Pacific Islands Literacy and Numeracy Assessment 2021 – Regional Report
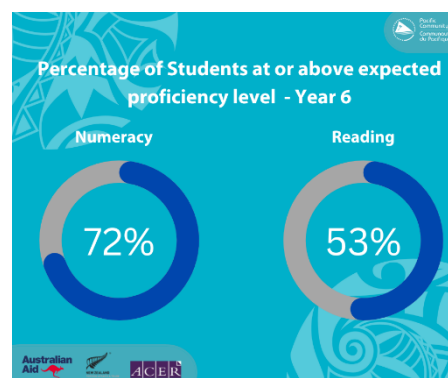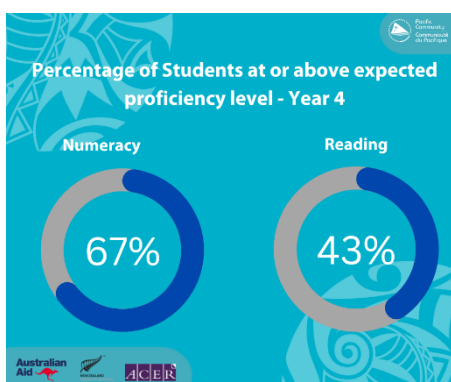
The Pacific Islands Literacy and Numeracy Assessment (PILNA) report is compiled by the Pacific Community's (SPC) Educational Quality and Assessment Programme (EQAP) on a three-year cycle. The report compiled in the fourth cycle in 2021 has adopted a new approach that allows users to actively control data retrieval. The new approach ensures that the entire report is available online and encourages greater data exploration rather than passive consumption of information.

With the migration of PILNA to a digital platform, EQAP is now better able to present a picture of the region's educational strengths and challenges. Each section of the digital report contains a wealth of invaluable data, which is carefully analysed by educators across the Pacific.

The first cycle of PILNA was administered in 2012 to provide a snapshot of how the region's Year 4 and Year 6 students across 15 Pacific island countries (PICs) were faring in the skills essential to progress through school and life. Areas covered included reading, writing, numbers, operations, measurements and data. In the fourth cycle of PILNA, administered in 2021, over 40,000 students were involved.

Findings of the 2021 Assessment:

1) The overall findings of PILNA 2021 show that across the region, on average, year four students are not meeting minimum expected performance levels in reading, but are exceeding minimum expected performance levels in numeracy. Expected levels of performance have not yet been established for writing, but the average writing performance score is increasing.

2) Across the region, on average, year six students are exceeding the minimum expected performance level in numeracy and are meeting the minimum expected performance level in reading, but only just. Expected levels of performance have not yet been established for writing, but the average writing performance was about the same as in 2018.

Percentage of Students at or above expected proficiency level - Year 4
Numeracy 67%   Reading 43%

Percentage of Students at or above expected proficiency level - Year 6
Numeracy 72%   Reading 53%

3) The results indicate that students have challenges with complex and critical thinking items, inference and interpretation, providing explanations, and developing a simple story or idea. Similar findings were recorded in previous cycles.

4) Data captured through contextual questionnaires and evidenced in the cognitive results indicate high levels of stress for students, teachers and principals that is having an impact on teaching and learning.

5) Responses to disruptions to education in the region remain physical in nature and are not equally accessible by all students, indicating that countries are not yet ready to cope with remote learning.

Link to the full report:

Recommendations

EQAP has identified two priority areas that apply across all recommendations:

1) **Student reading performance** is a priority for intervention due to the underperformance in reading in PILNA 2021 and its impacts on a diverse set of learning outcomes. Students require reading ability to not only engage with texts, but also to understand problems and succeed in all subjects. The relatively low reading scores from PILNA 2021 may, therefore, result in compounding impacts on performance for this cohort of students. If left unaddressed, lower reading scores now may cause lower performance, in all subjects, as students progress through school. Targeted interventions for reading performance are needed from a household level to a governmental and regional level.

2) **Formative assessment practices** are also a priority for the region. Evidence has shown that these are one of the most impactful strategies for improving student performance, in all areas. Formative assessment can be described as frequent and informal assessment of student learning that identifies learning needs and allows teachers to adapt their teaching accordingly. This may include 'checking-in' with students for their understanding and identifying where extra support or teaching is needed. These practices can ensure a greater number of students understand new concepts and that slower learners are identified and can receive required supports. It is recommended that regional entities, ministries of education, teacher education institutions, school leaders, and teachers strengthen, develop, and utilise formative assessment practices.

Three overarching recommendations

Use PILNA data effectively

Sharing country level data can enable new analyses of local circumstances and can help to share the task of understanding the large amounts of data. As PILNA data is broad, it may be valuable to many stakeholders, even beyond education. Ministries and departments of education are also encouraged to share national findings with all groups who can use them to create positive change such as teachers, education institutions, regional entities, and community organisations.

Enable supplementary data to be collected and used between PILNA cycles

PILNA findings may highlight areas, such as student underperformance, that require more evidence to understand or to justify interventions at a local level. These should be identified, and ministries should plan for strategies to monitor and evaluate these outcomes over time. Similarly, PILNA findings may highlight areas, such as student underperformance, that require further monitoring and evaluation to inform interventions or to better identify changes over time and as a result of targeted interventions. Where this is required, stakeholders should implement activities to collect, analyse, and disseminate this information to appropriate audiences. Formative assessment approaches should be both encouraged and supported at regional and national levels.

Use efficient and scalable solutions to lift student performance and create positive changes

Educators and other stakeholders should collaborate to identify possible activities to address any identified student underperformance at local and regional levels. These should be implemented in a manner that is inclusive, equitable, and considers local and traditional approaches to education. The contextual data that PILNA 2021 collected gave valuable insights into the experiences of these groups and their environments. Some of the challenges that were identified may impact student performance; others may have impacts on wellbeing and the effective functioning of education systems.