

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.

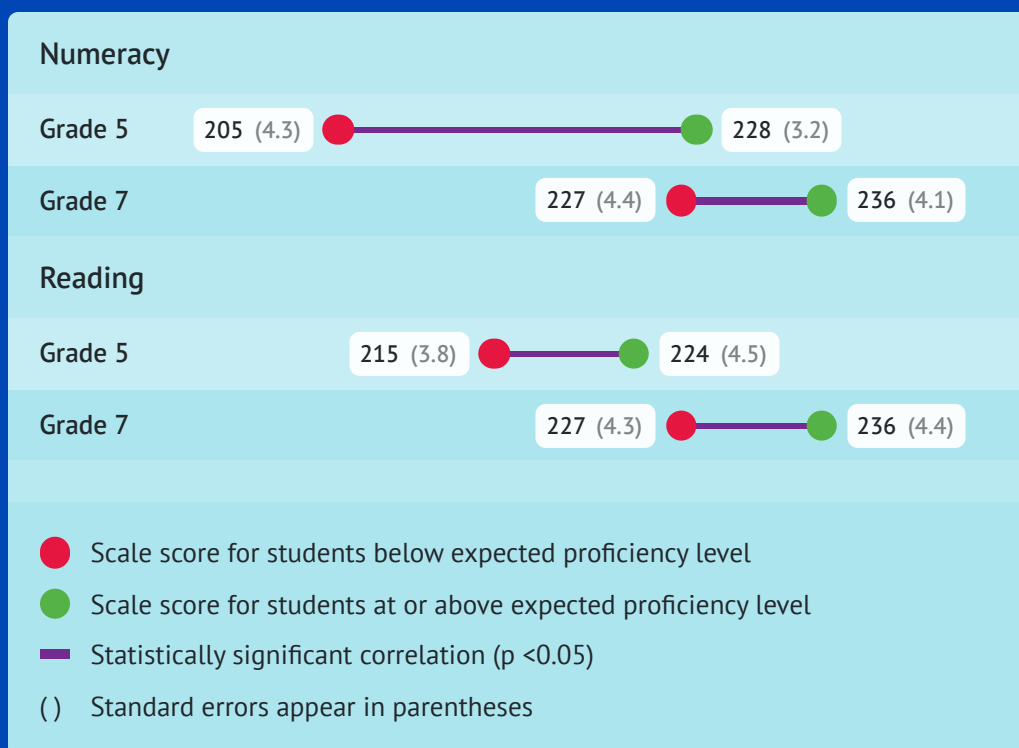
The PILNA language scale has an average of 200 and a standard deviation of 40. Most scores are expected to be within 40 points of 200 (160–240). The scale was formed statistical analysis of six out of ten answers to questions about students' language use.

Higher scores on this language scale indicate that the student uses the language that 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 expected (benchmarked) performance in each domain for students in Marshall Islands. 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

PILNA Language Scale



Language and numeracy performance

When looking at language scale scores by numeracy performance, the results are consistent between year levels. Grade five and grade seven students who performed at or above the expected level of numeracy proficiency had higher average language scores than those who performed below the expected level.

Grade five students who met the expected level of numeracy performance had higher average language scale scores (228) than grade five students who did not meet the expected level (205). Grade seven students who met the expected level of numeracy performance had higher average language scale scores (236) than grade seven students who did not meet the expected level (227). It appears that grade five and seven students who met the expected level of numeracy performance used the language they completed PILNA in more commonly to converse.

Regional results observed no difference between the average language scale scores for grade five students who met expected levels of proficiency and students who did not. There was a slight difference, however, in the equivalent of grade five students regionally.

Language and reading performance

For language scores by reading performance, both year levels show similar results. Grade five students who met the expected level of reading performance had higher average language scores (224) than grade five students who did not meet the

expected level (215). Grade seven students who met the expected level of reading performance had higher average language scores (236) than grade seven students who did not (227).

For both grade five and grade seven 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. This aligns with the regional results, which also observed that students who met the expected levels of reading performance used the language they completed PILNA in to converse in more settings.

What does this mean?

Interestingly, but perhaps intuitively, students who performed better in reading tended to use the language they were assessed with in more settings. This suggests that using a language in everyday conversation may improve students' reading ability.

The comparisons for numeracy in Marshall Islands also show this. Students who performed better in numeracy tended to use the language they were assessed with in more settings.