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Comparison to student-reported difficulties

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Table TT2.6 contrasts teacher and student responses to four similar items. Note that, while the items explored the same difficulties, they were worded differently and were on different scales. Teachers were asked to assign each issue to a series of five experience buckets, while students were asked to indicate how often they were experiencing the same issues on a four-point scale. The scales, therefore, are different, which complicates comparison. However, they are sufficiently similar to allow exploration of common and divergent perceptions across student and teacher respondents.

Table TT2.6

Percentages of students experiencing particular difficulties as reported by students and identified by teachers

Student-reported difficulties	%	Difference	%	Teacher-observed difficulties
Grade 5				
Concentrating and focusing your attention	 25%		 35%	Difficulty focusing attention and concentrating
Controlling your behaviour	 29%		 31%	Behavioural difficulties
Hungry	 23%		 21%	Hunger
Tired	 30%		 24%	Lack of sleep
Grade 7				
Concentrating and focusing your attention	 23%		 47%	Difficulty focusing attention and concentrating
Controlling your behaviour	 21%		 44%	Behavioural difficulties
Hungry	 19%		 23%	Hunger
Tired	 38%		 21%	Lack of sleep

Percentages of students experiencing particular difficulties as reported by students and identified by teachers, regional averages, RMI, PILNA 2021

() Standard errors appear in parentheses.

On average, teachers and students in Marshall Islands identify similar proportions of students experiencing hunger, but students are far more likely to report tiredness as a difficulty they face. Large differences are seen, however, for the items intended to capture behavioural issues and attention issues that students struggle with. Teachers do report a similar proportion of grade five students having difficulty controlling their behaviour compared to the number of students self-reporting. However, for grade seven students controlling their behaviour, and both grades focusing their attention, teachers reported that their students were experiencing higher rates of these two difficulties than students reported themselves.

What does this mean?

Teachers observed a substantial minority of their students experiencing difficulties in their learning. Of these, teachers identify behavioural and cognitive difficulties as the most common.

Teachers' responses cannot be directly compared to students' responses in similar areas but when looked at together, it is clear that there is a range of behavioural and physiological difficulties experienced by a substantial minority of students. Students identify physiological issues (such as tiredness) as a more common experience than do teachers. However, teachers observe behavioural issues (concentrating, controlling behaviour) more frequently than students report them. It may be that students and teachers have different perspectives on what constitutes behavioural issues, and students may be less likely to recognise their behaviours as problematic. This suggests that behavioural issues, as a whole, are quite common in the student body, and that teachers' assessments of physiological issues are aligned with students' reports of these.