Philippines Remote Learning Study

FINDINGS BRIEF #5: OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

Context
The 2020–2021 school year in the Philippines ran from October 2020 to July 2021 and was entirely remote. Children remained at home, and schools distributed printed self-learning modules (SLMs) developed at the central level and printed locally. Where available, some schools engaged in virtual learning. Families could also access Department of Education (DepEd) television episodes or other online resources. Contact between students and teachers remained limited and varied from community to community according to local quarantine restrictions. Among the schools in this study, the following challenges and solutions were mentioned.

Challenges
This study looked at challenges to effective learning for children in the early grades, who are at a critical age for learning foundational literacy and numeracy skills. Teachers identified challenges related to materials, communication with learners, readiness of home learning partners (HLPs) to support learning, and student motivation. The consequence of these challenges is that teachers could not provide sufficient support (e.g., reviewing completed modules, providing feedback, assessing children’s progress) in a context where the teaching method was insufficient for many learners. It is therefore unsurprising that children lacked motivation, which was both a challenge and a consequence of the situation.

Despite these challenges, teachers have persevered in finding solutions to maintain learning continuity and improve the learning experience for all. Nonetheless, the interviews suggested that:

- it is necessary to adjust expectations and prioritize any engagement over strong academic progress;
- schools should continue to promote awareness of the public health situation and to promote safe behaviors; and
- school heads should pay attention to teachers’ morale and well-being.

Materials. The content of self-learning modules was not tailored to different needs, including contextualization for the mother tongues spoken. Some modules were too difficult or contained too many activities. There were delays distributing the modules.

Home Learning Partners: HLPs either did not have the skills (e.g., mother tongue or English language and literacy skills) to support children, or they ended up doing the work for the child. HLPs had a hard time balancing work and teaching support.

Communication. Teachers found it hard to communicate directly with children because of physical distance to them (where home visits were possible) or community restrictions that made visits impossible. Not all families were responsive or had devices or reliable connectivity that could support remote communication.
## Addressing the Challenges

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| **Materials (content and distribution)** | • Communities establish specific schedules and methods for preparing and delivering modules rather than a one-size-fits all process for the region (e.g., parents may come to school to pick up materials at a designated time, or schools may deliver materials to the home).  
• Teachers share the workload related to materials preparation and distribution.  
• Teachers receive printers for home use in order to print and sort materials at home and then distribute to learners.  
• Materials for remote/rural learners are distributed in packages covering several weeks at a time rather than week-by-week.  
• Neighbors or other community members are solicited to help ensure that modules reach the children. |
| **Communication and HLP support** | • Teachers establish a schedule for observations of pupils and parent support either at home, or outside in a safe way (e.g., setting up a tent outside, in proximity to the school, where teachers and students can meet individually or in small groups). (Most teachers were communicating with HLPs at least once a week, if at all, but half of teachers never conducted home visits.)  
• Home visits are prioritized for the youngest learners or those in most difficulty who are unable to learn independently.  
• Where possible, online monitoring and support are done instead of direct monitoring. This includes creation of group chats on mobile applications like WhatsApp, Facebook, or Telegram, which allow HLPs to ask questions about the SLM or receive instructions.  
• Neighbors help each other out by “adopting” learners who do not have HLPs who can help.  
• Two-way radios were used in at least one community without phone or Internet connection.  
• Announcements using megaphone in the village was used in at least one community. |
| **Adapting teaching methods to improve the experience** | • Faculty meet regularly—as much as once per week—to discuss challenges, support each other to find solutions, at school or in Learning Action Cells (cluster meetings). School heads meet with teachers at least once per week to monitor teaching.  
• Reading assessments are administered during home visits to help identify gaps.  
• Repeat or review instruction across multiple lessons in case some children missed the first time.  
• If module printing is delayed and when students lose motivation, teachers think of other activities for the learners to do (e.g., drawing, coloring, creating a video that is sent to parents) or they adopt and contextualize materials from other regions that were ready on time.  
• Reduce the number of activities in a module to be more manageable; slow down the pace of instruction.  
• Translate modules into local languages  
• Use of videos for providing instruction on reading, including pronunciation and sound blending and for assessing student reading as HLPs send videos of students reading.  
• Augment modules with teacher-developed Learning Activity Sheets and supplementary reading materials (SLMs), which provide targeted practice.  
• Maximize the use of textbooks to serve as reference and provide examples, which the modules lack.  
• Strive to provide blended learning (modules and online courses), actively mobilizing programs and monetary contributions to cover load for those who do not have access. |
The complete series of briefs on key topics from this study provide the following recommendations:

**Literacy Instructional Practice**
- Increase opportunities for teachers to have direct contact with students, if not in person, then by regular phone contacts or if possible online learning.
- Use audio- and video-communications and exchange of recordings to keep abreast of their students’ reading progress. All possible ways to give phone and/or internet access to families should be made.
- Share audio- and video-presentations across schools to support more widespread use of these instructional good practices.

**School Leadership**
- Pay attention to school head burnout and fatigue; look for ways to support the school heads in administrative tasks, especially module printing and distribution. This may be an opportunity for private sector partnership to take a larger role where there are commercial printers in the area.
- Continue to encourage all school personnel to support one another socially and emotionally to cope with the changing workloads and stresses of the remote learning model.

**Student Engagement**
- 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.
- Establish a mechanism that helps children learn the schedule and track their adherence to the plan.
- Allocate a comfortable and well-lit spot, if possible, for children to study.
- 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. School heads should make it a priority to ensure that 100% of teachers communicate directly with 100% of their learners, ideally no less than once per week.
- Use incentives like snacks, games, making learning fun, and rewards to keep children engaged. Provide more reading materials, including videos if possible; be patient, and allow 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.
- Seek creative, socially distanced strategies (or completely remote strategies) to allow classmates (even from different class sections, if in the same geographic proximity) to work together. 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.

*Make it a priority to ensure that 100% of teachers communicate directly with 100% of their learners, ideally no less than once per week.*
Use of Technology

- Schools and teachers should be encouraged to use a combination of sustainable low, medium, and high-tech approaches to teaching to ensure students are learning at home but prioritize the simplest technologies that are available and familiar to teachers, students and parents.

- Schools should make certain that teachers have the opportunity to learn how to use digital technologies for their own professional development and for teaching. At minimum, school orientations should include training on the use of digital technologies for parents along with guidance on the self-learning modules and weekly home learning plans.

- Parents and teachers should be given load allowances to facilitate communication and online access.

- Over the course of the school year, DepEd expanded the availability of educational television and radio. For young learners who cannot yet read books or other self-learning modules, this media can ease the burden on parents and provide important educational enrichment for children.

- Teachers need to be made aware of how to access DepEd TV and other digital media for reus

Teaching and Learning Materials

- To support children’s multiliteracy development, parents may need simple reference materials like dictionaries if they are not fluent speakers of the languages (especially English).

- All families should have sufficient school supplies, including writing boards (blackboards, white boards). Inequities are apparent when it comes to technology (devices and connectivity), but this study also revealed that even basic school supplies and learning resources are not available to all.

- Home learning partners need more orientation sessions on how to use the self-learning modules. (See also Brief #1 for more information about how HLPs have been supported).

- Increase access to libraries, and mobile libraries for remote areas where families can borrow books and other learning materials or access the internet for downloadable activities.

- Many parents are resourceful finding supplementary resources online or in bookstores. Schools and teachers should leverage this curiosity and ability to draw attention to quality controlled and curated resources. Importantly, teachers need to be given the flexibility to deviate from the strict curriculum when printed modules are delayed, are too difficult for HLPs to support, or when children are losing motivation or have differing needs.

Assisting Home Learning Partners

- Given the importance of home visits, consider whether classroom assignments can be based on proximity to the teacher rather than only by grade level. This may work where School Divisions allow multi-grade classes and teachers have this experience and technical capacity. Particularly considering the likelihood of missed learning in 2020-2021,
there may not be as much of a difference between, e.g., KG and G1, or G1 and G2 students as in the past.

- Prioritize and differentiate the frequency or duration of visits based on individual learner and family needs, with more frequent visits or longer visits for the learners who need support the most. Reevaluate needs regularly.

- Where multigrade assignments are not possible, a system of team teaching can help ensure all families are visited by a teacher at least once and provide guidance to parents even if the child is still following the curriculum and lessons of a different grade level teacher.

- Increase recruitment of parateachers or other aides who can be on site for module distribution and can walk through the modules with parents and show them instructions. Instructions may also be provided by recorded video by an experienced teacher and made available when they come pick up modules, or if they have a mobile, internet connected device at home.

- Schools or parent leaders in communities should continue to set up times for socially-distanced outside meetings among parents so that they can work together to find solutions to some of their challenges in providing guidance for learning and managing their students and resistance to learning.

- Walk HLPs (many parents had older siblings help) through weekly activities, with a primary focus on ONE high impact activity, e.g., reading a sentence, word of the week, or blending words.

- Make more use of WhatsApp, Viber or other mobile messaging services to keep HLPs connected, provide tips, or survey HLPs more regularly to gauge their successes and understand their failures, but some families may need financial support for mobile connectivity.

- Provide orientation and support to HLPs on how to use the SLM, how to access other digital resources, and encourage more use of media, especially television and radio lessons when possible, which provide authentic audio stimuli needed for multilingual development (especially English language which is a reported area of weakness for teachers).

- Maintain an open line of communication, teachers sending encouraging messages to HLPs, and communicating more often were strategies that they said helped to improve HLP engagement.