

# Language

Language is the one of the most important tools we use to learn. While English is a common language of instruction in Pacific schools, there are hundreds of Pacific languages and the language students use at home is not always the language they use at school. Similarly, the language that students took the PILNA assessments in may not have been the language most familiar to them.

Taking assessments in a language that is not a student's most familiar language may affect their performance. This is important to consider, as the PILNA assessments aim to assess student performance independently from any one language – literacy and numeracy can be demonstrated using any Pacific language. Therefore, the PILNA programme takes into account the language students used to complete their assessments relative to the languages they are most familiar with.

Students were asked about the language they mostly used to converse with family, friends, teachers, and in other settings. This was recorded alongside the language the student used to sit the PILNA assessments. With this information, a regional scale was formed to describe how much a student used the language they completed the PILNA assessments in.

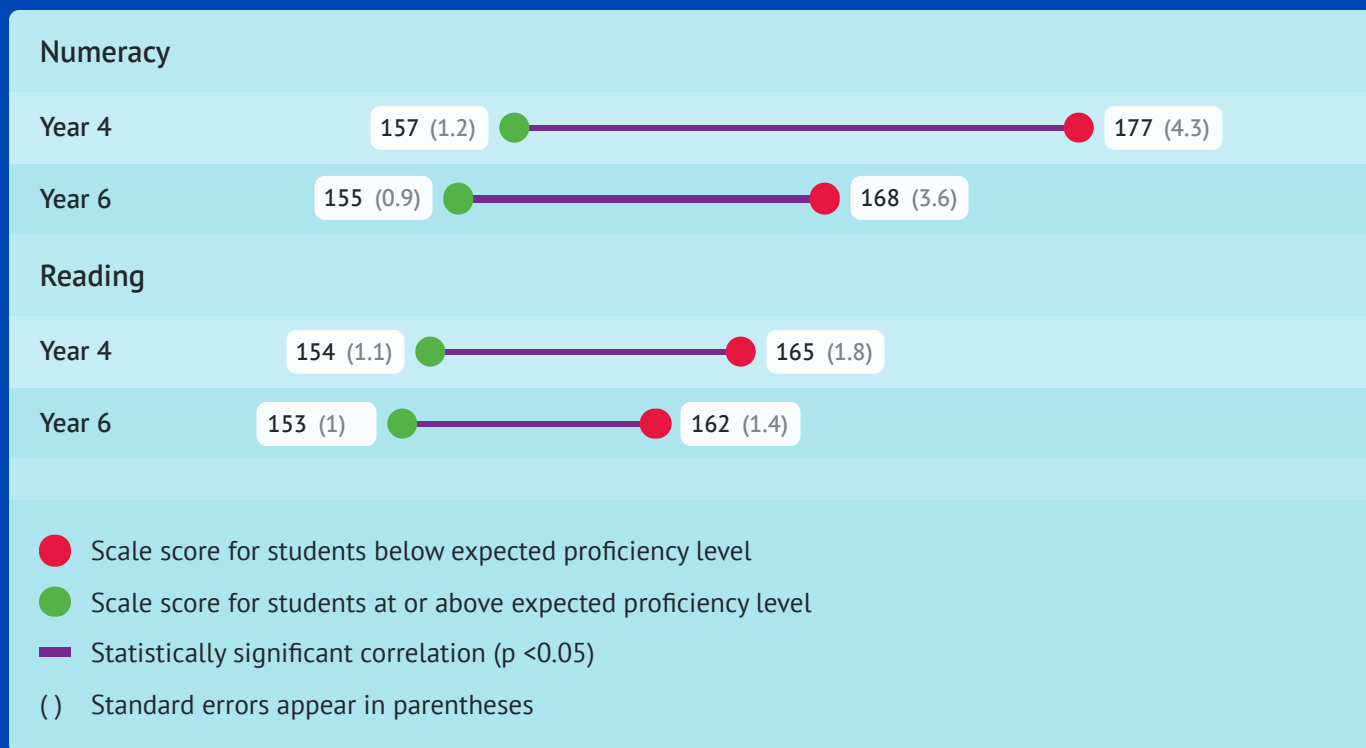
The PILNA language scale has an average of 200 and a standard deviation of 40. Most scores are expected to be within 40 points of 200 (160–240). Using statistical analysis, the scale was formed from the answers to six out of ten questions about students' language use.

Higher scores on this language scale indicate that the student uses the language that they completed the PILNA assessment in for conversing across a greater range of settings. Lower scores indicate that the student uses the language they completed the PILNA in for conversing across fewer settings.

This scale allowed for comparisons between student performance and the number of settings the students use the language they completed the PILNA assessments in. Figure STF1.1 shows differences in average language scale scores by year level, domain (numeracy and reading), and by meeting or not meeting the expected (benchmarked) performance in each domain for students in Solomon Islands. Note that comparisons to the writing domain are unavailable as the proficiency scale for writing (benchmarks) has not yet been established.

## Figure STF1.1: PILNA Language Scale

Average scores of students on language scale by year level and proficiency



## Language and performance

When looking at language scale scores by numeracy and reading performance, associations were found in all comparisons. At both the year four and year six levels, and in both numeracy and reading, students who performed at or above the expected level of performance had lower average language scale scores than students who did not meet these performance expectations.

## What does this mean

Students who performed better in numeracy and reading tended to use the language they were assessed with in fewer everyday settings than students who did not perform as well. This is unintuitive. It would be expected that students who use a language more in everyday settings would perform better in the PILNA subjects using that language but this was not the case in Solomon Islands.

The reasons for this are unclear and might be worthwhile investigating further.