Attitudes

Attitudes to school and to certain subjects can shape students' interactions as they progress through their education. For this reason, it was important to collect information about students' attitudes to learning. The PILNA programme took an approach that incorporated students' opinions to school overall and to each of the three cognitive domains covered by PILNA: reading, writing and numeracy.

Students were provided with a list of statements for each (such as "I enjoy going to school") and asked to rate how much they agreed with each statement. Students could respond with 'Agree a lot', 'Agree', 'Disagree', or 'Disagree a lot'. The statements covered:

- whether students enjoyed the activity;
- whether students did the activity in their own time;
- whether students thought it was important to be good at the activity;
- whether students found the activity easy; and
- whether students thought they did well in the activity.

Additionally, students were asked whether they thought it was important to go to school, if they felt safe at school, and if they felt like they belonged at school.

Student attitude to subjects and school

Most students in the region, both grade five and grade seven, reported agreement with all the attitude statements ('Agree a lot' or 'Agree') about the cognitive domains and school. This shows overall positive attitudes to reading, writing, mathematics and school.

On average, 90% of students in Federated States of Micronesia reported that they enjoyed going to school (grade five, 89%; grade seven, 91%) and felt that it was important to do so (grade five, 92%; grade seven, 93%). Additionally, more than four out of five students reported that they felt safe at school (grade five, 85%; grade seven, 84%) and safe travelling to school (grade five, 80%; grade seven, 84%). Most grade five and grade seven students in Federated States of Micronesia enjoy schooling, value schooling, and feel safe at school and travelling to school.

When it came to literacy, about four out of five students reported that they enjoyed reading (grade five, 86%; grade seven, 82%) and writing (grade five, 85%; grade seven, 82%). Three out of four students reported that they found reading easy (grade five, 72%; grade seven, 75%) and found writing easy (grade five, 75%; grade seven, 75%). Similar levels of agreement were seen between grade five and grade seven students on all questions related to reading and writing.

There was, however, a noticeable difference in agreement for questions related to mathematics. At the grade five level, agreement with statements was similar to those for reading and writing; 70% of grade five students agreed that they found

mathematics easy and 71% agreed that they did well in mathematics. At the grade seven level, however, there was a noticeable drop in students agreeing with the statements. Only 62% of students agreed that they found mathematics easy and 64% agreed that they did well in mathematics. These values are lower than the results for reading and writing at the grade seven level.

Interestingly, students at both year levels still agreed, in similar proportions to reading and writing, that mathematics was important (grade five, 85%; grade seven, 89%) and that they enjoyed mathematics (grade five, 83%; grade seven, 76%). The exception was that slightly fewer grade seven students reported enjoying mathematics compared to reading and writing (mathematics, 76%; reading, 82%; writing, 82%).

The full breakdown of these results can be seen in Table STT1.7.

Table STT1.7

Percentage of students agreeing with statements reading, writing, mathematics and school

Statement	Grade 5	Grade 7
Reading		
Enjoy reading	86% (1.9)	82% (2.4)
Read in my own time	80% (2.4)	81% (2.7)
Think it is important to be a good reader	86% (1.3)	88% (1.5)
Find reading easy	72% (2.8)	75% (3.0)
Do well in reading	74% (2.7)	70% (3.1)
Writing		
Enjoy writing	85% (2.0)	82% (2.2)
Do writing in my own time	80% (2.5)	80% (2.4)
Think it is important to be a good writer	83% (1.9)	89% (2.1)
Find writing easy	75% (2.8)	75% (3.3)
Do well in writing	72% (3.1)	70% (3.2)
Mathematics		
Enjoy doing mathematics	83% (1.5)	76% (2.4)
Do mathematics in my own time	77% (1.6)	70% (3.2)
Think it is important to be good at mathematics	85% (1.3)	89% (1.1)
Find mathematics easy	70% (2.4)	62% (37)
Do well in mathematics	71% (2.5)	64% (3.8)
School		
Enjoy going to school	89% (1.2)	91% (2.2)
Think it is important to go to school	92% (1.4)	93% (2.1)
Think it is important to do well in school	89% (1.6)	91% (2.2)
Find school easy	76% (1.9)	72% (3.1)
Feel like I belong at this school	85% (1.4)	83% (2.7)
Feel safe at the school	85% (1.5)	84% (2.3)
Feel safe travelling to school	80% (1.9)	84% (2.1)

Source: https://pilna.eqap.spc.int/2021/federated-state-of-micronesia/get-to-know/students/student-self-reflection/attitudes
Jan 14, 2024, 10:45

( ) Standard errors appear in parentheses.

Using the results above, regional scales for student attitudes on school, reading, writing, and numeracy were established. Higher scores on the scales indicated more positive attitudes. The scales were then compared to student performance in reading and numeracy. It should be noted that comparisons were not made to writing performance because the proficiency scale for writing performance has not yet been established.

> The PILNA scales for attitudes to school, reading, writing, and numeracy all have an average of 200 and a standard deviation of 40. Most scores on these scales are expected to be within 40 points of 200 (160–240). The attitudes to reading, writing, and numeracy scales were all formed from the five questions students were asked in each area. The attitude to school scale was formed from the answers to seven questions students were asked in this area.

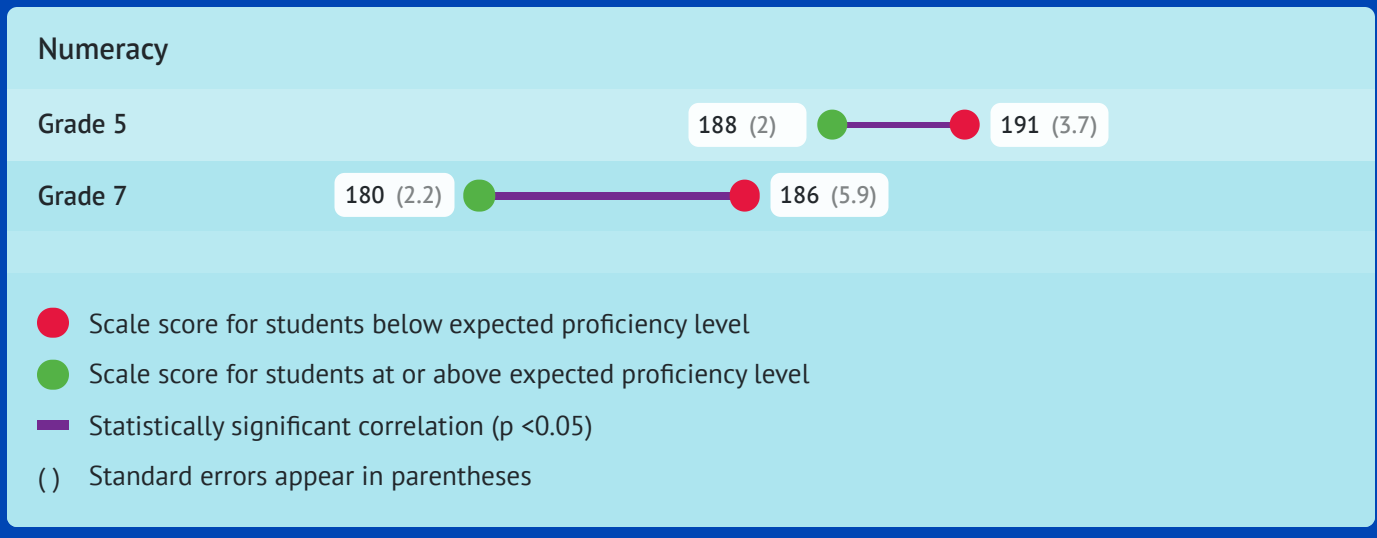
Comparisons to student performance were made between the average attitudes of students who were at or above expected levels of performance and students who were below these levels of performance.

The analysis showed that, across both grade levels, students who performed at or above the expected proficiency level in reading scored higher on the attitude scales for both reading and school. This means that they tended to have more positive attitudes to reading and school. Grade seven students who performed at or above the expected proficiency level in reading also scored higher on the attitude scale for schools, but the same association was not seen for grade five students.

No associations were found when comparing students' attitudes to mathematics against their performance in numeracy. For both grade levels, no significant difference was noted between students' attitude to mathematics and to numeracy achievement. These results are presented in Figure STF1.3.

Figure STF1.3: PILNA Attitude towards numeracy support scale

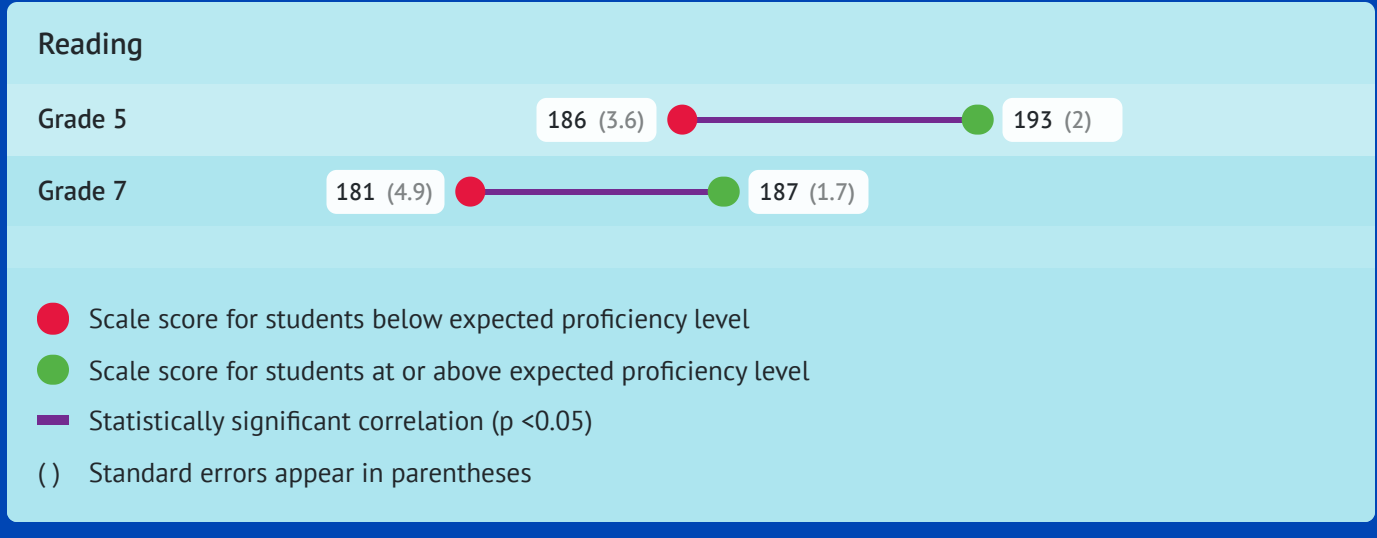
Average scores of students on attitude towards numeracy scale by year level and proficiency



Grade five and grade seven students who performed at or above the expected level in reading had higher attitude scores on average (Grade five, 193; Grade seven, 187) than students in the same year groups who did not meet expected reading performance (Grade five, 186; Grade seven, 181). These comparisons are shown in Figure STF1.4.

Figure STF1.4: PILNA Attitude towards reading support scale

Average scores of students on attitude towards reading scale by year level and proficiency



Comparisons were also made between student performance and attitudes to school in general. Across both grade five and grade seven levels, students who were performing at or above the expected level for reading had higher attitude scores to

school in general. While this was observed for both grade levels for reading, it was observed only at grade seven for numeracy. Grade seven students who were performing at or above the expected level for numeracy had higher attitude scores to school in general, but no significant difference was noted for grade five. Figure STF1.5 shows these comparisons.

Figure STF1.5: PILNA Attitude towards the school support scale

Average scores of students on attitude towards school scale by year level and proficiency

What does this mean?

The findings from this PILNA cycle show that a high proportion of students in Federated States of Micronesia in both year levels are enjoying reading, writing, and mathematics and identify them as being important. However, when it comes to ratings about finding each subject easy or rating themselves as doing well in each subject, one area falls behind: numeracy. Numeracy ratings in these areas for grade seven students were noticeably lower than for reading and writing. This may mean that, while students are still enjoying mathematics at these year levels, a larger proportion are challenged by the subject than are challenged by reading and writing. This may be an area that requires more attention by educators.

When comparing student attitude scores to performance, one thing was clear; students who met the expected performance in a subject area had higher attitude scores for school. This suggests an association between student attitudes to school and their performance in that subject. Importantly, this association is not clear and causality cannot be determined. For example, do positive attitudes to reading make someone more likely to be a better reader or is it those who are already good at reading who develop positive attitudes to reading because it is easier for them?