Student 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 (such as "I enjoy going to school") and were 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 attitudes 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, approximately 90% of students in Marshall Islands reported that they enjoyed going to school (grade five, 92%; grade seven, 91%) and felt that it was important to do so (grade five, 89%; grade seven, 91%). Additionally, more than four out of five students reported that they felt safe at school (grade five, 84%; grade seven, 88%) and safe travelling to school (grade five, 86%; grade seven, 86%). Most grade five and grade seven in Marshall Islands enjoy schooling, value schooling, and feel safe at school and travelling to school.

When it came to literacy, just under nine out of ten students reported that they enjoyed reading (grade five, 89%; grade seven, 89%) and writing (grade five, 88%; grade seven, 88%). More than four out of five students reported that they found reading easy (grade five, 83%; grade seven, 85%) and found writing easy (grade five, 84%; grade seven, 86%). 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, 77% of students agreed that they found mathematics easy and 81% agreed that they did well in mathematics. At the grade seven

level, 73% of students agreed that they found mathematics easy and 77% agreed that they did well in mathematics. These values are lower than the results for reading and writing for both year levels.

Interestingly, students at both year levels still agreed, in similar proportions to reading and writing, that mathematics was important (grade five, 84%; grade seven, 87%) and that they enjoyed mathematics (grade five, 84%; grade seven, 80%).

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	89% (1.7)	89% (1.2)
Read in my own time	84% (2.6)	80% (2.0)
Think it is important to be a good reader	86% (2.2)	90% (1.5)
Find reading easy	83% (2.3)	85% (1.9)
Do well in reading	83% (2.6)	84% (1.4)
Writing		
Enjoy writing	88% (1.4)	88% (1.8)
Do writing in my own time	84% (1.9)	77% (2.9)
Think it is important to be a good writer	87% (2.3)	89% (1.3)
Find writing easy	84% (2.7)	86% (1.5)
Do well in writing	86% (1.4)	84% (1.4)
Mathematics		
Enjoy doing mathematics	84% (1.8)	80% (1.5)
Do mathematics in my own time	80% (2.6)	74% (1.5)
Think it is important to be good at mathematics	84% (2.2)	87% (2.1)
Find mathematics easy	77% (3.3)	73% (2.4)
Do well in mathematics	81% (2.6)	77% (2.9)
School		
Enjoy going to school	92% (1.3)	91% (1.6)
Think it is important to go to school	89% (2.0)	91% (1.2)
Think it is important to do well in school	87% (1.7)	91% (1.8)
Find school easy	80% (2.6)	82% (2.6)
Feel like I belong at this school	86% (2.3)	87% (1.3)
Feel safe at the school	84% (2.0)	88% (2.2)
Feel safe travelling to school	86% (1.6)	86% (1.9)

Percentage of students agreeing with statements about reading, writing, mathematics, and school, RMI, PILNA 2021

Source: https://pilna.eqap.spc.int/2021/marshall-islands/get-to-know/students/self-reflections/attitudes
Jan 14, 2024, 08:12

( ) Standard errors appear in parentheses.

Student attitudes and student performance

Using the results above, regional scales for student attitudes to school, reading, writing, and numeracy were established. Higher scores on the scales indicated more positive attitudes to these areas. 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.

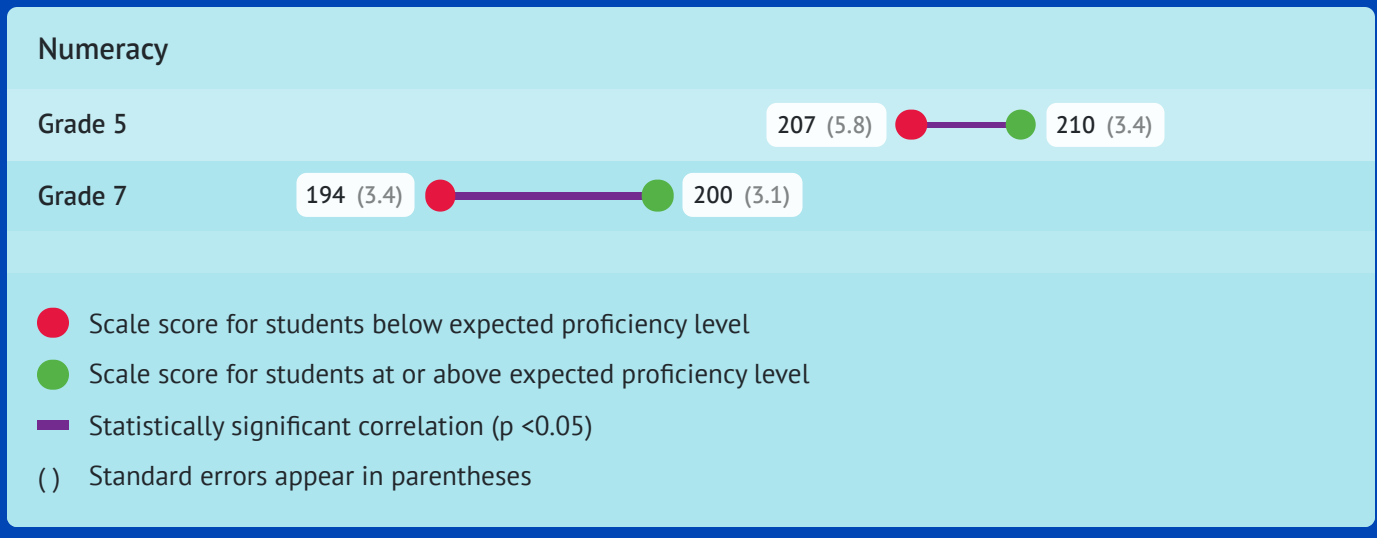
Comparisons to student performance were made between the average attitudes of students who were at or above expected levels of performance and students who were below these levels of performance.

The analysis paints a different picture for each year level. It shows that grade seven students who performed at or above the expected proficiency level in numeracy scored higher on the attitude scales for mathematics. Grade five students who performed at or above the expected level in reading scored higher on the attitude scales for reading. For students in both grade levels, those who performed at or above the expected proficiency level in numeracy and reading scored higher on the attitude scores for school.

Grade seven students who performed at or above the expected level in numeracy had higher attitude scores on average (200) than students in the same year groups who did not meet expected numeracy performance (194). No difference in attitude for grade five students was observed based on numeracy proficiency level. These results are presented in Figure STF1.3.

Figure STF1.3: PILNA Scale: Student attitudes to numeracy

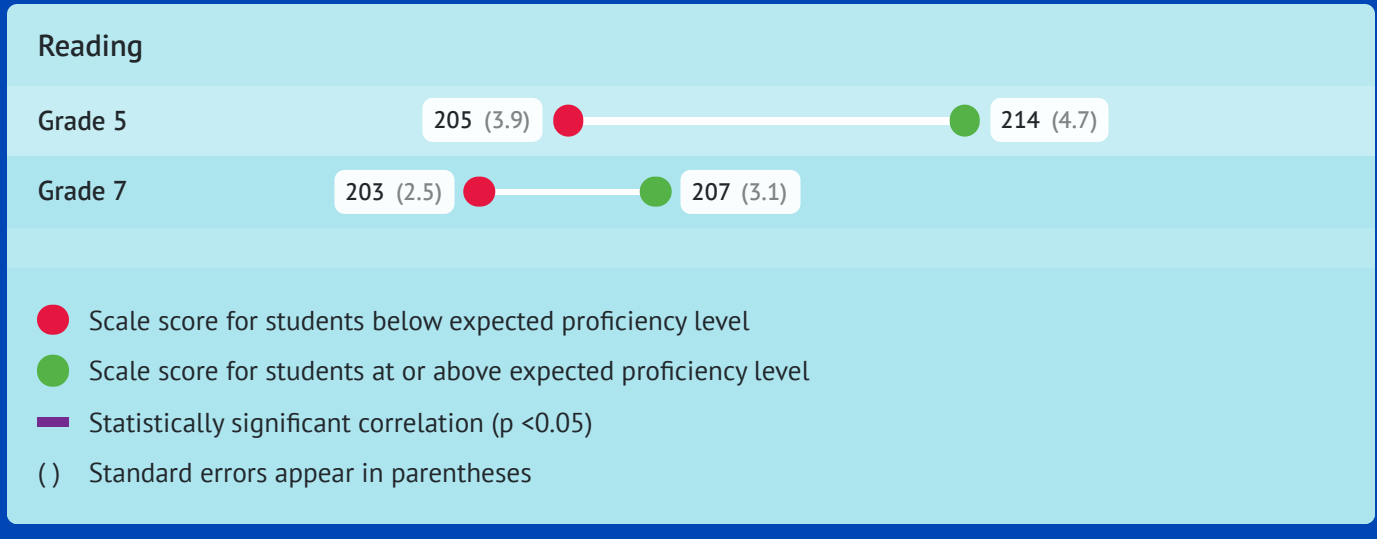
Average scores of students on attitude to mathematics scale by year level and proficiency, RMI, PILNA 2021



The differences in attitudes were greater between the performance levels for reading than for numeracy. Grade five students who performed at or above the expected level in reading had higher attitude scores on average (214) than students in the same year groups who did not meet expected reading performance (205). No significant difference in attitudes for grade seven students was observed based on reading proficiency level. These comparisons are shown in Figure STF1.4.

Figure STF1.4: PILNA Scale: Student attitudes to reading

Average scores of students on attitude towards reading scale by year level and proficiency, RMI, PILNA 2021



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 had higher attitude scores to school. This was true for students performing at expected levels in numeracy and for students performing at expected levels in reading. Figure STF1.5 shows these comparisons.

Figure STF1.5: PILNA Scale: Student attitudes to schooling

Average scores of students on attitude to school scale by year level and proficiency, RMI, PILNA 2021

What does this mean?

The findings from this PILNA cycle show that a high proportion of students in Marshall Islands 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 both year levels 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 to school in general. This suggests an association between student attitudes to school and their performance in that subject. For subjects, the picture is a little less clear, but showed that grade five students at or above the reading proficiency level were more likely to have positive attitudes to reading, and yea six students at or above the numeracy proficiency level were more likely to have positive attitudes to mathematics. 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's easier for them?