

Conclusions for students

A wealth of information on student experiences and circumstances was collected in PILNA 2021. 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 84-96%) and acknowledged their importance (between 88-96%). These findings might reflect generally positive learning environments, but the causes and consequences of student attitudes in these areas still need to be discovered.

Many students are experiencing challenges to their well-being and seldom experience positive attitudes. Less than half of the students indicated that they frequently had good days, were generally cheerful, and felt calm and relaxed. Also, about one in ten students reported frequent negative experiences such as hunger, sickness, not being able to sleep or eat. 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 controlling (own) behaviour, concentrating and focusing attention, and learning and remembering things.

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 in reading and writing were found in students:

- 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 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 caregiver support scale – a scale used to summarise how supportive caregivers were of a student and their learning;
- higher scores on the reading and school attitude scale – meaning that they had more positive attitudes towards reading and school in general; and
- higher scores on the student well-being scale – meaning they reported higher levels of overall well-being.

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