

Students difficulties

The PILNA 2021 student questionnaire collected information about difficulties students experienced beyond well-being. Specifically, the questionnaire asked students to respond to statements about their ability to learn, manage themselves, and navigate their environment. Their responses highlight the learning support needs in the region.

Students were provided with a list of situations and were asked to indicate whether they had any difficulty with them. The situations were framed around physical, cognitive, and behavioural challenges, such as seeing, hearing, managing behaviour and walking. The responses they could give were 'No difficulty', 'A little difficulty', 'A lot of difficulty', or 'I cannot do it at all'.

Proportions of students experiencing challenges

Table STT1.9 lists the challenges to student learning measured by the questionnaire. This table also shows the proportions of grade three and grade five students who reported these as either 'A lot of difficulty' or 'I cannot do this at all'. This allows us to identify the proportion of students on whom these factors posed a severe burden.

Overall, the distribution of students reporting at least 'A lot of difficulty' across the eight items was relatively concentrated in Papua New Guinea. For both grade three students and grade five students, the proportions of students reporting at least 'A lot of difficulty' across the items was between 10% and 24%.

The most frequent difficulty was 'Controlling your behaviour' (grade three, 24%; grade five, 21%). This was followed by 'Concentrating and focusing your attention' (grade three, 21%; grade five, 18%) and 'Learning or remembering things' (grade three, 19%; grade five, 18%). The least reported difficulty was 'Seeing, even if wearing glasses' (grade three, 10%; grade five, 11%).

Table STT1.9

Percentage of students with difficulties

category	Grade 3	Grade 5
Seeing, even if wearing glasses	10% (0.9)	11% (1.3)
Hearing, even if wearing a hearing aid	14% (1.7)	13% (1.3)
Walking or climbing steps	16% (1.7)	15% (1.6)
Being understood by other people when I speak	18% (2.1)	17% (1.5)
Self-care, such as feeding or dressing yourself	17% (1.8)	15% (1.5)
Learning or remembering things	19% (1.9)	18% (1.4)
Controlling your behaviour	24% (1.8)	21% (1.7)
Concentrating and focusing your attention	21% (1.9)	18% (1.7)

Percentage of students with difficulties, PNG, PILNA 2021

() Standard errors appear in parentheses.

These findings can be compared with teachers' responses to a similar set of items (*Student difficulties reported by the teacher*). Not all the items were the same but there are interesting comparisons that can be made for the items about controlling their behaviour, concentrating and focusing their attention.

What does this mean?

A sizeable proportion of students in Papua New Guinea are experiencing quite severe behavioural and cognitive challenges related to learning and school environments in general. One out of five students across both grade three and five are finding it difficult to concentrate and, relatedly, finding it difficult to control their behaviour. Smaller proportions of students are experiencing difficulties with sensory or physical tasks. These findings can inform learning support activities in Papua New Guinea.