Year 6 cohort

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

Introduction to the 2021 year six cohort

Year six students who participated in PILNA 2021 have had different schooling experiences from previous PILNA cohorts. Formal learning in the Pacific region 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 also had wider impacts on school-age children, such as changes to their mental health, community commitments, or their access to education, although further research is needed to validate any wider impacts of these events.

The 2021-year six cohort of students have had a smaller proportion of their total school years affected by these learning disruptions than the 2021 year four students, who may have been more affected by them. The effects of learning disruptions on students with more years of formal schooling compared with the effects on students with fewer years of formal schooling have not, however, been well established. Future research and analysis are needed in this area.

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

Conclusions for year six

Year six students in Cook Islands are performing well in numeracy and reading compared with PILNA 2018. They scored higher in numeracy and reading than did students in the PILNA 2018 cycle. The average scores in these areas were higher than any other PILNA cycle. The average writing performance has, however, decreased. For year six students, it is lower than all other PILNA cycles. The average scores in numeracy (541) and reading (557) were higher than the scores for the region, although the average writing score (504) was about the same as in the region (numeracy, 531; reading, 492; writing, 507). Across the PILNA subjects, year six students are performing similarly or better than the region, although decreases in writing performance are worrying.

Most year six students are also meeting minimum expected proficiency standards in numeracy and reading. 75% of students were at or above minimum expected proficiency levels in numeracy and 82% were at or above minimum expected proficiency levels in reading. Minimum expected proficiency levels for writing have not yet been established but, as noted above, writing performance is decreasing.

In year six, girls tended to score higher than boys in numeracy (girls, 549; boys, 534) reading (girls, 582; boys, 537) and writing (girls, 516; boys, 494). Also, more girls were meeting minimum expected proficiency levels than boys in numeracy (girls, 82%; boys, 70%) and reading (girls, 90%; boys, 76%).

Year six students in non-government schools tended to score higher in reading (government, 554; non-government, 567) and writing (government, 499; non-government, 517) than did students in government schools. There were no differences in the overall numeracy scores of students in government and non-government schools (government, 542; non-government, 539). There were also no differences in scores for most numeracy strands, although students from government schools did score slightly higher in the measurement and geometry strand.

Year six students in urban schools tended to score higher in numeracy (urban, 550; non-urban, 509) reading (urban, 571; non-urban, 510) and writing (urban, 512; non-urban, 476) than did students in non-urban schools.

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