

USING ASSESSMENT DATA IN EDUCATION POLICY AND PRACTICE:
EXAMPLES FROM THE ASIA PACIFIC

Pacific Islands Literacy and Numeracy Assessment

*Collaboration and innovation
in reporting and dissemination*

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FROM THE EDITORS

Evidence-based policymaking in education has been adopted around the world, establishing a global norm for educational governance (Wiseman, 2010, p. 2). Assessments of student learning have become a major tool of governments – equipping them to gather high-quality data on education in order to inform effective policies and practices (Masters, 2017).

Different assessments fulfil different purposes. Some provide valuable information about access to education, and about the quality, efficiency and equity of education (Braun, Kanjee, Bettinger, & Kremer, 2006). International and regional large-scale assessments enable countries and regions to identify their relative strengths and weaknesses. National assessments allow policymakers to focus on country-specific policy priorities and education issues. Classroom- and school-based assessments, in addition, facilitate the monitoring of students' progress and can inform appropriate pedagogical strategies designed to improve learning outcomes.

But how and to what extent are the data collected through learning assessments actually used to inform education policy and practice? A joint research study conducted by the Network on Education Quality Monitoring in the Asia-Pacific region (NEQMAP) Secretariat at UNESCO Bangkok and the Australian Council for Educational Research, Centre for Global Education Monitoring (ACER-GEM) provided insights into how data collected from large-scale assessments of students' learning are used to inform education policy and practice. This study, published in 2015, focused attention on the Asia-Pacific region (Tobin, Lietz, Nugroho, Vivekanandan, & Nyamkhuu, 2015).

The study identified several facilitators and barriers to the use of large-scale assessments in education policy. The three major facilitators included the degree to which assessments were integrated into policy processes, the effect of their exposure through the media and public opinion, and the quality of the assessment programs themselves (Tobin et al., 2015).

As a follow-up to the 2015 study, UNESCO Bangkok and ACER-GEM have embarked on another joint research initiative – namely, to investigate strategies, practices and approaches that have been implemented in the Asia-Pacific region to support better use of assessment data in education policymaking and educational practice. In 2016, researchers, policymakers and other stakeholders from among the NEQMAP member institutions were invited to submit topical case studies. These case studies are intended to provide examples of innovative and effective practices; to analyse the nature of, and the benefits derived from, such practices; and to articulate valuable lessons learnt from their implementation.

Issue 1 examines the Pacific Islands Literacy and Numeracy Assessment (PILNA), which has developed as a regional model designed to enable the negotiation of a high degree of consensus among the participating countries. Commitment to a collaborative approach pervades all aspects of PILNA, from governance, operation and development through to data sharing, reporting and dissemination of results. The efforts undertaken to reach consensus, enhanced transparency and public dissemination of results have stimulated countries in the region to investigate how data on student learning outcomes may be used and shared in a common endeavour to improve the standards of education in the Pacific Islands.

It is our aim that this series of topical case studies will serve to increase the use of assessment data in education policy and practice in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond.

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Pacific Islands Literacy and Numeracy Assessment: Collaboration and innovation in reporting and dissemination

INTRODUCTION

A range of stakeholders have identified, as a shared educational goal, the improvement of literacy and numeracy achievement in Pacific Islands countries. Geographically, the Pacific Islands region is one of the largest in the world, and hosts diverse populations and resources. Nevertheless, many countries in the region have identified literacy and numeracy as a common educational challenge. Within this context, the Pacific Islands Literacy and Numeracy Assessment (PILNA) provides data on the literacy and numeracy outcomes of students in 13 Pacific Islands countries who have completed Year 4 and Year 6.¹

PILNA has developed as a consensual model. It facilitates discussion and requires that decisions be made cooperatively. Decisions are subject to the joint approval of regional and country participants. The model enables participating members to reach consensus in providing knowledge and data on student learning outcomes. As such, decisions about reporting and dissemination are made collaboratively, in a group environment – no individual determines how reports are to be written and disseminated.

This case study explores PILNA's collaborative and innovative model of reporting and disseminating data to a range of educational stakeholders, including senior policymakers, administrators, teachers, parents and communities. Importantly, it explores the public dissemination of results in the second cycle of PILNA in 2015, and focuses on the implementation of a process that enabled greater transparency in the reporting of data.

The case study begins with background information on PILNA and on the commitment of Pacific Islands governments to support it as an assessment of regional learning outcomes. The case study then discusses the operation of the PILNA model, which is a collaborative process for regional data sharing, reporting and dissemination. The case study proceeds to explore the process of dissemination endorsed by the PILNA Steering Committee. In particular, it discusses a three-stage strategy for further dissemination and use of PILNA results by

participating countries. The case study concludes with a brief evaluation of the significance of PILNA's collaborative approach to reporting and dissemination.

BACKGROUND

Forum Education Ministers' Meeting (FEEdMM)

Through the PILNA model, Pacific Islands governments have made a commitment to monitor the outcomes of education systems. It is by measuring students' achievement in literacy and numeracy that governments in the region seek to honour this commitment.

Literacy and numeracy assessment will be undertaken on a regular basis and within an agreed common framework. Figure 1 shows the 13 countries that participated in PILNA 2015.

In 2006, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), along with the Secretariat for the Pacific Board of Educational Assessment (SPBEA) – now the Educational Quality and Assessment Programme (EQAP) of the Pacific Community (SPC) – and representatives from 15 Pacific Islands countries developed the Pacific Regional Benchmarks for Literacy and Numeracy. PILNA is framed around the regional benchmarks, which were endorsed by the 15 education ministers at the 2007 FEEdMM. Collaborative activities between UNESCO and SPBEA that began in 2010 ultimately resulted in the development of the PILNA cognitive tools.

In 2012, the first cycle of PILNA was administered in 14 countries. The aim of the 2012 cycle was to establish a regional baseline for the literacy and numeracy achievement of students at the end of Year 4 and Year 6.² This first cycle was a significant step towards establishing the assessment and monitoring of literacy and numeracy outcomes at a regional level.

1 The following 13 countries participated in PILNA 2015: Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.

2 The following 14 countries participated in PILNA 2012: Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.

The two objectives of the 2012 PILNA (SPBEA, 2013) administration were to:

- i) *provide reliable and valid baseline data on the achievement levels of the literacy and numeracy skills of pupils who have completed Year 4 and Year 6 of primary education.* These baseline figures were reported for the region, and disseminated to each participating ministry of education at the country level, to the Pacific Heads of Education Systems (PHES) meeting held in Tonga in October 2013 and to the ministers of education assembled at the 2014 FEdMM in the Cook Islands.
- ii) *promote the effective use of data in formulating national policy, in monitoring, and in designing appropriate intervention programmes to improve literacy and numeracy levels.* Three sets of reports (regional, sub-regional and individual country) were produced for national ministries of education. These enabled the ministries to engage in critical examination of the results and to undertake further analysis to inform policy and practice.

for the end of 2015, with the purpose of measuring literacy and numeracy outcomes in the Pacific Islands. A range of innovations were implemented during the PILNA 2015 administration and analysis, which enabled the monitoring of trends in student learning outcomes. The New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) – via the New Zealand Aid Programme – and the SPC initiated discussions about financial and technical support for PILNA 2015.

Countries invited to participate in PILNA 2015 were bound by the following two conditions:

- i) that participating countries are committed to sharing the results with other countries for lessons that one can learn especially from those that appear to be doing better, on good practices and policies that have been proven to work.
- ii) that each country is committed to using the findings to carry out policy interventions as well as technical interventions (for example, classroom instructional intervention to improve learning outcomes) aimed at improving the situation in each country.³

At the 2014 FEdMM meeting in the Cook Islands, the ministers of education approved a second administration of PILNA

3 Secretariat of the Pacific Board for Educational Quality (21 November 2014). Regional Monitoring of Literacy and Numeracy Standards. Letter of Invitation to countries. SPBEA: Suva, Fiji.

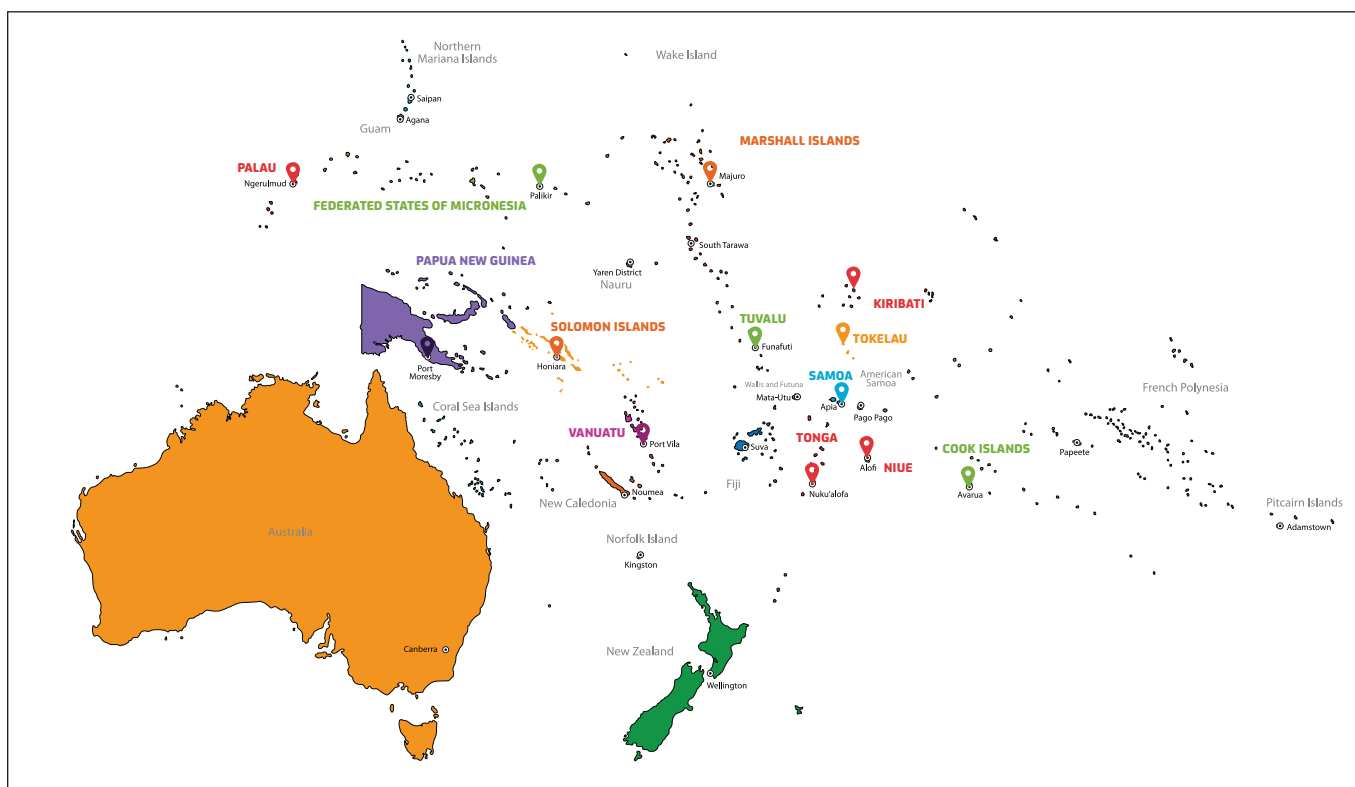


Figure 1: Countries participating in PILNA 2015

Thirteen countries (see footnote 1 and Figure 1) agreed to participate in PILNA 2015. The following section gives a brief overview of the PILNA 2015 management and governance structure.

Emphasis on a collaborative approach: the PILNA 2015 management and governance structure

The design of PILNA 2015 included a four-level management and governance structure. This structure is illustrated in Figure 2. The significance of this structure is that it enabled the achievement of a high level of consensus among EQAP and national governments. The four levels shown in Figure 2 were designed to operate as follows:

1. EQAP manages and supervises PILNA overall.
2. The Steering Committee provides oversight and guidance in regard to the development of plans, activities and communication related to PILNA.
3. The EQAP PILNA Project Management team ensures that outputs are delivered on time, and that appropriate technical expertise supports the program.
4. The Operations team at EQAP supports the administration of PILNA 2015 in the 13 participating countries, and the Development team – led by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) – provides analytical and technical support in partnership with EQAP. These initiatives serve the aim of developing PILNA as a long-term regional assessment.

The management and governance structure provides a general framework for communicating the PILNA 2015 results. It recognises that the use of regional assessment data requires considered region-wide consensus, facilitated

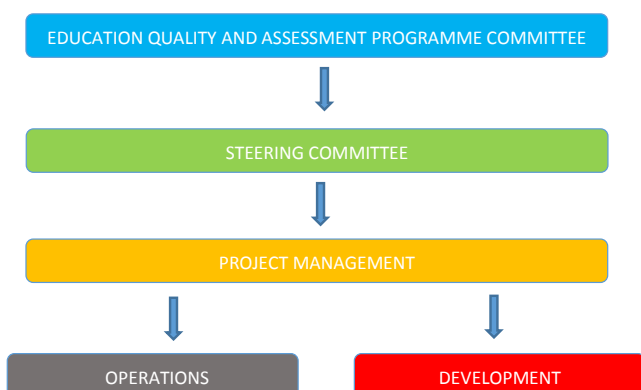


Figure 2: PILNA management and governance structure

by the ongoing input of the PILNA Steering Committee. The Project Management team, which leads the Operations and Development teams, is guided in reporting and dissemination by both the Steering Committee and EQAP management. The results of PILNA 2015 are available in the *2015 Pacific Islands Literacy and Numeracy Assessment Regional Report (2016)*.

The following section provides a detailed description of the collaborative reporting and dissemination process.

REPORTING AND DISSEMINATING PILNA 2015: A COLLABORATIVE APPROACH TO DATA SHARING

Each participating country was fully involved in all levels of management and governance (refer to Figure 2). PILNA 2015 was characterised by collaboration in development and administration. Collaboration engendered effective practices, which resulted in a regional assessment that represents a window into the educational achievements of the Pacific Islands region. Further, collaboration has enabled PILNA to achieve the aims of information sharing and dissemination, while primary-stakeholder consensus – notably on the part of members of the PILNA Steering Committee and of the participating countries themselves – has facilitated use of the results by interested parties.

During the 2014 FEdMM, the education ministers of the 15 member countries committed their support to a second administration of PILNA, which initiated the collaborative process. During the design phase of PILNA 2015, countries expressed not only their desire to participate but also their willingness to share results and to take an active role in the development of PILNA.

The entire administration of PILNA in 2015 was channelled through the Steering Committee. The Steering Committee consisted of the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of each participating country's ministry of education, representatives of the New Zealand MFAT and the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), and the director of EQAP. The Steering Committee was able to represent the strategic priorities of the participating countries and engage in high-level discussions on behalf of their ministries. Moreover, the Steering Committee was able to make critical decisions about PILNA as a result of the support that it had at the highest levels of government. This process resulted from the ownership taken by the respective CEOs.



Figure 3: Consensus workshop: PILNA Steering Committee meeting, Nadi, Fiji, 18 August 2015

The Steering Committee met twice during the 2015 PILNA administration cycle. The first meeting was conducted in mid-August 2015, and at that point a number of decisions were agreed upon that helped shape the way in which PILNA results would be disseminated and used by participating countries.

Identification of key purposes and use of data

The PILNA Steering Committee adopted a consensual approach to determining the purposes and the use of results for PILNA 2015. Table 1 lists the six key purposes – interventions, policy, political support, community awareness, monitoring results and national validation – derived from the rich discussion about PILNA reporting and dissemination.

The Steering Committee adopted a consensus-workshop process. This required members of the Steering Committee to write down their own ideas and then to share these ideas with a colleague in a ‘think-pair-share’ format.⁴ Each pair then shared ideas with their table group, agreed on a range of ideas to be aired in the presence of the entire committee, and posted those ideas in a random fashion on the wall as a way of

⁴ Think-pair-share is a technique that enables workshop participants to collaborate in developing ideas about an issue. Committee members were asked to think individually about an issue and then to share their thoughts with colleagues as a means of achieving consensus about expectations and outcomes.

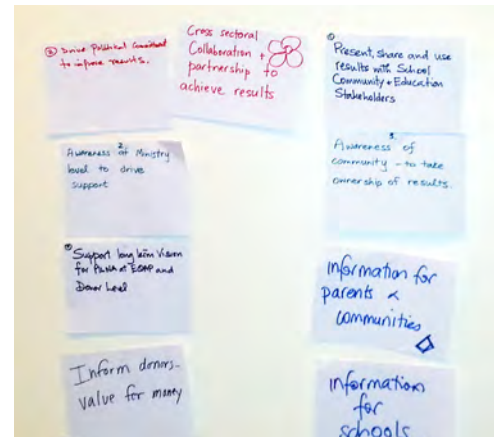


Figure 4: Identifying key themes: PILNA Steering Committee meeting, Nadi, Fiji, 18 August 2015

triggering discussion about the future uses of PILNA data. This process is shown in Figure 3.

The group collectively identified ideas posted on the wall that were similar to one another and grouped them according to the ideas’ similarities. Six groups emerged from the iterative process of reviewing the ideas. Subsequently, the Steering Committee discussed the commonalities in each group, and then identified and recorded the key purposes.

The ideas and the six key purposes – which, importantly, were products of a consensual process – are represented in the six columns of Table 1. The ideas and themes emerged from the original statements written down during the consensus-workshop process.

The discussions that eventuated in the Steering Committee established the direction for the types of reports that would be generated. They also helped to determine the audiences for these reports and laid the groundwork for the communications plan that ultimately facilitated the dissemination of the results at both regional and national levels. The Steering Committee emphasised that a focus on student learning outcomes should be at the centre of every decision. The material presented in Table 1 provides a primary point of reference for all stakeholders involved in PILNA. In other words, the table expresses the key reporting decisions agreed to by members of the Steering Committee, which, in turn, oversees the activities of all PILNA stakeholders.

Table 1: The six key purposes and use of results for PILNA 2015

| 1. Interventions | 2. Policy | 3. Political support | 4. Community awareness | 5. Monitoring results | 6. National validation |
|---|---|---|---|--|--|
| Develop interventions to improve literacy and numeracy at system and school level | Inform curriculum review, pedagogy, teacher-training institutions and education providers | Drive political commitment to improve results | Present, share and use results with school communities and education stakeholders | Encourage country ownership of data through capacity building, collection and interrogation of results | Validate national results/data |
| Identify and design interventions to improve learning and teaching | Develop policies | Develop awareness at ministry level to drive support | Develop community awareness to take ownership of results | Provide a measure for tracking results | Use PILNA results to support, validate and improve national assessments |
| Establish and implement intervention strategies | Provide evidence-based information for policymaking and interventions | Support long-term vision for PILNA and EQAP at donor level | Provide information for parents and communities | Use PILNA results to set literacy and numeracy benchmarks at district, provincial and national levels | Confirm literacy and numeracy outcomes against other national sources (e.g., NGO surveys/ research, national census) |
| Review programs and support offered to schools | Plan and conduct program evaluations | Inform donors about value for money for investment | Provide information for schools | Observe any shifts in results since 2012 | |
| Use assessment data to inform classroom interventions | Create a profile of learning outcomes based on PILNA results for countries | Provide information for government (cabinet) | Create a sense of ownership and responsibility for results | Observe where participating countries sit in relation to the regional literacy and numeracy benchmarks | |
| Guide discussions between countries and development partners on priority interventions at country level | Focus resources to improve learning outcomes | Encourage cross-sector collaboration and partnership to achieve results | | Share results with countries of similar backgrounds | |
| Show gender disaggregation of results to inform interventions | Provide information for accountability | | | Engage in cross-country comparison | |
| Inform professional development on literacy interventions | Build more accountability around data and results at all levels of the education system | | | | |
| Decide areas for targeted interventions | | | | | |

Note: The rows in this table do not correspond with one another.

Data sharing, communications plan and dissemination methods

Sharing data

As well as discussing the purposes of the results and how best to share them with the appropriate stakeholders, the Steering Committee engaged in substantive discussion around what was and what was not acceptable in terms of sharing data. The second Steering Committee meeting – which convened in March 2016 – endorsed a data-sharing commitment that outlined who would have control and be empowered to share the country-specific results of PILNA 2015. Throughout the process, all of the participating countries were adamant that the PILNA 2015 results were not to be used to make side-by-side comparisons of countries or to be shared in the form of league tables or similar instruments.

Communications plan

During the second Steering Committee meeting, the group revisited the purposes that had been outlined at the August 2015 meeting and reaffirmed them (refer to Table 1). This process enabled the Steering Committee members to have conversations about how the results would be reported and shared with the countries. The collaborative development of a communications plan was a critical component of the work and included elements designed to keep all of the countries fully engaged in the reporting of their own results.

The communications plan was built on the idea that the results needed to be accessible at the ministry level for system-wide efforts towards improvement of education quality. At the same time, the Steering Committee agreed that the results needed to be accessible to teachers. The group agreed that accessibility would not be limited to physical access to the reports, and that results also needed to be presented in meaningful ways to ministry officers, principals/head teachers and classroom teachers.

Reporting

The result of the discussion was agreement on the development of a series of reports:

- ▶ a regional report
- ▶ a small island states (SIS) report
- ▶ a national report for each participating country.

The regional report captured literacy and numeracy outcomes of Year 4 and Year 6 students in all 13 participating countries. The SIS report contained results from the five small Island states – Cook Islands, Niue, Palau, Tokelau and Tuvalu. Finally, the following 15 country reports were produced: one for each of the 13 countries, and separate Francophone and Anglophone reports for Vanuatu.

These reports follow the same general structure: literacy and numeracy results are presented and disaggregated by gender, school authority and school locality.⁵ The reports also include comparisons of the PILNA 2012 and 2015 results.

All reports discuss innovations in PILNA 2015. These innovations include the implementation of a coding process, and the development of a common regional scale and of the pilot of contextual questionnaires for students, teachers and head teachers.

Ministerial briefs

Since all participating countries had agreed that the results of PILNA 2015 should be shared at the political level to foster awareness of the literacy and numeracy situation in each country, a ministerial brief with the key findings and recommendations was prepared for each country. In the past, large-scale assessments have been met with distrust in the Pacific Islands – viewed dismissively as exercises initiated externally rather than in collaboration with participating countries. In the case of PILNA 2015, every effort was made to engage with the countries at all stages of the process, primarily through the work of the Steering Committee.

Access to reports and data

The Steering Committee also discussed access to national reports and data. While the data are housed centrally with EQAP, the country-level data were shared with the CEO of each ministry; and each national ministry decided who could access the data at the national level. EQAP has the authority to respond only to requests for regional (aggregate) reports and data. Requests for country-specific reports and data are directed to each country's ministry of education.

⁵ School locality was reported only in country reports.

Follow-up visits

Since sharing of results with a range of stakeholders is considered critical to the productive use of the PILNA 2015 results, the Steering Committee endorsed follow-up visits by EQAP officers to each of the participating countries in the months immediately following the release of the results (in June 2016). These visits provided opportunities to present the results and work with senior ministry staff, curriculum and assessment officers, head teachers, teachers and, when possible, parent groups. The follow-up visits are described in greater detail in the section headed 'Three-stage strategy for further dissemination and use of PILNA results'.

DISSEMINATION

The previous section discussed the various reports in which PILNA 2015 data were presented to key stakeholders. The reports were produced through the collaborative efforts of officers from EQAP and ACER.

Dissemination of the PILNA 2015 results engaged the collaborative approach endorsed by the Steering Committee. Reports were produced and results were presented for a range of education stakeholders. Lessons learnt from the PILNA 2012 cycle indicated the need to involve senior officials of education ministries and departments – as well as education administrators, teachers and community groups – in PILNA reporting and dissemination processes.

It should be emphasised that these processes are likely to strengthen regional commitment to PILNA as a way to monitor change in student learning outcomes and as a reservoir of data that can be used to inform policy strategies and planning for interventions. The following two sections address how the process of engaging stakeholders in the drafting and finalisation of results and reporting may reinforce a commitment to collaboration through dissemination.

National reports

Prior to the release of the results at the end of June 2016, the final drafts of the national reports were sent to the CEOs or permanent secretaries in the education departments or ministries of each participating country. This process gave them the opportunity to provide feedback on PILNA 2015 findings for their countries. The decision to include a process of review of the final drafts by the heads of education

departments and ministries served two purposes: first, to collect any initial comments on the reports; and second, to receive ministerial endorsement of the results prior to the reports' finalisation and dissemination to the public.

These draft reports were sent out before the launch of the regional and SIS reports so that ministers were aware of their countries' results at the time of the PILNA launch and before the commencement of a series of meetings of governing bodies, such as PHES and the Committee of Representatives of Governments and Administrators (CRGA). Almost all of the countries acknowledged the reports and sent back suggestions for improvement within the timeline for review.

Recipients of the draft reports welcomed the opportunity to engage in review and comment, and their responses testified to the depth of participants' interest in knowing more about student learning outcomes in their respective countries. The finalised country reports and raw data were delivered to countries by EQAP officers, who presented at a number of forums and sessions organised for education ministry officials.

This approach involved leaders of education in the provision of feedback to, and in the dissemination of, PILNA reports. As a result, leaders had ownership of the PILNA results and, subsequently, assumed responsibility for devising strategies designed to foster improvements in teaching and learning in their classrooms.

Regional and SIS reports

All possible quality-assurance checks were put in place in the preparation of the regional and SIS reports. Two venues hosted the official launch and release of the PILNA 2015 reports. The first release and main launch occurred at the PHES small working group meeting in Nadi, Fiji, on 29 June 2016; the second release also took place in June 2016, at an event at the CRGA meeting in Noumea, New Caledonia.

Media coverage in a number of daily news agencies in the region and internationally generated significant interest in the PILNA outcomes. At the same time as the launch, the CEO of each PILNA country received electronic copies of the regional report, the SIS report (distributed only to the five countries identified earlier in this case study), and a ministerial brief that summarised their country's literacy and numeracy findings.

The following section discusses a three-stage strategy for the dissemination of the PILNA 2015 results – comprising country visits by EQAP officers, a benchmark review and a presentation of PILNA results to the FEEdMM in 2017.

THREE-STAGE STRATEGY FOR FURTHER DISSEMINATION AND USE OF PILNA RESULTS

Country visits

EQAP officers visited each participating country during the months of July and August 2016. The purpose of these visits was to present PILNA results and discuss ways to disseminate the PILNA findings among education stakeholders.

Each visit included three separate sessions. First, the EQAP officer conducted a brief session with heads of education ministries, including the CEO and directors. This session provided an opportunity to share the country PILNA 2015 results and discuss strategies to enable the results to reach teachers in the classroom.

The second session, conducted with education officials in assessment and curriculum units, focused on strategies enabling assessment to be used as a learning tool. Curriculum and assessment officers were encouraged to conduct intervention activities with teachers, focusing on areas in need of improvement. Objectives included, for example, ways to achieve a better understanding of the learning outcomes that are assessed, or to make advances in constructing items that assess student learning outcomes.

The final session took the form of a training workshop with classroom teachers. This focused on the PILNA findings. EQAP officers described how to utilise assessment as a tool and a method to guide intervention – in particular, through the use of assessment-derived data – and addressed techniques on item construction, scoring and coding. In 2015, coding (as opposed to scoring) was introduced as an innovation in PILNA. Teachers learnt how to use coding to interpret student performance on assessments. Teachers attending the workshop also developed dissemination and intervention plans to share with colleagues who were unable to attend the session.

Benchmarks review

In September 2016, a regional workshop was conducted in Fiji, at which participants from Pacific Islands countries were invited to review the Literacy and Numeracy Regional Benchmarks. In 2006, 15 Pacific Islands countries collaborated to develop Pacific-wide benchmarks for literacy and numeracy in Years 2, 4, 6 and 8. The benchmarks were developed from curriculum skill components and learning outcomes that were determined as common across the national curricula of the participating Pacific Islands countries.⁶

The *Setting regional benchmarks* document defines literacy and numeracy, indicating the educational attainments in respect of which a person in the Pacific context could be described as literate or numerate.

EQAP (2006, p. 3), defines literacy as:

Knowledge and skills necessary to empower a person to communicate through reading and writing, in particular language or languages, with respect to their society and individual needs.

EQAP (2006, p. 4), defines numeracy as:

Knowledge and skills necessary to empower a person to be able to use numbers in mathematical processes, as well as the language of mathematics, for a variety of purposes, with respect to everyday life.

The benchmarks were endorsed by FEEdMM in 2007. Subsequently, they were used as the basis for monitoring the quality of education – through assessment of literacy and numeracy outcomes – in the Pacific Islands region. Since 2006, the primary curricula in some countries have been revised, thus justifying the need to revisit and review the Literacy and Numeracy Regional Benchmarks.

Expert officers in literacy and numeracy from each country were invited to the September 2016 workshop. Officers shared their national primary curricula, and discussed changes that have been made to their curricula since 2006. Participating

⁶ Support for benchmark development was provided by UNESCO and EQAP (formerly SPBEA).

countries identified common learning outcomes in their 2016 curricula. They will subsequently engage in a process of mapping the 2016 common learning outcomes from their national curricula alongside the existing regional benchmarks developed in 2006.

The final part of this process will be to update and endorse the learning indicators identified in the *Setting regional benchmarks* document. By the end of the workshop, a revised Literacy and Numeracy Regional Benchmarks document was drafted for proposed endorsement by the FEdMM in early 2017.

FEdMM 2017

The results of PILNA 2015 will be presented at the FEdMM in 2017 as part of the ministers' formal endorsement of the plan to establish PILNA as an ongoing assessment program. In light of the demand for high-quality education as envisaged in the UN Sustainable Development Goal 4 (United Nations, 2015), it is imperative that the achievements of PILNA 2015 are highlighted for FEdMM. PILNA data will enable thorough deliberation on strategies to improve the quality of education in the Pacific Islands, and particularly for students at the primary level.

In addition, the revised regional benchmarks will be presented to FEdMM for their endorsement. Once endorsed, the regional benchmarks will provide the framework for future cycles of PILNA.

CONCLUSION

This case study has described how PILNA has developed as a regional model that elicits a high level of consensus among the participating countries, and how it provides knowledge and data on student learning outcomes. The case study focused specifically on PILNA's collaborative and innovative approach to the reporting and dissemination of outcomes to a range of educational stakeholders.

The second cycle of PILNA in 2015 was notable for the transparency of its operations and for the dissemination of its results to a public that showed itself to be increasingly interested in how to use data on student learning outcomes in literacy and numeracy. Specifically, the reporting process – whereby country officials comment on relevant report drafts and contribute to dissemination through a process of review – has resulted in increased ownership of data on learning outcomes throughout the region.

This case study discussed the background and elements of PILNA that enabled it, under the oversight of the Steering Committee, to become a collaborative undertaking, and to build a consensus-based process for the reporting and dissemination of data. This feature of consensus is an innovative aspect of PILNA governance. It has been argued here that such a process has contributed to the development of PILNA as a potentially long-term assessment program in the Pacific.

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ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|--------|--|
| ACER | Australian Council for Educational Research |
| CEO | Chief Executive Officer |
| CRGA | Committee of Representatives of Governments and Administrators |
| DFAT | Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Australia) |
| EQAP | Educational Quality and Assessment Programme |
| FEEdMM | Forum Education Ministers' Meeting |
| MFAT | Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (New Zealand) |
| NEQMAP | Network on Education Quality Monitoring in the Asia-Pacific |
| PHES | Pacific Heads of Education Systems |
| PILNA | Pacific Islands Literacy and Numeracy Assessment |
| SIS | small island states |
| SPBEA | Secretariat for the Pacific Board of Educational Assessment |
| SPC | Pacific Community |
| UN | United Nations |
| UNESCO | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization |

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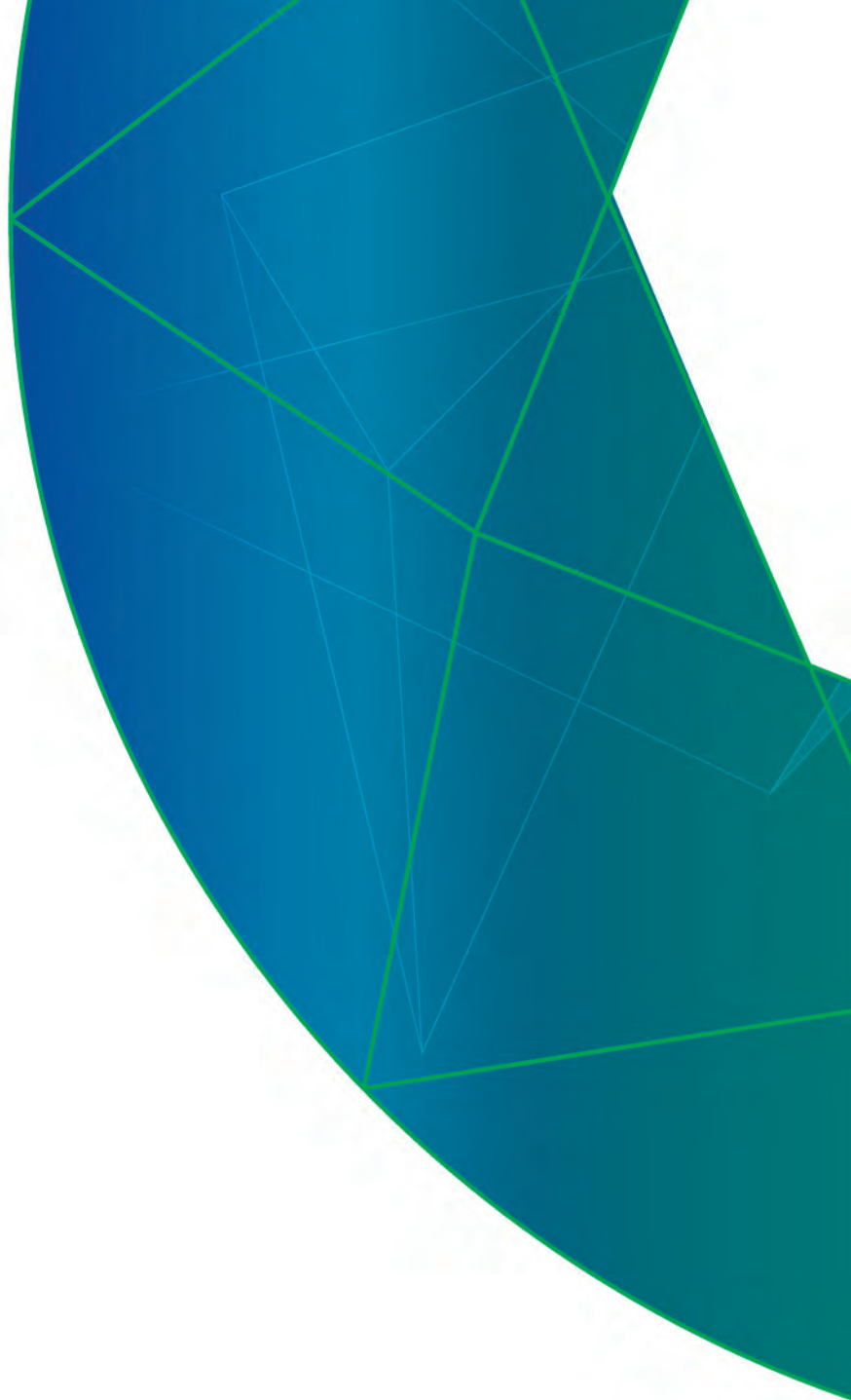
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