

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). The scale was formed statistical analysis of six out of ten answers to 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 expected (benchmarked) performance in each domain for students in Tuvalu. 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

PILNA Language Scale

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Numeracy

Year 4 163 (3.6) — 173 (2.4)

Year 6 167 (5) — 169 (5.7)

Reading

Year 4 166 (2.3) — 167 (3.2)

Year 6 166 (3.9) — 169 (5.4)

- Scale score for students below expected proficiency level
- Scale score for students at or above expected proficiency level
- Statistically significant correlation ($p < 0.05$)
- () Standard errors appear in parentheses

Language and student performance

When looking at language scale scores by student performance, only one comparison had a significant result. Year four students who scored at or above the expected proficiency level in numeracy tended to have lower language scale scores than those who scored below this proficiency level.

No other associations were found between student performance in literacy and numeracy and language scale scores at either the year four or year six level.

What does this mean?

Year four students who scored at or above the expected proficiency level in numeracy tended to use the language they were assessed in in fewer settings than students who scored below the minimum expected level.

The findings of these comparisons in Tuvalu are counterintuitive and the implications of these findings are unclear. At the regional level, higher student performance scores were associated with higher language scale scores, therefore wider

language use, in most comparisons.