than boys in numeracy (girls, 474; boys, 452), reading (girls, 490; boys, 431) and writing (girls, 503; boys, 482). Also, more girls were meeting minimum expected proficiency levels than boys in numeracy (girls, 64%; boys, 53%) and reading (girls, 59%; boys, 43%).

Year four students in non-government schools tended to score higher in numeracy (government, 457; non-government, 472) and reading (government, 453; non-government, 470) than students in government schools. There was a small difference in the writing scores of students in government and non-government schools, with students in government schools scoring slightly higher (government, 495; non-government, 485).

Year four students in urban schools tended to score higher in numeracy (urban, 469; non-urban, 433) and reading (urban, 469; non-urban, 414) than did students in non-urban schools. There were no differences in the writing scores of students in urban and non-urban schools (urban, 494; non-urban, 486).

Experiential and environmental data, as outlined in the contextual sections, may provide some insights into the reasons for these performance trends.