

Grade 5 cohort

The numeracy, reading, and writing performance of grade five students.

Introduction to the 2021 grade five cohort

Grade five students who participated in PILNA 2021 have had different schooling experiences from previous PILNA cohorts. Formal learning in the Pacific region has been significantly disrupted since 2019, when the Covid-19 pandemic resulted in periodic school closures throughout the region. Other health-related events and natural disasters, such as the measles outbreak in Samoa and the Hunga Tonga-Hunga Ha'apai volcanic eruption, have created further learning disruptions.

These events may have also had wider impacts on school-age children, such as changes to their mental health, community commitments, or their access to education, although further research is needed to validate any wider impacts of these events.

The 2021 grade five cohort of students have had a smaller proportion of their total school years affected by these learning disruptions than the 2021 grade three students, who may have been more affected by them. The effects of learning disruptions on students with more years of formal schooling compared with fewer years of formal schooling have not, however, been well established. Future research and analysis are needed in this area.

Importantly, PILNA 2021 is the first large-scale regional assessment to show the consequences of these disruptions. It has collected the information necessary to link learning disruptions to student performance. Analysis of this information will be undertaken in the near future and provided alongside the PILNA 2021 results when available.

Conclusions for grade five

Grade five students in Papua New Guinea had mixed performance in the 2021 PILNA subjects compared to PILNA 2018. The 2021 students scored lower in numeracy, higher in reading, and higher in writing than the PILNA 2018 students. Average scores in reading (510) and writing (541) in Papua New Guinea were higher than the scores across the region (reading, 492; writing, 507), but the numeracy score in Papua New Guinea (529) was similar to the regional score (531).

Over three quarters (77%) of grade five students were at or above the minimum expected proficiency standards in numeracy and more than six out of ten (66%) were at or above them in reading. Minimum expected proficiency levels for writing have not yet been established but writing performance is increasing.

In grade five, girls tended to score about the same as boys in numeracy (girls, 529; boys, 530), but slightly higher than boys in reading (girls, 515; boys, 505) and writing (girls, 544; boys, 539). Also, more girls were meeting the minimum expected proficiency level than boys in reading (girls, 69%; boys, 62%), but a similar proportion were meeting the minimum expected proficiency level in numeracy (girls, 77%; boys, 77%).

Grade five students in non-government schools tended to score similarly in numeracy (government, 532; non-government, 526), reading (government, 512; non-government, 507), and writing (government, 542; non-government, 540) when compared to students in government schools.

Grade five students in urban schools tended to score similarly in numeracy (urban, 533; non-urban, 529) and writing (urban, 544; non-urban, 541), and higher in reading (urban, 518; non-urban, 507) when compared to students in non-urban schools.

Experiential and environmental data, as outlined in the contextual sections, may provide some insights into the reasons for these performance trends.