Conclusions for students

- Overall, student attitudes toward school and the three domains assessed in PILNA 2021 were positive.
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- Many students are experiencing challenges to their well-being and many are not frequently experiencing positive attitudes.
- Three areas stood out as more common student learning difficulties: difficulties learning or remembering; difficulty controlling their behaviour; and difficulty concentrating and focusing.
- A range of analyses using the students' contextual data against their cognitive (performance) data were made. These reveal some factors that may be associated with student performance.

A wealth of information on student experiences and circumstances was collected in PILNA 2021, This regional report is an initial presentation of the primary data, and the broad conclusions that can be drawn from it. Additional in-depth analyses are planned, and the Pacific nations which participated will have access to their own data for analysis and reporting.

The areas that were reported on show how students feel towards key aspects of their education; provide insights into student learning difficulties and well-being, and highlight areas for future research.

Overall, student attitudes toward school and the three domains assessed in PILNA 2021 were positive. Most students reported that they enjoyed school and the PILNA subjects (between 84-93%) and acknowledged their importance (about 90%). These findings might reflect generally positive learning environments throughout the Pacific, but the causes and consequences of student attitudes in these areas are unknown.

Most students were also confident in the PILNA subjects, although confidence in mathematics was an outlier. Students enjoy mathematics and rated its importance highly – in keeping with their ratings of reading and writing – but the proportion of students (73-79%) who were confident (reporting they find the subject easy and they do well in the subject) was noticeably lower than for reading (80-83%) and writing (81-84%).

In addition, fewer year six students were confident with mathematics than year four students. The opposite was found for reading and writing; in these areas, more year six students were confident than year four students. This suggests that students have less confidence in mathematics in comparison to reading and writing, and mathematics confidence may decrease slightly as students progress.

Many students are experiencing challenges to their well-being and many are seldom experiencing positive attitudes. Only half of the students indicated that they frequently had good days, were generally cheerful, and looked forward to the next day.

Also, about one in five students reported frequent negative experiences such as hunger, tiredness, feeling upset, or not having enough friends.

Overall, this suggests that some students have positive experiences while at school, but a significant number of students are experiencing poor well-being outcomes.

A range of information was collected on students' difficulties with learning and self-management. This shows how many students are experiencing learning difficulties with three areas standing out: difficulties learning or remembering, controlling (own) behaviour, and concentrating and focusing attention.

About one in five students reported a lot of difficulty with these skills. This shows the importance of schools having systems in place to accommodate students with difficulties that may affect their learning in the classroom.

Variables from the student contextual questionnaires were compared to students' performance in the PILNA numeracy, reading and writing assessments. This was done to understand whether any of the contextual factors were associated with differences in student performance. The aim was to identify key areas for future research on the influences that students' demographic background and school-based experiences may have on their educational performance.

Higher performance scores were found in students:

- who had attended at least one year of early childhood education;
- who had parents with a university level education or higher; and
- who belonged to a household with above their country's average level of wealth.

Student performance was also compared to the newly developed PILNA scales. With some exceptions, students who performed at or above the expected proficiency level in numeracy and reading typically had:

- higher scores on the PILNA language scale – meaning that they used the language they completed the PILNA assessments with in most contexts;
- higher scores on the caregiver support scale – a scale used to summarise how supportive caregivers were of a student and their learning;
- higher scores on the corresponding 2018 numeracy and reading attitude scales – meaning that they had more positive attitudes towards the subject they performed well in;
- higher scores on the school attitude scale – meaning that they had more positive attitudes towards school in general; and
- higher scores on the student well-being scale – meaning they reported higher levels of overall well-being.

These differences are significant and indicate that the language of assessment is important, as is the support network that surrounds students. There is also an indication that socio-economic privilege confers some advantage to students.

Students belonging to households with more resources (higher wealth, higher parental education, ability to send children to early childhood education) tended to perform better in reading and numeracy.

Finally, higher levels of performance tended to be associated with higher levels of well-being and more positive attitudes toward the subject and school.

Overall, most students had positive attitudes toward school and were confident in their abilities in literacy and numeracy. Well-being challenges were, however, common across the region and a substantial proportion of students are experiencing learning difficulties. Associations between household or student factors and student performance may show areas where changes could raise performance or create better student experiences.