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What is PILNA?

PILNA gives an understanding of children's literacy and numeracy needs and informs actions to strengthen these fundamental skills throughout the Pacific region.

Definition and structure

The [Pacific Islands Literacy and Numeracy Assessment \(PILNA\)](#) is a long-term Pacific-wide assessment. It is carried out every three years and generates data which is used to facilitate collaborative efforts to monitor and improve learning outcomes for children in Pacific Island countries.

This includes literacy (reading and writing) and numeracy performance data ([cognitive data](#)) as well as data about the students, their teachers, and their environments ([contextual data](#)), all of which help to understand students' performance and how it can be supported more effectively.

Implementing PILNA is an enormous undertaking that would not be possible without the engagement and close collaboration of hundreds of stakeholders across the Pacific region.

The Pacific context

The Pacific region is one of the largest and most diverse regions of the world and the Pacific Ocean is the world's largest body of water.

Home to some 9.7 million inhabitants, the region is characterised by rapidly changing economic structures, high migration rates, high youth unemployment in many areas, and vulnerability to the effects of climate change, including natural disasters (UNESCO 2015).

Pacific Islanders are ethnically diverse and live in areas that differ significantly in terms of geography, size, history, culture, economies, and political systems (UNESCO 2018).

Despite this diversity, there are many shared characteristics and common education challenges, particularly in literacy and numeracy.

Improving educational achievement in literacy and numeracy in Pacific Island countries has been identified as a shared goal by a range of stakeholders. They recognise the right of children to have access to good quality education – of which literacy and numeracy are a crucial part – regardless of gender, background, ethnicity, family background, and socio-economic status.

Pacific leaders are also cognisant of international research that highlights the relationship between literacy and numeracy and the ability to participate fully in society (*Edwards et al. 2021; Carpraro et al. 2014; OECD 2014; Altinok 2012*).

More critically, Pacific leaders are looking at ways to address the global trend of many young people, especially the disadvantaged, leaving school without the skills to effectively engage in everyday society and secure employment (UNESCO 2012). Pacific Island stakeholders understand that literacy and numeracy are critical foundation skills that are required for full participation in life and work.

PILNA addresses the shared goal of understanding and improving student learning outcomes across the region.

As it is evidence based, it supports initiatives for improvement while allowing for regional differences in the varied education systems, languages, and cultures of the Pacific.

PILNA evidence contributes to the improvement of teachers' training, teachers' assessment skills, and the development of policies to ultimately improve Pacific children's literacy and numeracy skills.

Establishing regional benchmarks in literacy and numeracy

To allow the effective assessment of literacy and numeracy, the region's stakeholders defined and agreed on standards of performance enable the comparison of learner performance. This milestone was the first step in creating the regional assessment tool.

It began with the development of the 2006 Pacific regional benchmarks for literacy and numeracy for students in years two, four, six, and eight. These benchmarks were then used to develop the 2012 and 2015 cycles of PILNA. The benchmarks were derived from an analysis of the skill common components and learning outcomes of the 15 Pacific Island countries national curricula. In 2016 these were revised after several countries revised their primary school curricula.

The benchmarks were reviewed and revised in a workshop by English language and mathematics curriculum advisors from 15 Pacific Island countries. The resulting 2016 Pacific regional benchmarks formed the basis of the 2018 and 2021 PILNA cycles.

They cover the common learning outcomes in literacy and numeracy and outline the knowledge, skills, understanding, values, and capacities that Pacific students need in order to develop and participate effectively in society.

The Pacific definition for literacy is:

“The knowledge and skills necessary to empower a person to communicate through any form of language in their society and the wider world, with respect to all aspects of everyday life.”

The Pacific definition for numeracy is:

“The knowledge and skills necessary to empower a person to be able to use mathematical processes, as well as the language of mathematics, for a variety of purposes, with respect to everyday life.”