

Early childhood education

Early childhood education (ECE) is often seen as an opportunity to get a head start in schooling. Information gathered from the PILNA System Questionnaire shows that, although each country has policies regarding ECE, the structure and compulsory nature varies across participating countries.

As part of PILNA, students were asked to indicate their ECE history using the following categories: 'Yes, for 1 year', 'Yes, for 2 years', 'Yes for 3 years or more', or 'No'.

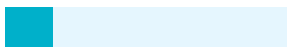
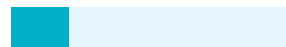




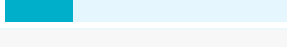
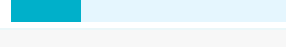
ECE attendance

Across the Pacific, over 80% of students from PILNA 2021 had attended at least one year of ECE. This was similar, on average, for boys (80%) and for girls (82%). There are differences, however, in the amount of time that students spent at ECE prior to their schooling.

Figure 1 shows these ECE differences by year four students and year six students from PILNA 2021.

Table RCSF#1

ECE attendance by year level

ECE attendance	Year 4	Year 6
Did not attend	 17% (0.2)	 20% (0.1)
1 year	 42% (0.2)	 38% (0.2)
2 years	 17% (0.1)	 17% (0.1)
3 years or more	 24% (0.1)	 24% (0.1)

() Standard errors appear in parentheses.

Similar proportions of year four students (83%) and year six students (78%) attended at least one year of ECE. Importantly, about one in four students in year four (24%) and in year six (24%) reported attending ECE for three years or more, but approximately 20%, or one in five students in both year levels reported they did not attend any ECE at all.

ECE attendance and student performance

Statistical testing was done to learn whether there was a difference in student performance between students who had attended at least one year of ECE and students who had not attended any ECE.

This was done at both the year four and year six levels. No differences were found at the year four level but differences were found at the year six level across all domains – numeracy, reading and writing.


Year six students who attended at least one year of ECE scored higher in numeracy, reading and writing than year six students who did not attend any ECE. These differences in performance were all small.

Table RCSF#2

Year six student performance by ECE attendance

Domain	No ECE attendance	Attended some ECE
Numeracy	 529 (2)	 535 (1.5)
Reading	 488 (2.2)	 497 (1.9)
Writing	 504 (1.4)	 510 (1.2)

() Standard errors appear in parentheses.

 Expected minimum proficiency score.

What does this mean?

Most students (80%) who participated in PILNA 2021 attended ECE for at least one year. Similar proportions were observed across year four and year six students, showing ECE attendance rates were stable over time.

Student performance tended to be higher for year six students who attended ECE than for those who did not. For year four students, there were no differences in performance between those who attended ECE and those who did not.

It is not known why differences were found for year six students and not year four students, but the findings suggest the possibility that ECE has a positive effect on performance, which may only become noticeable in later years of schooling.

Given the diversity of ECE throughout the region, these results should be looked at in local contexts.