

Philippines Remote Learning Study

FINDINGS BRIEF #6: SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

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 proceeded in 20 schools around the country while classrooms were closed. The school head, teachers and families of Grades 1 and 3 students were interviewed to gain insights on school administration, teaching and learning, and the home environment.

Sample

Data was collected at three time points—November, March and June—from 20 school heads, 37 teachers and 79 parents. Not all respondents were available at each time point. No home learning partners and only 7 teachers were interviewed in November as recruitment was still underway, but all school heads participated in the first occasion (November 2020).

School heads were mostly women (73%) and over the age of 41 (60%). For 13 schools with data available, 6 had no change in enrolment (within +/- 10 from the year before), 3 had increased enrolment, and 4 had decreased enrolment as of November 2020.

More information

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Context

An effective school leader engages in a range of critical instructional, administrative, and interpersonal tasks every day to create the conditions needed for teaching and learning. The Remote Learning Study, carried out by the USAID/All Children Reading–Philippines activity in 2020 and 2021, defined and investigated three broad themes related to school leadership. These themes were based on a review of literature, including the *Philippines Professional Standards for School Heads* (see text box). This brief looks at the extent to which school heads were able to continue providing instructional leadership, teacher support, and stakeholder relationships after schools closed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Elements of School Leadership

Instructional Leadership: Articulates vision, goals, curricular expectations; monitors teachers and learner progress; innovates and solves problems; present and visible; assessment of learning; use of evaluation results.

Teacher Support: Attends to professional development and well-being of self and teachers; performance management, coaching, and observation; awareness, responsiveness, and support to teachers' psycho-social needs; rewards and recognition.

Connections with Families and Communities. Reaches out to keep home learning partners involved and/or to community members for support. This may include engaging in partnerships that generate resources for the school.

New Administrative Roles. First, in this “new normal” of the coronavirus pandemic, school heads had to adapt quickly to changing needs. They were nearly unanimous in reporting that they “strongly agreed” that their **instructional and administrative responsibilities** had both increased. During interviews, school heads expressed several ways in which their roles changed, including having to manage copying and distribution of modules and sharing this responsibility with teachers. Schools had to borrow, buy, or rent printers and constantly renew ink and paper supplies. School heads set up systems for monitoring the distribution and collection of modules; some identified lead home learning partners (HLPs) for delivery or collection from homes, others called on barangay officials for support; and they all established schedules for HLPs to pick up and drop off printed modules at the school. Despite these efforts, in the beginning of the school year, printing and distribution of modules weighed heavily on teachers and school heads and took time away from instructional delivery. The feeling that **their workloads had increased** was highest mid-year, when 83% of school heads said that they “strongly agreed” that their overall workload had increased (up from 50% at the start of the year; N=16). By the last interview, all 20 school heads answered the question, and 70% strongly agreed that their workload had increased.

On the other hand, school heads also agreed that they required more support, but were getting all the support that they needed from district, regional, and central offices. Agreement with this assertion consistently increased over the course of the year, with 85% of school heads agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement. Additionally, most of the school heads felt confident in their transition

“Our teachers are like factory workers now because of the printing, sorting, and distribution of modules. They complain of back aches because of the printing. Some teachers even hired assistants to help them in the photocopying, sorting, and putting together the modules.” (School Head)

“During the first quarter, I felt so stressed in downloading the modules, printing, and sorting. I handled two subjects this school year. But as we go along this 3rd quarter, we embraced the modalities. The teachers help one another in making reports, assisting and sharing ideas in the new normal.” (School Head)

“I thought since it's a pandemic, there won't be a lot of work (laughs). It's actually more and too much.” (School Head)

to the new normal, and half of them “strongly agreed” by the end of the school year that they had seamlessly transitioned to the new normal (compared to being neutral or agreeing) earlier in the year. Only two schools reported some ambivalence that did not improve by the end of the year.

Instructional Leadership

Early in the school year (the first data were collected in November) most school heads agreed that teachers had been sufficiently oriented to teaching in the selected learning delivery modalities for their schools, whereas only 25% “strongly agreed.” By the end of the school year, 80% “strongly agreed.” This was likely due to a range of in-service training opportunities that were held (i.e., during term breaks) and a range of professional development opportunities that were offered virtually or in person over the course of the year.

Setting expectations for instruction is the first step to supporting teachers; 18 of 20 school heads reported that they had established performance targets for student reading achievement, and 100% of school heads set expectations for teachers to regularly assess student progress and to give feedback. Most school heads (80%, or 16 of 20 schools) set expectations for teachers to assess their students' progress and provide feedback at least once per week. One school head expected teachers to assess students twice per month, and three school heads only expected teachers to assess and provide feedback monthly.

Monitoring Teacher Performance. In the absence of direct observation of teachers in classrooms, school heads had to develop creative ways to monitor teacher and student performance. School heads mentioned the following alternatives to conventional classroom observations:

- Reviewing of reports, which included daily logs of accomplishments and accompanying “means of verification” such as pictures, videos, and screen shots;
- Holding weekly meetings with teachers to discuss performance and challenges;
- Accompanying teachers on home visits to directly observe their interactions with parents and students;
- Observing interactions with parents and/or students when they came to school for socially distanced meetings;
- Scheduling Learning Action Cells (LACs) designed to allow teachers to demonstrate how they delivered instructions followed by feedback from their peers;
- Monitoring teacher interactions with parents during regularly scheduled Facebook Group Chats, radio-based instruction, or online teaching; and
- Monitoring through adapted tools, including the “checklist assessment tool”, whereby teachers check the areas they are struggling.

In some schools, school heads made use of master teachers and assistant school heads to support the monitoring and supervision of teachers. At least one school head in our sample also developed a system to help teachers monitor students and identify which students were struggling, using a template to check modules that were distributed and returned, and the students' performance.

Responsive Instructional Support. Interview findings revealed the responsive nature of school heads' instructional leadership. During interviews, school heads and teachers both commented on the openness of communications and the availability and approachability of school heads, which made it easy for teachers to share their concerns and to resolve specific challenges together.

“As a leader you should not always be on top. It’s not that [if] you are a leader you are always right, you also need to listen to them, what are their sentiments, go to their levels, because not all the time you are correct. [You] listen to your subordinates so that you can cater to their sentiments.” (School Head)

“[We cope with] first, the never-ending support from our school head and second, help from my colleagues.” (Teacher)

“I have managed to cope with the help and support of our school head, where she showed her effort and guidance to us teachers. I and my colleagues help one another to adjust in our situation.” (Teacher).

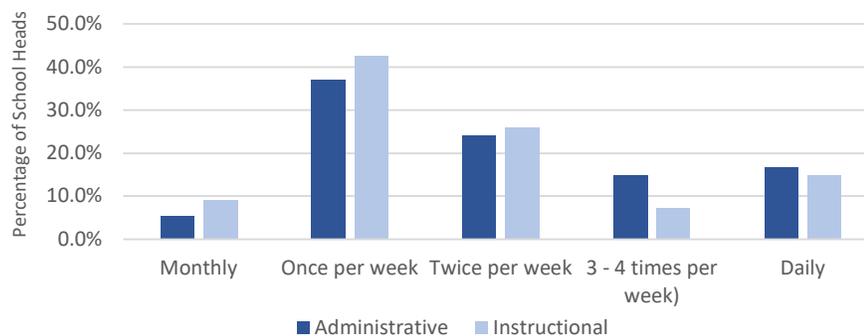
Most school heads (94%, 15 of 16 respondents) used input from teachers or other stakeholders to solve problems or identify solutions for effective implementation of the learning continuity plan at the start of the school year. In addition to responsive support and general tips on instruction for remote learning, teachers received specific guidance from school heads. For example, school heads “convinced and encouraged” teachers to reach out to students, to communicate regularly with HLPs, and to speak kindly in all circumstances.

Teacher Support

Formal Platforms for Teacher Support. School leadership always involves attention to continuous professional development, even more in this context where there was so much for teachers to learn about the new modalities, the modified curriculum, health and safety protocols, and more. School heads addressed this by surveying teachers’ needs and organizing LACs that were responsive to these needs. School heads organized training sessions centered on using computers and onboarding the use of technologies such as Google Classroom and videoconferencing. They also set up regularly scheduled LACs, held in a socially distanced, face-to-face format at schools or remotely, for teachers to demonstrate and receive peer feedback on providing instruction in remote learning. During a virtual LAC session, one school head encouraged teachers to submit video lessons that could be featured and discussed by peers. LAC sessions and regularly scheduled faculty meetings provided a formal platform for teachers to share with each other some of the challenges their students and HLPs were facing and to help each other find solutions.

Frequency of School Head Instructional Support Communications. Figure 1 shows how often school heads communicated best practices for the teaching of reading and administrative matters to teachers. School heads communicated slightly more frequently with teachers about administrative matters than instructional matters. This pattern did not change over the course of the year, with the most frequent response being “once per week” at all three time points, for both categories. However, 31% of school heads said they communicated on administrative matters more than twice per week, compared to 22% who communicated about instructional matters this often. While most school heads communicated instructional best practices to teachers once or more a week, there were 5 who communicated only once a month.

Figure 1: Average frequency of communicating instructional best practices and administrative matters (School Heads, N=20)

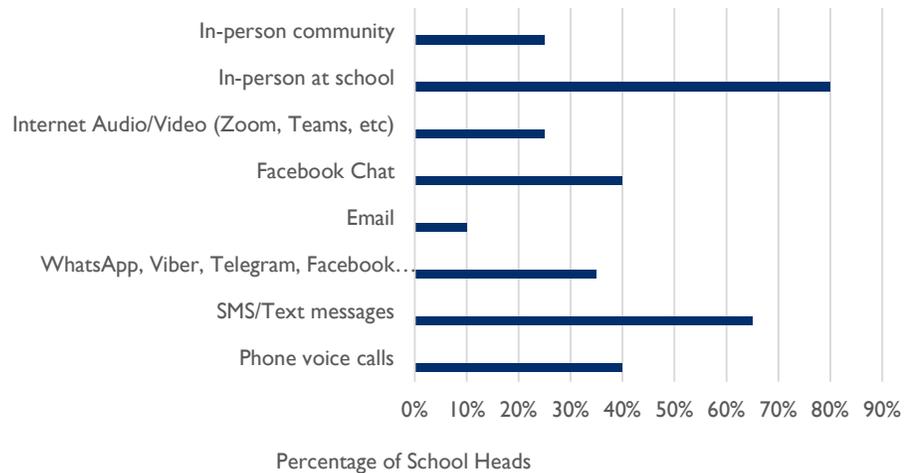


Over the course of the school year, 6 school heads reported increased frequency of providing teacher feedback, whereas 5 reported decreased frequency (the other 9 either reported no change, or the responses both increased and decreased).

Modalities of School Head Communication. School heads communicated with teachers in a variety of ways, from individual phone calls to online platforms

such as Zoom or Google Classroom. These communication modalities also changed over the course of the school year. The following chart shows the distribution of school head use of different modalities across the school year. Note that these were not mutually exclusive methods, as school heads used a variety of communication modalities, with text messaging and in-person communications at the school being the most frequent—65% or more of school heads used text messaging, and over 80% communicated in person at the school. Individual phone calls, WhatsApp and other messenger technologies, and Facebook Chat were also popular choices, used by more than a third of the school heads.

Figure 2: Modality of school head communications to teachers (n=20)



“We conduct psychological seminars for the teachers, and there are insets conducted to help stressed out teachers. Sometimes we have bonding, like outings, swimming for teachers to become stress free.” (School Head)

“I’m in constant communication with the teachers, inspire them, advise them not to worry too much. I make sure that I’m not a source of stress but of comfort.” (School Head)

Social and Emotional Support to Teachers. Findings also showed that school heads were responsive to teachers’ social and emotional needs and attended to their well-being as well. All school heads reported that the school supported strategies to ensure that teachers connected with one another, including teacher training for stress management and organizing “bonding experiences” such as outside recreation or swimming, in the case of one school. Ensuring teachers maintained professional connections with their peers is key to well-being during remote learning as these connections are placed at risk under social distancing.

Many school heads take special care to regularly send “good vibe” text messages and to have one-on-one communications with their teachers to ensure there is an opportunity to discuss personal challenges they are facing.

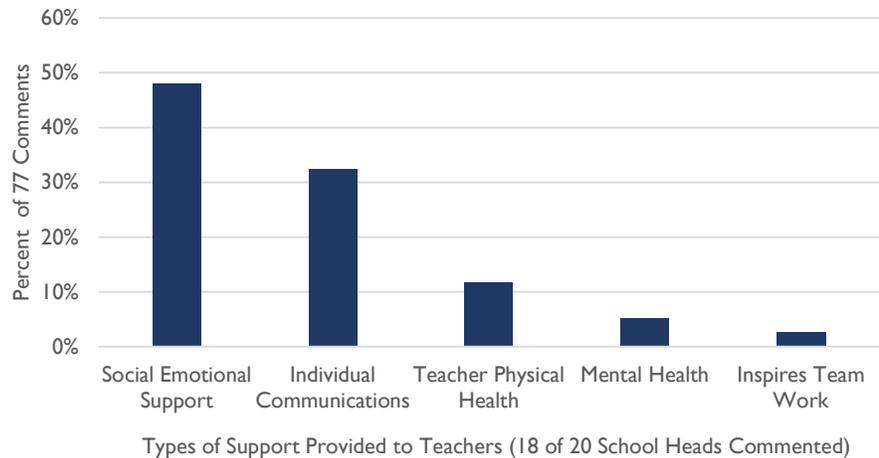
During interviews, teachers spoke to the openness and approachability of school heads, and school heads discussed the priorities they placed on giving teachers a chance to discuss both personal and professional challenges. Interview comments from both school heads and teachers centered on open communications to support psycho-social well-being.

80% of school head comments about their support for teacher wellbeing referenced social and emotional wellbeing (48%) or provision of regular individual communications to address personal and teaching challenges (32%), see Figure 3. School heads are also cognizant of the physical health challenges that teachers may be facing, including that of family members, and some have taken special care to ensure teachers know where to obtain psycho-social support or to organize webinars on mental health.

“I ask them [teachers] what their needs are. I ask them how they are. I just guide them based on what they need. Sometimes when they are in school working on modules, it also serves as their time to express their feelings and anxieties. This kind of activity serves as their debriefing session, too, and everybody becomes each other’s sounding board. Somehow, it also gets them closer to each other while working on these tasks.” (School Head)

“We give at least a little bit of help and constantly talk to the parents to ease their worries, as well as encourage them that we have to keep going and survive.” (School Head)

Figure 3. Types of School Head Support for Teacher Wellbeing (Collected from Beginning, Mid-Year, and End-of-Year Interviews)



School Head Connections with Families and Community

School heads reported that they were active in supporting families directly and through the teachers in their schools in a variety of ways. Many school heads took the lead in organizing regular meetings and “kamustahans” (check-ins) with HLPs. About half of the school heads communicated with HLPs once a month, while the other half communicated more frequently, with check-ins happening weekly. Sometimes online or Zoom meetings were scheduled, but most of the HLP check-ins were held at the school. In order to maximize the opportunities to meet and guide parents and maintain social distancing, school heads organized staggered times for parents to come into the school to collect modules, receive instructions from teachers, and discuss their challenges. For example, one school head organized home room meetings on different days for different grades, scheduling no more than 15 students at a time. Some school heads reinforced social distancing by limiting the time that an HLP had at the school.

In addition to providing administrative support and logistical planning to organize socially distanced visits to schools for as many HLPs as possible, school heads worked with teachers to develop mechanisms for reaching hard-to-reach households and supporting households that are struggling in providing home learning support. This involved the following:

- Planning logistics of teacher visits and transportation (e.g., taking motorcycles);
- Mobilizing village and block leaders in the community or the barangay to deliver and collect materials to families;
- Engaging parent leaders to bridge communications and check-in with families;
- Encouraging parents to tap into neighborhood resources for communications (sharing phones, for example) or assisting in the support of learners; the “Bayanihan of neighbors” to provide supplemental learner support, especially when parents were working outside of the home;
- Organizing schoolwide programs to mobilize community support such as “Pagtutulungan sa Pagbasa sa Panahon ng Pandemya” or “Helping Each Other Read in the Time of Pandemic” where the school identified high-school students, college students, and capable parents as community

“The school (school head and teachers) allow us to go to school, they would inform us what to do and asked us if we have questions or struggle at home. They allow each parent to stay for 30 minutes to avoid too much crowding in the school vicinity.” (Parent)

partners to facilitate learners who don't have capable parents to help them in answering their modules;

- Personally visiting households of students who have difficulty in learning or are thinking of dropping from class, to talk with HLPs and try to solve issues together so the child can continue attending classes, including coordination with barangay officials as assistance if needed; and
- Filling the gaps in feeding that arose when schools closed. For example, school heads organized food packs and provided bags of rice for families and feeding schemes or milk provisions have been organized for families when they come to collect or drop off modules.

School heads also helped to mobilize support from Local Government Units by keeping them informed of the schools' needs and motivating their contributions; for example, to help with the printing of materials and/or to provide Internet connectivity. Mobilizing programs and stakeholders to contribute the costs of load for sharing videos, group chat has been a focus of many school heads. One school head, at the time of the interview, was actively working with the Rotary Club to develop an Internet hub and another helped teachers and HLPs access internet through WIFI zones in the community. One school head sought private sector support to donate load to families who need access by launching a Project Load initiative.

In spite of these contributions and school heads' efforts to mobilize community support, there were mixed feelings about the contributions of communities in supporting distance learning. Three school heads and 6 teachers reported that the communities had not contributed anything, yet others (2 school heads and 7 teachers) felt communities were helpful. Thus, more can be done to garner community support, and school heads may need support from their Divisions to engage more productively with community.

Recommendations

- 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.
- Recognize and support the creative efforts of school heads in mobilizing community support -- private, neighborhood, and public contributions.