

Language

Language is the one of the most important tools we use to learn. While English is a common language of instruction in Pacific schools, there are hundreds of Pacific languages and the language students use at home is not always the language they use at school. Similarly, the language that students took the PILNA assessments in may not have been the language most familiar to them.

Taking assessments in a language that is not a student's most familiar language may affect their performance. This is important to consider, as the PILNA assessments aim to assess student performance independently from any one language – literacy and numeracy can be demonstrated using any Pacific language. Therefore, the PILNA programme takes into account the language students used to complete their assessments relative to the languages they are most familiar with.

Students were asked about the language they mostly used to converse with family, friends, teachers, and in other settings. This was recorded alongside the language the student used to sit the PILNA assessments. With this information, a regional scale was formed to describe how much a student used the language they completed the PILNA assessments in.

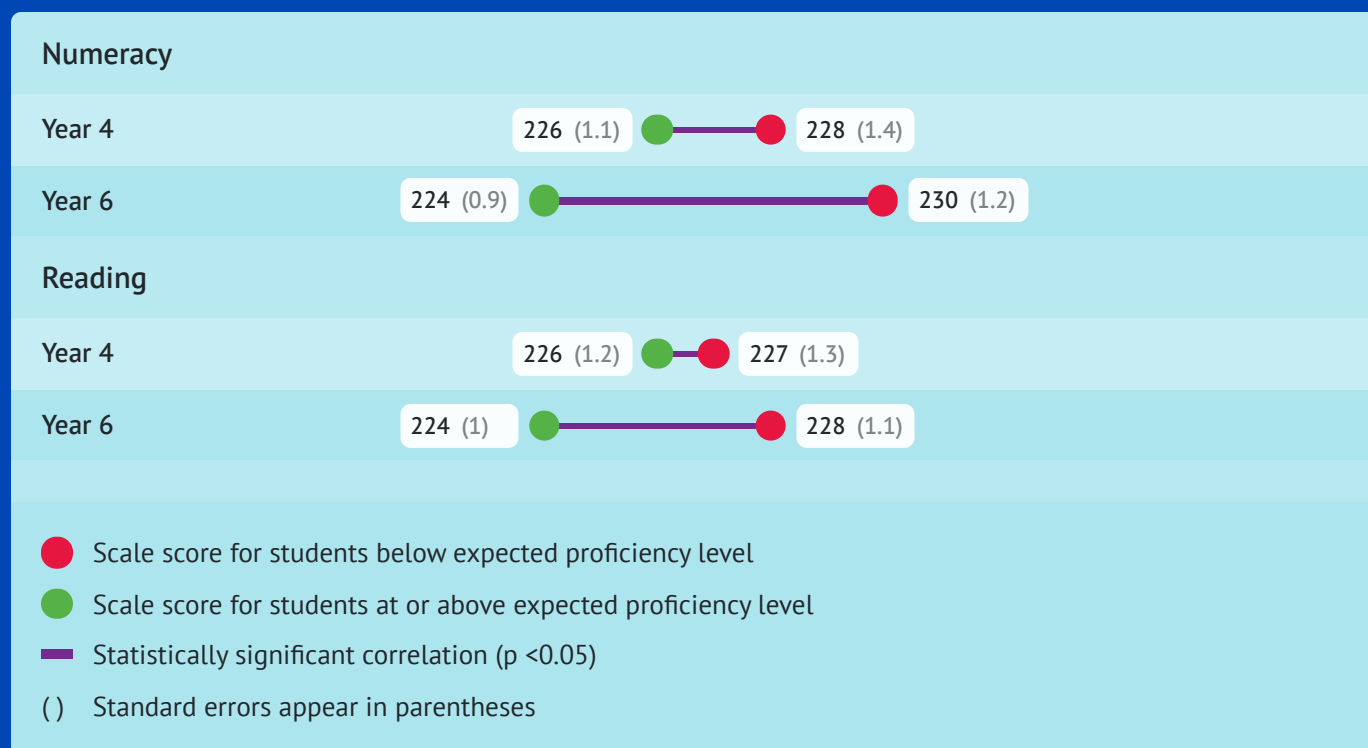
The PILNA language scale has an average of 200 and a standard deviation of 40. Most scores are expected to be within 40 points of 200 (160–240). The scale was formed statistical analysis of six out of ten answers to questions about students' language use.

Higher scores on this language scale indicate that the student uses the language they completed the PILNA assessment with for conversing across a greater range of settings. Lower scores indicate that the student uses the language they completed the PILNA in for conversing across fewer settings.

This scale allowed for comparisons between student performance and the number of settings the students use the language they completed the PILNA assessments in. Figure STF1.1 shows differences in average language scale scores by year level, domain (numeracy and reading), and by meeting or not meeting the expected (benchmarked) performance in each domain for students in Fiji. Note that comparisons to the writing domain are unavailable, as the proficiency scale for writing (benchmarks) has not yet been established.

Figure STF1.1: PILNA LANGUAGE SCALE

Average scores of students on language scale by year level and proficiency



Language and numeracy performance

Associations were found at both year levels between language scale scores and numeracy performance. The differences in language scale scores were small.

Year four students who met the expected level of numeracy performance had slightly higher average language scale scores (228) than did the year four students who did not meet the expected level of numeracy performance (226). It appears that year four students who met the expected level of numeracy performance used the language they completed PILNA in more commonly to converse.

Year six students who met the expected level of numeracy performance had slightly higher average language scale scores (230) than year six students who did not meet the expected level of numeracy performance (224). It appears that year six students who met the expected level of numeracy performance used the language they completed PILNA in more commonly to converse.

Language and reading performance

For language scores by reading performance, an association was found only at the year six level. The differences in language scale scores were, however, small. Year six students who met the expected level of reading performance had slightly higher average language scores (228) than year six students who did not meet the expected level (224).

For year six students, those who met the expected levels of performance in reading used the language they completed PILNA in to converse in more settings than those who did not meet the expected levels of performance.

What does this mean?

Students, both year four and year six, who performed better in numeracy tended to use the language they were assessed with in more settings. Differences in scale scores were, however, small. This suggests that using a language in everyday conversation may slightly support students' numeracy ability.

Interestingly, only one association – for year six students – was found between reading proficiency and language scale scores. This is different from the regional findings, where associations were noted at both the year four and year six levels. It may be that reading performance is only supported by using a language in more settings at the higher years of schooling in Fiji, but this is unintuitive.