Mathematics Education Research Group of Australasia

MERGA 47: Teacher Reads

MERGA 2025

UNLOCKING MINDS IN MATHEMATICS EDUCATION
Canberra, 6-10 July 2025

Giving Underachieving Students a Voice: Exploring Student Perspectives to Improve the GRIN Program

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Many students who underachieve in mathematics have experienced repeated setbacks that erode their confidence, motivation, and engagement. The Getting Ready in Numeracy (GRIN) program aims to re-engage these students by preparing them for upcoming lessons through small-group tutoring focused on language, prior knowledge, and key concepts. While GRIN has been shown to support improved attitudes and participation, most research to date has focused on teacher perspectives. Yet, students themselves, particularly those who have become disengaged, can offer vital insights into how such programs might better meet their needs. Capturing and acting on student voice is therefore an important and often underused strategy for supporting underachieving learners.

To better understand how GRIN could be improved from the perspective of students, we analysed written responses from 311 participants across 2023 and 2024. These students, from Years 1 to 9 and from all school sectors, were invited to suggest one change they would make to the program. We focused our analysis on this open-ended question, using a thematic coding approach to identify common ideas and priorities expressed by the students.

Around one-quarter of students said they wouldn't change anything about GRIN, often describing it as helpful and confidence-building. Among those who suggested changes, the most common request was for more or longer sessions, underscoring how valued the program is by participants. Many also wanted more mathematical games—particularly for practising multiplication facts—suggesting that playful approaches support engagement. Other feedback centred on session timing, with some students concerned about missing other subjects. A smaller group highlighted issues of task difficulty or group composition, though preferences varied. These findings point to both strong student endorsement and the need for responsiveness to individual differences.

While GRIN is broadly valued, there is no one-size-fits-all model. Preferences around session timing, challenge level, and group structure differed widely, suggesting that flexibility at both the program and school level is key. Schools implementing GRIN should regularly reflect on how it is delivered, adjusting features like group composition, scheduling, and activity mix to better support student needs. Actively incorporating student feedback can help ensure GRIN remains a responsive and effective tool for re-engaging students in mathematics.

For more information, please refer to the following paper presented at the 47th Annual Conference of MERGA in July 2025.
Kalogeropoulos, P., Russo, J., Roche, A., & Sullivan, P. (2025). Giving underachieving students a voice: Exploring student perspectives to improve the GRIN program. In S. M. Patahuddin, L. Gaunt, D. Harris & K. Tripet (Eds.), *Unlocking minds in mathematics education. Proceedings of the 47th annual conference of the Mathematics Education Research Group of Australasia* (pp. 221–228). Canberra: MERGA.