



# Philippines Remote Learning Study

## FINDINGS BRIEF #4: STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

### About the study

The Remote Learning Study was conducted during the 2020–2021 school year to investigate how mother-tongue-based multilingual education reading instruction took place in 20 schools around the country while classrooms were closed. The school head, 2 teachers, and 4 home learning partners from each school in Grades 1 and 3 were interviewed to gain insights on school administration, teaching and learning, and the home environment.

Data was collected at three time points—November, March and June—from 20 school heads, 37 teachers and 79 parents. Parents were only contacted in March and June (Occasions [occ] 2 and 3). Children—one boy and one girl in each of the grades—were also asked to fill out a literacy assessment worksheet, but there was inconsistent rate of submission, so no learning outcomes were measured.

This is one of seven briefs prepared based on the results of this study. See [shared.rti.org](https://shared.rti.org) for the full series of briefs.

### More information

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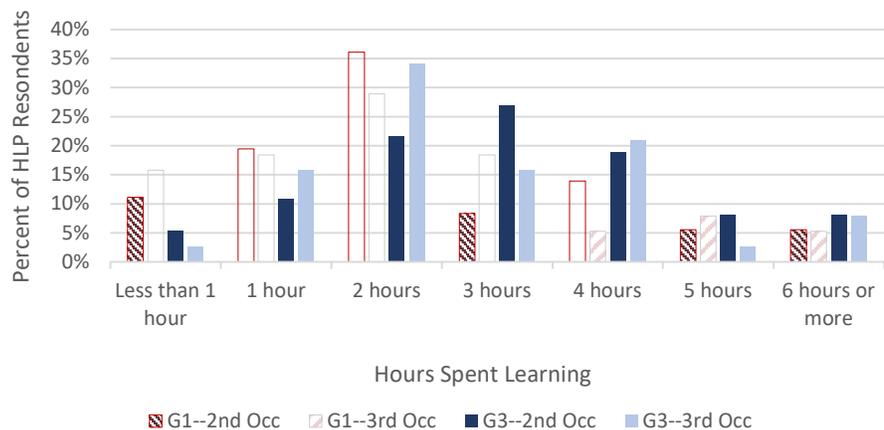
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### Context

In the context of remote learning, which the Philippines, and other countries around the world experienced during the 2020-2021 school year due to the COVID-19 pandemic, supplying self-study learning materials is necessary, but not sufficient to guarantee continuity of learning. For learning to take place, it is important that learners are motivated and engaged. Learning tasks must be carried out with a certain level of intensity, persistence, and quality participation for actual learning to occur. This is no easy task with young learners who had either never been to school (the case with Grade 1 learners) or who previously developed relationships with their teachers and familiarity of school and classroom expectations (the case with Grade 3 learners). It can be especially challenging for home learning partners (HLPs) to provide structure, routines, and learning support that young learners need to keep them focused and on track with their schoolwork. This brief provides information on learners' engagement during home-based learning from a study conducted while schools were closed (see description, at left). It describes challenges experienced and opportunities for keeping children focused and actively involved in their school tasks and on track in their academic development.

All 20 schools we followed over the course of the year used the modular approach (printed self-learning modules delivered to the home or picked up by parents at the school), either as the only delivery modality (50%) or in combination with other delivery modalities, such as online learning (synchronous and asynchronous) or tuning in to radio and television. Regardless of the modality(ies) used or grade of the child, the majority of HLPs from our study reported that **their child, on average, only studied 2 hours a day**. According to HLPs, very few learners studied 5 or 6 hours a day, which is comparable to the time children normally spend engaged in some way when attending DepEd public school in-person. Much of the discussions with HLPs regarding learner engagement centered around the learner's ability to remain interested in and engaged with learning tasks.

Figure 1: Parent Report (n=76) of Hours Per Day Spent Learning



*“It is challenging to get him to sit longer with me to study. He always tells me, ‘You’re not a teacher, Mama. I want to learn with a teacher.’” (HLP)*

*“As time goes by, the learners are less and less motivated to work on the modules. They don’t want to work on the modules.” (School Head, Occasion 2)*

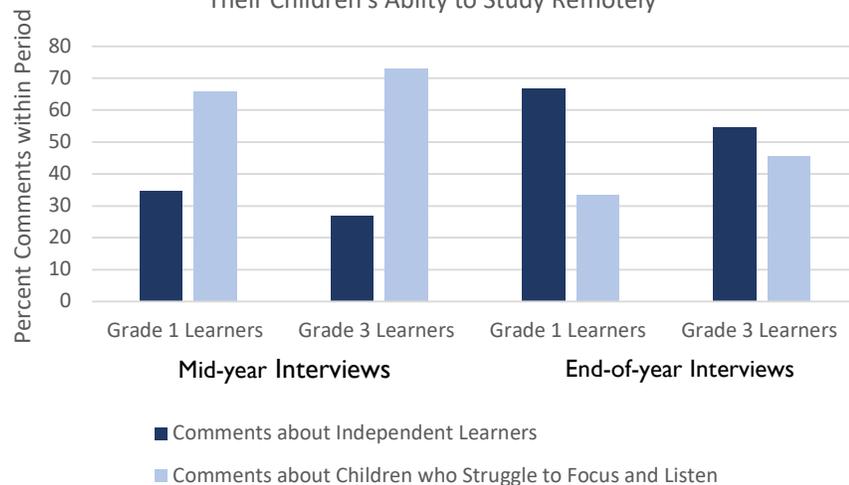
*“Before, the HLPs and the pupils were active in going to school to receive their modules on Mondays and submit it on Thursdays. But recently, some pupils won’t even go to school, it seems like they’re tired with the situation, they won’t receive or submit their modules. It’s like if their interest in learning is in 100%, its now down to 30-50%.” (School Head, Occasion 3)*

Naturally, HLPs also needed to dedicate time to supporting their child’s engagement, especially at this early stage of learning. Most HLPs of Grade 1 children said they spent one or two hours per day (24% and 26% of HLPs, respectively). This did not change from March (occasion 2, mid-year) to June (occasion 3, mid-year). Most Grade 3 HLPs also spent one or two hours per day facilitating learning (34% and 24%, respectively), but there was a noticeable decline from mid-year to end of year—the **majority of HLPs mid-year reported spending 3 or more hours, but by the end of year, the majority was spending less than 3 hours** per day supporting learning.

### Learner Comfort Levels, Focus, and Motivation

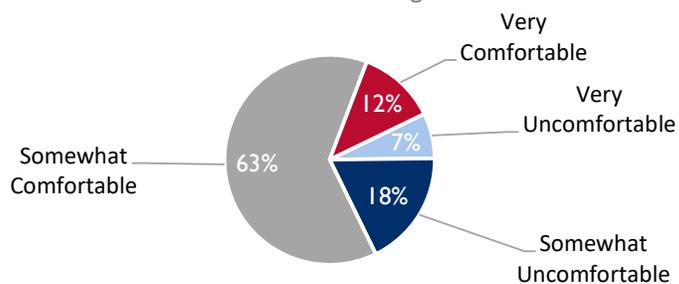
Some HLPs reported during interviews that their children were active in their learning, independent readers and confident. These learners reached out for help when they needed it and even reviewed content and prepared for daily tasks in advance. However, as expected of early grade learners, other HLPs faced many challenges keeping their children focused, especially when children did not listen and preferred to play while at home. Though there were no major differences in HLP responses related to Grade 1 and Grade 3 learners, there was an increase in HLP comments about the independence and confidence of their children from mid-year to end-of-year interviews and a decrease in HLP comments about their children struggling to focus and listen during home learning (See Figure 2 below).

**Figure 2.** Comments from 53 HLPs (36 Mid-year, 17 End-year) on Their Children’s Ability to Study Remotely



By the end of the year, the majority of HLPs (75%) said that their children were either “somewhat comfortable” or “very comfortable” learning from home, and about a quarter of the HLPs indicated that their child was still either “somewhat uncomfortable” or “very uncomfortable”.

**Figure 3:** Parent Report (n=76) of Learners’ Comfort with Remote Learning



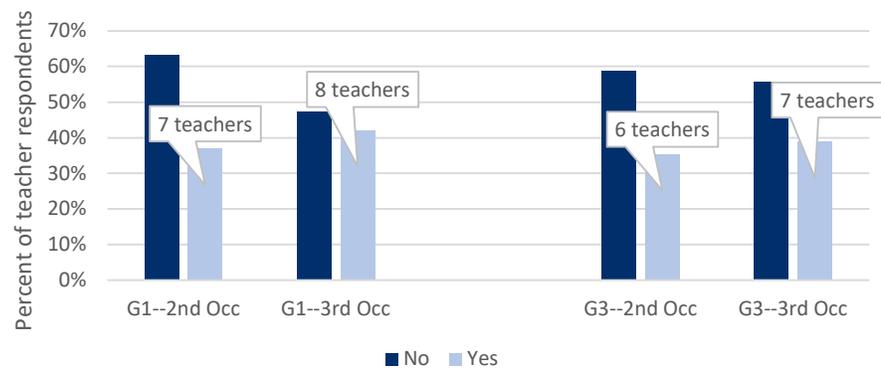
Most HLPs agreed or strongly agreed that their children had the materials they needed to learn to read in the three languages of the curriculum. However, there was a slight tendency for Grade 1 survey respondents to say they did not have the resources they need. Several noted that when their child did not understand or could not do the modules, they became bored, tired, and even cried. Three HLPs noted that their child was unwilling to listen because they simply preferred instruction from their teachers.

<sup>1</sup> USAID, November 2020. Best Practices on Effective SEL/Soft Skills Interventions in Distance Learning <https://www.edulinks.org/sites/default/files/media/file/Remote-SEL-FINAL-508.pdf>

### Teacher-student contact time

Maintaining connections between learners and their teachers is crucial for effective home learning.<sup>1</sup> For young children, regularly connecting with their teacher can make a difference in keeping them engaged at home. Teachers and parents working together to ensure that children spend time on learning is equally important. Children missed their teachers, which could negatively affect their ability to work at home with their parents or independently. This underscores the importance of some direct teacher contact. Almost 60% of teachers in the study (22 of the 37 teachers) were unable to connect with learners in person by the end of the school year (Figure 4), while 40% of teachers visited learners at various and sometimes inconsistent frequencies (Figure 4). By the end of the year, about a third of teachers surveyed held regularly scheduled online classes with learners.

**Figure 4:** Teacher Report: Do you ever meet your students face-to-face?



Most teachers who could visit students did so once per week, for both Grades 1 and 3, although frequent visits were more common for Grade 3 students. There was a slight increase in frequency of once weekly visits for Grade 3 from mid-year to end-of-year.

Given that face-to-face meetings were not possible in most cases, teachers connected with learners and parents using other modalities such as voice calls, online meetings, instant messenger programs, or text messaging. With the limitations in mobility and despite the use of a variety of technologies, many learners were not being reached directly by their teachers.

### Structure and routines

Structure, routine, and a specific timetable are a part of conventional classroom teaching, but much harder to set up and maintain with young children learning from home. Just as teachers had lesson plans, HLPs were given Weekly Home Learning Plans along with self-learning modules to serve as a daily schedule of subjects to follow. The plans were designed to guide HLPs in providing a structure and a timetable to help their children complete weekly learning tasks. Teachers encouraged HLPs to follow the daily schedule as much as possible but allowed them to adapt to accommodate their unique circumstances—balancing domestic chores, working outside the home, and doing home learning support.

*“Each morning I send a message to the learners via their Facebook group chat to remind them of the lessons and tasks for the day. I request them to ‘like’ or ‘heart’ the message if they received and understood it as a way to take attendance.” (Teacher, Occasion 2)*

Some homes lacked a dedicated space for children to work on their modules; some HLPs noted that their children sat on their beds to study while others mentioned their child studied in the living room. However, this was not happening in all households. Even though 87% of HLPs “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that teachers and/or school administrators helped provide structure and routine for home learning, more than half of HLPs surveyed reported that they did not set a time and place for learning. Still, HLPs actively supported their children and in a variety of ways, as shown in Table 1, below.

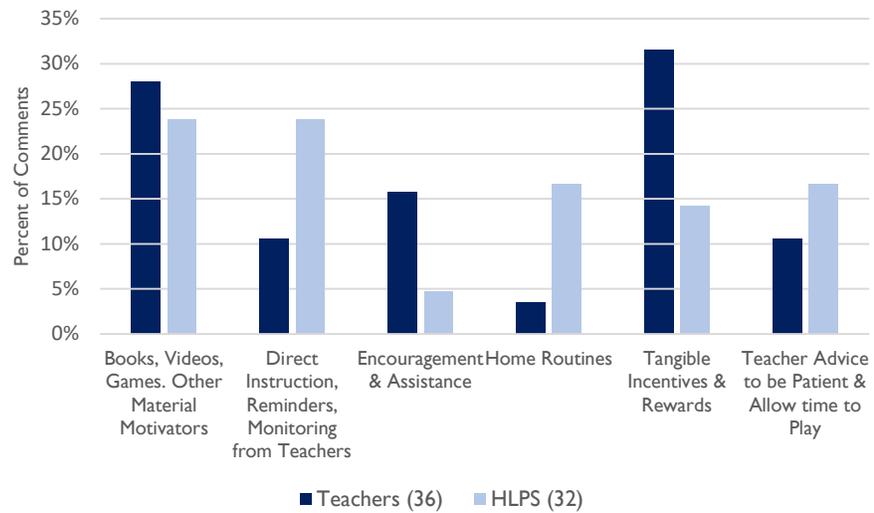
**Table 1: HLP-reported strategies for supporting children (survey responses at occasion 3)**

How do you support your child in remote learning? (N=73 HLPs)	Number of HLPs	% of HLPs
Ensure my child has a set time and place for learning	19	26%
Offer motivation and encouragement	30	41%
Monitor my child to ensure s/he is on task	23	32%
Check to make sure assignments are completed and handed in on time	16	22%
Read with and/or to my child	17	23%
Check/review my child’s completed assignments	13	18%
Provide direct instruction/explanation to my child for new concepts being learned	24	33%
Provide extra assignments/assessments for my child related to concepts being learned	5	7%

**Challenges of and solutions to keeping children engaged in their learning.** Even though HLPs discussed several positive experiences that occurred during remote learning, such as bonding with their child and a sense of satisfaction in helping them and learning themselves, many still had difficulty keeping their children sufficiently engaged to get their weekly tasks completed. As mentioned above, children were not always willing to listen to their parents or stop play activities for home learning, or once they started, they had difficulty staying focused and persevering to complete their work. Children showed signs of boredom, fatigue, and sadness when they did not understand their lessons or felt overwhelmed with the number of pages and activities to be completed. Some school heads and teachers even noticed that learners became less interested and less engaged over time.

Teachers along with HLPs came up with a variety of strategies to keep children engaged. Figure 5, below, shows the percentage of comments made by 36 teachers (*Occasion 1, 2, 3*) and 32 HLPs (*Occasion 2, 3*) who discussed the ways in which they helped to increase learner engagement. Analysis of interview responses confirms some of the results of the survey shown in Table 1 and highlights some other aspects of importance to HLPs. Comments were centered around the use of tangible incentives such as snacks, games, contests, quizzes, and rewards, or providing other and varied materials, including educational YouTube videos. Some HLPs mentioned the teachers’ advice to be patient with their children, not to force them and to provide flexible schedules to accommodate a balance of play and schoolwork. Some home routines were mentioned as being important to keep children focused, including choosing special locations for study and routines that allowed chores to be completed first. Also, teachers’ regularly scheduled visits were mentioned as an important incentive for getting learners’ attention. Finally, HLPs also mentioned their use of encouragement and direct help as important for keeping their children focused on their schoolwork.

**Figure 5:** Approaches to increasing student engagement reported by teachers and HLPs during interviews



## Strategies to Keep Learners Interested and Engaged

To summarize, Philippine teachers and families have gone to great lengths under extraordinary circumstances to keep children engaged and learning from home. There is a strong need and desire for more contact time from the teacher to help this become a reality. Table 2 below summarizes recommendations and strategies used by families in this study.

**Table 2: Summary of strategies and recommendations**

Impedes Learner Engagement	Suggestions to Enhance Learner Engagement
Lack of routine—schedule and designated place—for learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teachers, HLPs, and learners all work together to come up with a schedule that provides the time recommended on the Weekly Home Learning Plan and accommodates the unique family requirements and balance of chores, work schedules outside of the home, study, and play.</li> <li>Establish a mechanism that helps children learn the schedule and track their adherence to the plan. For example, print and post a daily/weekly schedule near the child’s study location or develop a simple chart that uses stickers or checkmarks for the child to track their activities.</li> <li>Teachers must have regular check-ins with HLPs and learners to discuss the success in following the plan and adjust if necessary.</li> <li>Allocate a comfortable and well-lit spot, if possible, for children to study.</li> </ul>
Limited connection between teacher and learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teachers recognize the critical need to regularly connect with their learners and develop a plan to check in directly with learners.</li> <li>Home visits are ideal, but this may not be possible. If not, teachers can work with HLPs to find an agreed-upon time for a phone call or, if possible, an online connection with the learners or a safe in-person meeting in a common location with a small group of children. If phones are not available, a neighbor may be willing to share their phone for the learners to connect with their teachers.</li> </ul>

Impedes Learner Engagement	Suggestions to Enhance Learner Engagement
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>School heads work with teachers to develop a plan so that all children can personally communicate with their teachers, ideally at a minimum of once per week. If home visits are not possible, a plan for online or phone contacts should be arranged; 100% of teachers should be communicating directly with 100% of their learners, ideally no less than once per week.</li> </ul>
<p>HLPs have difficulty keeping their children engaged and focused to complete their assignments</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>HLPs have some good ideas for keeping their learners engaged: use of incentives like snacks, games, making learning fun, and rewards; providing more reading materials, including videos if possible; learning to be patient, allowing children to have relaxation time. Teachers can organize opportunities for HLPs to share with each other some of their positive experiences and to help each other in small groups.</li> <li>Teachers and school heads can invite a school counselor or other counseling or school psychology professional to join the HLPs in their weekly school meetings to help HLPs develop strategies and enhance their children's engagement in their schoolwork.</li> </ul>
<p>Overwhelming volume of content or tasks to complete</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Some teachers have already, on their own, reduced the volume of work that is needed for learners to turn in each week. School heads can help teachers to prioritize assignments when these reductions in learner outputs are required. School heads can also communicate these issues with supervisors in the Division and find solutions together.</li> </ul>
<p>Fatigue with the modules</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Any opportunity to introduce something new in the modules or in addition to the modules—new ways, more fun ways of doing things, new supplementary reading materials, enhancing access to technologies, and other changes—are important for teachers to consider.</li> <li>Creative, socially distanced strategies (or completely remote strategies) to allow fellow classrooms to work together is also recommended. This could change the scenery or the approach for completing assignments in a way that is positive for learning but also supports the learners' well-being.</li> </ul>

Student Eijann at a workspace where he watches a live broadcast of his teacher. (Photo sent by the parent, with permission to reuse)

