Student attitudes

Attitudes to school and to certain subjects can shape students' interactions as they progress through their education. For this reason, it was important to collect information about students' attitudes to learning. The PILNA programme took an approach that incorporated students' opinions to school overall and to each of the three cognitive domains covered by PILNA: reading, writing and numeracy.

Students were provided with a list of statements (such as "I enjoy going to school") and asked to rate how much they agreed with each statement. Students could respond with 'Agree a lot', 'Agree', 'Disagree', or 'Disagree a lot'. The statements covered:

- whether students enjoyed the activity;
- whether students did the activity in their own time;
- whether students thought it was important to be good at the activity;
- whether students found the activity easy; and
- whether students thought they did well in the activity.

Additionally, students were asked whether they thought it was important to go to school, if they felt safe at school, and if they felt like they belonged at school.

Student attitudes to subjects and school

Most students in Small Island States, both year four and year six, reported agreement with all the attitude statements ('Agree a lot' or 'Agree') about the cognitive domains and school. This shows overall positive attitudes to reading, writing, mathematics and school.

On average, about 90% of students in Small Island States reported that they enjoyed going to school (year four, 89%; year six, 91%) and felt that it was important to do so (year four, 92%; year six, 94%). Additionally, more than four out of five students reported that they felt safe at school (year four, 85%; year six, 85%) and safe travelling to school (year four, 86%; year six, 88%). Most year four and year six students in Small Island States enjoy schooling, value schooling, and feel safe at school and travelling to school.

When it came to literacy, more than four out of five students reported that they enjoyed reading (year four, 87%; year six, 84%) and writing (year four, 86%; year six, 87%) and that they found reading easy (year four, 81%; year six, 80%) and writing easy (year four, 80%; year six, 82%). Similar levels of agreement were seen between year four and year six students on all questions related to reading and writing.

There was, however, a noticeable difference in agreement for questions related to mathematics. At year four level, only 74% of students agreed that they found mathematics easy and 77% agreed that they did well in mathematics. At year six level, only 64% of students agreed that they found mathematics easy and 69% agreed that they did well in mathematics.

Interestingly, students at both year levels still agreed, in similar proportions to reading and writing, that mathematics was important (year four, 86%; year six, 87%) and that they enjoyed mathematics (year four, 88%; year six, 84%). The exception was that slightly fewer year six students reported enjoying mathematics compared to reading and writing (mathematics, 75%; reading, 84%; writing, 87%).

The full breakdown of these results can be seen in Table STT1.8

Table STT1.8

Percentage of students agreeing with statements reading, writing, mathematics and school

Statement	Year 4	Year 6
Reading		
Enjoy reading	87% (1.1)	84% (1.8)
Read in my own time	83% (1.6)	83% (0.4)
Think it is important to be a good reader	88% (2.2)	91% (1.9)
Find reading easy	81% (1.7)	80% (1.9)
Do well in reading	80% (2.6)	82% (1.8)
Writing		
Enjoy writing	86% (0.9)	87% (1.1)
Do writing in my own time	78% (1.5)	80% (0.9)
Think it is important to be a good writer	88% (3.0)	90% (0.9)
Find writing easy	80% (2.7)	82% (1.2)
Do well in writing	79% (2.2)	80% (1.3)
Mathematics		
Enjoy doing mathematics	83% (1.1)	75% (1.6)
Do mathematics in my own time	76% (2.1)	67% (2.7)
Think it is important to be good at mathematics	86% (2.1)	89% (2.1)
Find mathematics easy	74% (1.8)	64% (1.8)
Do well in mathematics	77% (1.6)	69% (2.1)
Schooling		
Enjoy going to school	89% (1.4)	91% (0.4)
Think it is important to go to school	92% (1.9)	94% (0.4)
Think it is important to do well in school	89% (2.6)	94% (0.5)
Find school easy	78% (1.6)	77% (1.4)
Feel like I belong at this school	85% (2.2)	85% (1.3)
Feel safe at the school	85% (1.9)	85% (1.6)
Feel safe travelling to school	86% (1.5)	88% (1.6)

Percentage of students agreeing with statements reading, writing, mathematics and school

Source: https://pilna.eqap.spc.int/2021/small-island-states/get-to-know/students/student-self-reflections/student-attitudes
Jan 14, 2024, 10:39

( ) Standard errors appear in parentheses.

Student attitudes and student performance

Using the results above, regional scales for student attitudes on school, reading, writing, and numeracy were established. Higher scores on the scales indicated more positive attitudes to these areas. The scales were then compared to student performance in reading and numeracy. It should be noted that comparisons were not made to writing performance because the proficiency scale for writing performance has not yet been established.

> *The PILNA scales for attitudes to school, reading, writing, and numeracy all have an average of 200 and a standard deviation of 40. Most scores on these scales are expected to be within 40 points of 200 (160–240). The attitude to reading, writing, and numeracy scales were formed from the answers to the five questions students were asked in each area. The attitude to school scale was formed from the seven answers to questions in this area.*

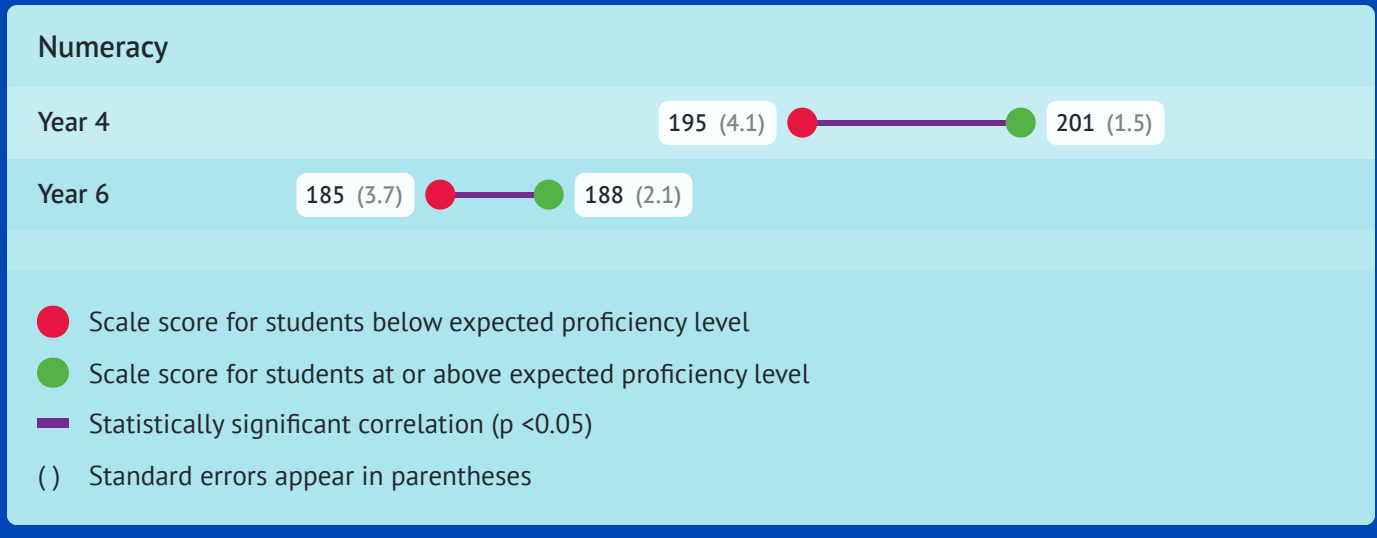
Comparisons to student performance were made between the average attitude of students who were at or above expected levels of performance and students who were below these levels of performance.

For attitude to mathematics, year four students who performed at or above the expected level in numeracy had higher attitude scores on average (201) than year four students who did not meet expected numeracy performance (195). No differences in attitude were found at year six level between those who met the expected proficiency level and those who did not. These results are presented in Figure STF1.3.

Figure STF1.3: PILNA Scale: Student attitudes to numeracy

Average scores of students on attitude towards mathematics scale by year level and proficiency

The PILNA scales for attitudes to school, reading, writing, and numeracy all have an average of 200 and a standard deviation of 40. Most scores on these scales are expected to be within 40 points of 200 (160–240). The attitudes to reading, writing, and numeracy scales were all formed from analysis of answers to the five questions students were asked in each area. The attitude to school scale was formed from analysis of the seven answers to questions students were asked in this area.

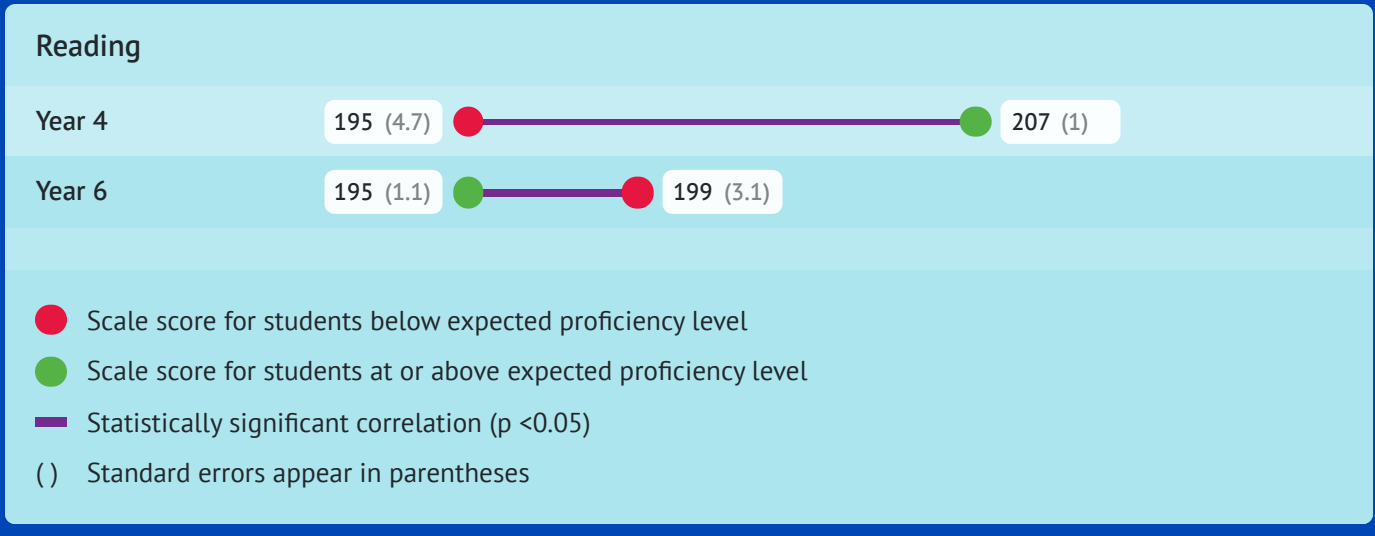


For attitude to reading, associations were found at both the year four and year six levels, but in different directions. Year four students who performed at or above the expected level in reading had higher attitude scores on average (207) than year four students who did not meet expected reading performance (195). However, year six students who performed at or above the expected level in reading had lower attitude scores on average (195) than year six students who did not meet expected reading performance (199). These comparisons are shown in Figure STF1.4.

Figure STF1.4: PILNA Scale: Student attitudes to reading

Average scores of students on attitude towards reading scale by year level and proficiency

The PILNA scales for attitudes to school, reading, writing, and numeracy all have an average of 200 and a standard deviation of 40. Most scores on these scales are expected to be within 40 points of 200 (160–240). The attitude to reading, writing, and numeracy scales were formed from the answers to the five questions students were asked in each area. The attitude to school scale was formed from the seven answers to questions in this area.

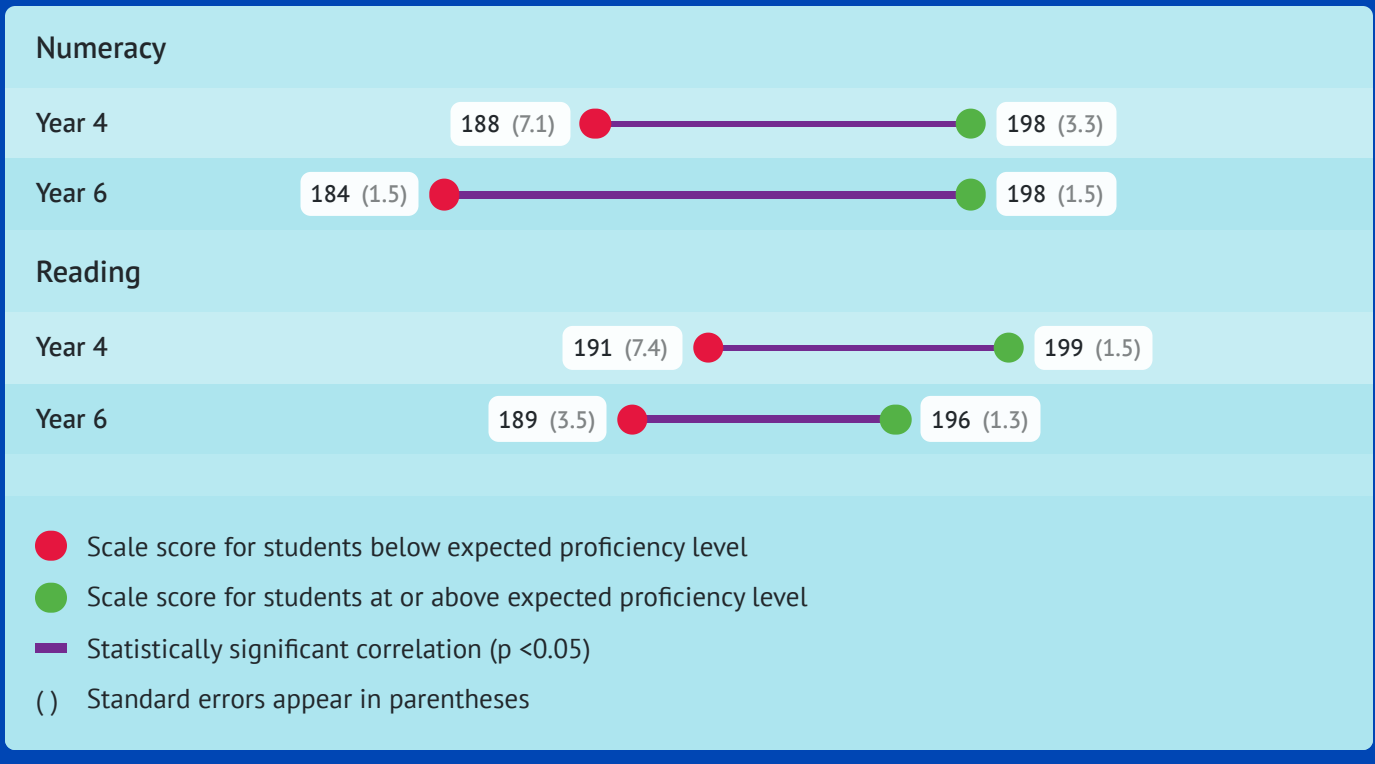


Comparisons were also made between student performance and attitudes to school in general. Across both year four and year six levels, students who were performing at or above the expected levels had higher attitude scores to school in general. This was true for students performing at expected levels in numeracy and reading. Figure STF1.5 shows these comparisons.

Figure STT1.5: PILNA Scale: Student attitudes to schooling

Average scores of students on attitude towards schooling scale by year level and proficiency

The PILNA scales for attitudes to school, reading, writing, and numeracy all have an average of 200 and a standard deviation of 40. Most scores on these scales are expected to be within 40 points of 200 (160–240). The attitude to reading, writing, and numeracy scales were formed from the answers to the five questions students were asked in each area. The attitude to school scale was formed from the seven answers to questions in this area.



What does this mean?

The findings from this PILNA cycle show that a high proportion of students in Small Island States in both year levels are enjoying reading, writing, and mathematics and identify them as being important. However, when it comes to ratings about finding each subject easy or rating themselves as doing well in each subject, one area falls behind: numeracy. Numeracy ratings in these areas for both year levels were noticeably lower than for reading and writing. This may mean that, while students are still enjoying mathematics at these year levels, a larger proportion are challenged by the subject than are challenged by reading and writing. This may be an area that requires more attention by educators.

Mixed results were found when comparing student performance in a subject to their attitude to that subject. At year four level, those who performed better in reading and numeracy tended to have a more positive attitude to the subject. At year six level, students who performed better in reading tended to have a less positive attitude to reading and there were no differences in attitude to mathematics for students who performed well in it and those who did not. At the regional level, it was generally found that students who performed better in a subject tended to have a better attitude to it.

When it came to attitude to school in general, students at both year levels who performed better tended to have a more positive attitude to school.