

Year 6 cohort

The numeracy, reading, and writing performance of year six students.

Introduction to the 2021-year six cohort

Year six students who participated in PILNA 2021 have had different schooling experiences from previous PILNA cohorts. Formal learning in the Pacific region has been significantly disrupted since 2019, when the Covid-19 pandemic resulted in periodic school closures throughout the region. Other health-related events and natural disasters, such as the measles outbreak in Samoa and the Hunga Tonga-Hunga Ha'apai volcanic eruption, have created further learning disruptions.

These events may have also had wider impacts on school-age children, such as changes to their mental health, community commitments, or their access to education, although further research is needed to validate any wider impacts of these events.

The 2021-year six cohort of students have had a smaller proportion of their total school years affected by these learning disruptions than the 2021 year four students, who may have been more affected by them. The effects of learning disruptions on students with more years of formal schooling compared with fewer years of formal schooling have not, however, been well established. Future research and analysis are needed in this area.

Importantly, PILNA 2021 is the first large-scale regional assessment to show the consequences of these disruptions. It has collected the information necessary to link learning disruptions to student performance. Analysis of this information will be undertaken in the near future and provided alongside the PILNA 2021 results when available.

Conclusions for year six

Year six students in Tonga had mixed performance across the PILNA subjects compared with previous PILNA cycles. These students scored lower in numeracy and writing compared with 2018, but scores in these areas were higher than 2015. The average reading score in 2021 was lower than both previous PILNA cycles. The average score in numeracy (557) was higher than for the region, but the average scores for reading (453) and writing (479) were lower than for the region (numeracy, 531; reading, 492; writing, 507).

Most year six students are meeting the minimum expected proficiency level in numeracy but not in reading; 87% of students were at or above the minimum expected proficiency levels in numeracy but only 30% were at or above them in reading. Minimum expected proficiency levels for writing have not yet been established but writing performance decreased compared with 2018.

In year six, girls scored higher than boys in numeracy (girls, 565; boys, 550), reading (girls, 472; boys, 437), and writing (girls, 494; boys, 466). Also, more girls were meeting the minimum expected proficiency levels than boys in numeracy (girls, 91%; boys, 83%) and reading (girls, 40%; boys, 21%).

Year six students in government schools scored about the same as students in non-government schools in numeracy (government, 557; non-government, 555). However, students in non-government schools scored higher than students in government schools in both reading (government, 446; non-government, 482) and writing (government, 476; non-government, 492).

Year six students in urban schools scored higher in numeracy (urban, 567; non-urban, 551), reading (urban, 473; non-urban, 435), and writing (urban, 490; non-urban, 469) than students in non-urban schools.

Experiential and environmental data, as outlined in the contextual sections, may provide some insights into the reasons for these performance trends.