



All Children Reading—Philippines

Philippines Remote Learning Study 2020–2021 School Year Findings Report

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List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

BARMM	Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao
BE-LCP	Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan
COVID-19	coronavirus disease 2019
DepEd	Philippines Department of Education
EGRA	Early Grade Reading Assessment
HLP	home learning partner
MOOE	maintenance and other operating expenses
SLM	self-learning module
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

1. Introduction

In June 2020 the Philippines Department of Education (DepEd) adopted the Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan (BE-LCP), a framework to guide the 2020–2021 school year in light of school closures that started in March 2020, during the final weeks of the 2019–2020 school year. The plan introduced an adjusted and condensed curriculum, the Most Essential Learning Competencies, to support schools and teachers in delivering learning through alternative modalities in lieu of face to face classes.

DepEd also modified the 2020–2021 school calendar to start October 5, 2020, and end in June 2021. The school year typically runs from June through March in the Philippines, but regions, divisions, and schools needed additional time to prepare and operationalize the BE-LCP. For example, regions were tasked with determining appropriate remote learning¹ delivery modalities based on local context. Approaches were further adapted and defined at the individual school level as schools contextualized the learning continuity plan.

Given DepEd’s decentralized approach to contextualizing and ensuring learning continuity for learners, it became clear that remote learning would look vastly different across regions, divisions, and within schools. Subsequently, this mixed-methods study was designed to take an in-depth look at schools and families across the country to understand their experiences with teaching and learning during school closures—and particularly to understand how early language and literacy learning can best be supported in the distance learning context.

2. Methodology

2.1 Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to investigate the experience of school heads, teachers, home learning partners (HLPs), and students during the first year of remote learning in the 2020–2021 school year. Another study, which was designed before the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) school closures, had planned to investigate what elements of leadership, teaching and learning, and mother-tongue based multilingual education implementation best explained the performance outliers in Grade 3 reading before and after introduction of mother tongue as medium of instruction, based on findings from the 2013 to 2019 national Early Grade Reading Assessments (EGRAs).² The purpose of the study was changed when it became apparent that data collection in schools, including classroom observations, would be impossible because of school closures and limited mobility in communities that took place in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

While maintaining the same sample of schools, the focus shifted to a study of the remote learning experience of school actors; school heads, teachers, parents and other HLPs, and learners. To this end, we turned our attention to: (1) the ability of school heads to apply established school leadership standards in the remote learning context; (2) the extent of learning continuity based on the dimensions given by the United Nations Children’s Fund

¹ Used interchangeably with distance learning modalities

² See Pouezevara, S., Pressley, J., & Cummiskey, C. (2019). *2019 National Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA): English and Filipino, Grade 3. Findings report*. Prepared for USAID under the All Children Reading-Philippines Project, AID-OAA-TO- 16-00017. Research Triangle Park, NC: RTI. <https://shared.rti.org/content/2019-national-early-grade-reading-assessment-egra-english-and-filipino-grade-3-findings>

(UNICEF) framework;³ (3) school head, teacher, HLP, and learner experiences of well-being and how this was supported; and (4) the resilience of schools and school actors based on the adaptations they made to address the many challenges faced in maintaining continuity of learning during distance learning. The study focused on language and literacy instruction for kindergarten to Grade 3 learners and addressed four overarching research questions, as follows:

1. What was the experience of school heads during remote learning in the 2020–2021 school year?
2. What were the teachers', HLPs', and learners' experiences of language and literacy teaching and learning during remote learning in the 2020–2021 school year?
3. What school, teacher, family, and learner factors are catalysts or barriers to remote teaching and learning during remote learning in the 2020–2021 school year?
4. Did schools that were more successful in language and literacy instruction, evidenced by increased EGRA scores from 2013–2019, create conditions for maximally supporting continuity of learning during the pivot to remote learning in the 2020–2021 school year or was performance in remote learning more likely to be associated with conditions in the home and community?

2.2 Design

We adopted a mixed-methods study design, including both quantitative survey methodologies and qualitative inquiry, with data collected through either online surveys or phone interviews.

2.2.1 Sample Design

School Selection. Twenty schools were purposefully selected based on their aggregate change in Grade 3 reading performance in Filipino and English from the 2013 to the 2019 National Grade 3 EGRA. We chose 10 schools whose average oral reading fluency score increased, despite their being remote or low resource schools, and chose 10 whose performance decreased, despite their having conditions typically associated with higher performance such as high socioeconomic status. **Table 1** shows the geographic distribution of the sampled schools.

Table 1. Sampled Schools by Super Region

Super Region	Number of Schools (n=20)
North Luzon: (r1, r2, r3, car)	3
South Luzon: (r4a, r4b, r5)	4
Visayas: (r6, r7, r8)	4
Mindanao: (r9, r10, r11, r12, r13)	3
Metro Manila: (National Capital Region)	2
Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM)	4

³ Alam, A., & Tiwari, P. (2020). Putting the 'learning' back in remote learning: Policies to uphold effective continuity of learning through COVID-19. Office of Global Insight and Policy, Issue Brief. UNICEF. In *Education and COVID-19 Pandemic*, 1-6.

Participant Selection. School heads provided the Grade 1 and Grade 3 enrollment lists. In each school, one Grade 1 class and one Grade 3 class were randomly selected, and the teachers in the selected classes were asked to participate in the study. If they declined, an alternate class was selected. Subsequently, one boy and one girl from each of the selected Grade 1 and Grade 3 classes were randomly selected as well as a replacement student to include in the event that the parents of the original student selected did not provide consent or wish to participate.

2.3 Data Collection

School head and teacher data were collected through phone interviews (semi-scripted, open-ended questions) and online surveys (multiple-choice, close-ended questions). HLP data were collected via phone interviews that included a mix of open-ended questions (e.g., qualitative interviews) and closed-ended questions (e.g., survey questions). Trained data collectors conducted (and recorded) phone interviews. Following the interview, data collectors transcribed and translated notes for each question in the interview protocol.

Data were collected at three timepoints throughout the 2020–2021 school year (beginning, middle, and end of the year). Occasion 1 data were collected from November 5–December 23, 2020, in 17 of the 20 sampled schools. Occasion 2 data were collected from March 18–April 23, 2021, in all 20 schools. Occasion 3 data were collected from May 30–June 25, 2021, in 20 schools. These data are summarized in **Table 2**.

Table 2. Summary of Responses by Occasion

Number of responses	Occasion 1 Nov. 10–Jan. 8	Occasion 2 Mar. 18–April 26	Occasion 3 May 30–July 1
School Heads (Sample = 20)			
Phone interviews	15	20	20
Online surveys	16	18	20
Teachers (Sample = 40)			
Phone interviews	7	40	30
Online surveys	11	38	39
HLPs (Sample = 80)			
Phone interviews	N/A	73	76

2.4 Data Analyses

The following analysis framework was used for data analysis, based on the focus areas of investigation: school leadership, continuity of learning, well-being, and resilience/adaptation. The various elements within these overarching focus areas that were analyzed are given below in **Table 3**.

Table 3. Analysis Framework

School Leadership					
Instructional Leadership		Teacher Support		Resource Management & Outreach	
Continuity of Learning					
Curriculum & Content	Pedagogy	Student Motivation & Engagement	HLP Facilitation	Assessment	Resources
Well-Being			Resilience/Adaptation		
Teacher, School Head, HLP, Learner			School, Teacher, HLP Adaptations		

Descriptive analyses were used to analyze the quantitative data generated from the school head, teacher, and HLP surveys by generating frequency tables for each question by each occasion of data collection. To understand the differential responses for schools across the dimensions of continuity of learning (see table above), additional frequency analyses were conducted for questions relevant to each continuity of learning dimension by school.

Using qualitative data analysis software, the open-ended responses collected through phone interviews were coded according to the analysis framework given in the table above and analyzed according to emerging themes and according to common narratives that crossed these thematic areas.

These findings are reported below by means of two separate mechanisms. First, using these analysis findings, the team developed school case studies for 10 of the 20 participating schools that had the most complete data from all rounds and also represented a range of contexts. Second, based on data from all schools, we generated briefs that relate to both the research questions of the study and the focus areas from the analysis framework above.

2.5 Methodological Limitations

- The study sample is relatively small and therefore not generalizable to populations and schools outside of this sample.
- School heads participated in all three occasions of data collection; only a small number of teachers participated in all three occasions; and HLPs only participated in Occasion 2 and Occasion 3, but not Occasion 1. (This was because the participant enrollment process had not been completed, in the case of teachers and HLPs).
- In a few cases, participants, once fully enrolled in the study, were not able to participate in all occasions of data collection. If a school head or teacher was unavailable on any occasion, data from that participant were missing.
- The questions in the surveys and interviews were designed such that participants self-reported based on their personal beliefs and experiences. This can result in self-reporting bias.
- The study relies solely on survey and interview responses and did not include any observation or measurement of student learning/performance except for some limited review of student-generated homework and writing samples. These samples were not returned by all children and were not a standardized measurement that could be objectively compared to others.

3. Findings

3.1 Summary of Findings Briefs

3.1.1. Introduction

Findings in this study, based on analysis of data in all participating schools, were compiled into a set of seven findings briefs that summarize the different elements of the analysis framework presented in Table 3 of this report, which are:

- School Leadership
- Continuity of Learning
- Well-Being
- Resilience/Adaptation

In sum, the findings briefs describe the various ways in which school communities, that is, school heads, teachers, HLPs, and learners, adapted to and used remote learning modalities for teaching and learning during the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure continuity of learning and describe the challenges faced and what school heads, teachers, and HLPs did to overcome them. The following is the list of the findings briefs. The findings briefs in their entirety can be found in **Appendix 1**.

- Brief # 1. Supporting Home Learning Partners
- Brief # 2. Teaching and Learning Materials
- Brief # 3. Use of Technology
- Brief # 4. Student Engagement
- Brief # 5. Overcoming Challenges
- Brief # 6. School Leadership
- Brief # 7. Literacy Instructional Practices

The ensuing paragraphs summarize the content of and recommendations given in each of the briefs and address two of the four research questions in this study: *Research Question 1: What is the experience of school heads during remote learning in the 2020–2021 school year?* and *Research Question 2: What was the experience of teachers, learners and HLPs during remote learning in the 2020–2021 school year?* The summary briefs have been organized to answer the relevant research questions.




3.1.2. Experience of School Heads

Research Question 1: What is the experience of school heads during remote learning in the 2020–2021 school year?

Brief #6. School Leadership. The school leadership brief underscores the crucial role of school head leadership in supporting the transition to remote learning and successful implementation of remote learning and continuity of learning. Regular, open communications with teachers and the provision of learning action cells to provide opportunities for teachers and school head support to work through instructional challenges together were the most common mechanisms for providing instructional support to teachers. However, not all the schools were able to have learning action cell (i.e., school cluster) meetings or conduct them regularly throughout the school year. Notably, most school heads supported teachers' psycho-social well-being through their openness to discuss personal matters. Community outreach in remote learning was a critical role for the school head, and some school heads—

but not all—were successful in securing equipment, consumables for printing, and assistance for learners in households struggling with home learning. Overall, school heads stated that they felt supported by the regional, division, and district education offices, but still, many needed more support. Most of the school heads described an increase in responsibilities because of the pivot to remote learning. Much of the extra responsibilities involved the support they gave for printing, collating, reproducing, and delivering the SLMs and increased reporting requirements. The chief recommendations for school heads are discussed in **Table 4**.

Table 4. School Head Recommendations

Recommendations for Supporting School Heads	
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.	

3.1.3. Experience of Teachers, HLPs, and Learners

Research Question 2: What is the experience of teachers, learners, and HLPs during remote learning in the 2020–2021 school year?



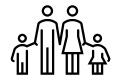
The experiences of teachers, learners, and HLPs during remote learning are encapsulated in the findings presented in the six remaining findings briefs, which cover literacy instructional practice, teaching and learning materials, supporting HLPs, the use of technology, and how school communities (school heads, teachers, and HLPs) collaborated to overcome the challenges and barriers to remote learning during the pandemic.

Brief # 7. Literacy Instructional Practice. Teachers delivered literacy instruction in a variety of ways. The primary modality of instruction in 15 of the 20 schools was the use of self-learning modules (SLMs), which comprised reading materials, worksheets, and instructions for HLPs on how to support their learner’s literacy learning. Teachers in 9 schools used only the SLMs as a mode of instruction, while 5 schools used SLMs in combination with home visits or group instruction in community spaces. Teachers in 5 schools used online instruction as their primary means of instruction, often in combination with SLMs. A variety of augmentative modalities were used by teachers including educational TV and mobile technologies. To support children in learning letter sounds and syllables, teachers in 7 of the 10 schools developed video or audio instruction, e.g., recorded videos of themselves reading that they sent to HLPs and learners. They also adapted DepEd materials to learners’ different learning needs. Even by the end of the school year, however, only 41 percent of teachers reported ever visiting their learners at home.

Teachers also provided remedial instruction to learners who were struggling. They were very concerned about learner progress in reading. Teachers assessed and monitored learners’ progress through direct assessment using telephones and group chats with learners reading to their teacher or through exchanges of video- or audio-recordings of learners reading. They also provided feedback directly on activity sheets and writing assignments submitted by the learners. According to the survey, most teachers (80 percent) required learners to turn in completed language and literacy assignments weekly. Some teachers provided an “Assessment Checklist” to parents to check in on learner progress on daily tasks and




completion of modules. Teachers noted an increase in the effectiveness of the remote learning program from mid-year to the end of the year, with approximately 20 percent more teachers stating remote learning was effective for most or all learners at the end of the school year compared to the middle of the year. **Table 5** shows our recommendations for literacy instruction practices.

Table 5. Literacy Instruction Recommendations

Recommendations for Strengthening Literacy Instructional Practices	
Increase opportunities for teachers to have regular direct contact with students, if not in person, then by regular phone contact or, if possible, online learning. One good practice was the use of teacher-made audio and video instructional presentations.	
All possible ways to give phone and/or Internet access to families should be explored to reduce the digital divide and ensure that regular communications with learners is possible and provide for monitoring of learner progress.	
Teach HLPs how to support children without it becoming an undue burden on them.	

Brief # 2. Teaching and Learning Materials. Although HLPs and teachers found the teaching and learning materials to be helpful, there were a variety of issues that were successfully mitigated by teachers. Most HLPs found the numbers of materials (e.g., pages and modules) to be too many or difficult, especially for young learners or struggling learners, and supplemental reading materials (especially for mother tongue) were thought to be too few. In some schools, the mother-tongue language modules were not aligned with the home language of learners. Teachers responded to these challenges by making various changes to the modules to fit the contexts and developmental progressions of learners. This included simplifying, reducing, and translating modules into appropriate mother-tongue languages or accessing additional materials as needed. Teachers supported struggling learners by providing leveled materials aligned with their abilities. Teachers at some schools developed learning activity sheets, and HLPs who could afford supplemented school teaching and learning materials with resources like alphabet charts, stories/books, and chalkboards. **Table 6** has three recommendations for increasing and improving the use of teaching and learning materials during school closures in the future.

Table 6. Teaching and Learning Material Recommendations




Recommendations for Teaching and Learning Materials	
All families should have sufficient basic school supplies and learning resources including dictionaries for HLPs, writing boards, notebooks, pens, and crayons.	
Increase learner access to libraries and mobile libraries for remote areas where families can borrow books and other learning materials or provide and orient HLPs on how to access the Internet for downloadable activities.	
Teachers should recommend quality, curated supplementary resources from DepEd, online, and bookstores.	

Brief # 1. Supporting Home Learning Partners. HLPs were vital in the pivot to remote learning. They were expected to support their children's learning at home by assisting them to understand and complete their modules and to provide encouragement and support. The brief on supporting home learning describes the strategies school heads and teachers used

to support HLPs, as well as HLP experiences with remote learning. School heads organized at least one orientation for parents regarding the use of the modules and how to schedule lessons and set up routines for learners at home. School heads and teachers communicated with HLPs in a variety of ways including phone calls, Facebook Group Chat groups, and text messages. All the schools set up SLM pick up and retrieval schedules for parents, and in many cases school heads and teachers were available at school to answer any questions parents might have and to offer encouragement and support.

When infection levels were low, teachers made home visits, prioritizing the teaching of learners who were struggling and the ones whose HLPs could not help them in learning at home. There were many such HLPs. They could not, or struggled to, support their children because they had low levels of education and/or work schedules that left them with little time to support their children. Cognizant of this, the number of home visits by teachers in most schools increased over the school year. **Table 7** contains a few recommendations for strengthening collaboration with HLPs to support learning at home.




Table 7. Strengthening HLP Partnership Recommendations

Recommendations for Strengthening Partnerships and Support of HLPs	
Walk HLPs through weekly activities, with a primary focus on one high impact activity (word of the week, blending words).	
Provide orientation and support to HLPs on how to use the SLM, accessing other digital resources and using television and radio lessons when possible.	
Maintain an open line of communication to improve and strengthen HLP engagement.	

Brief # 3. Use of Technology. The onset of the pandemic led to a quick pivot to the use of technology for communication, teaching, and learning, but the findings of this study also revealed the digital divide and inequities in the Philippine educational system. Various forms of digital technologies were used by school communities. In addition to schools that offered forms of online learning using platforms like Google Classroom and Zoom, teachers communicated with HLPs and learners through text messages, Facebook Messenger, and WhatsApp. These same applications were used for teacher professional development. However, very few schools, teachers, and HLPs used online multimedia, but some aligned their lessons to radio and TV broadcasts.

For many schools, both urban and rural, parents could not afford the cost of Internet service. In remote areas Internet access was also limited because there was no Internet or cell phone connectivity or only intermittent electricity. Many HLPs did not have smartphones. The major recommendations for strengthening the development and use of digital technologies include making sure that schools use a variety of approaches to support learning at home. These approaches can be low tech, such as the use of learning activity sheets and SLMs; medium tech, such as the use of texts and online applications like WhatsApp; or high tech, such as the use of online learning management systems like Google Classroom. What policy makers need to pay most attention to is ensuring that the use of digital technologies does not exacerbate the digital divide and that all learners have equitable opportunities to learn. **Table 8** shows some recommendations for improving access to technology for all learners.

Table 8. Recommendations for Improving Access to Technology




Recommendations for Improving and Expanding the Use of Technology	
Schools and teachers should be encouraged to use a combination of sustainable low-, medium-, and high-tech approaches, but prioritize the simplest technologies that are available and familiar to school communities.	
School orientations should include training on the use of digital technologies for parents along with guidance on the SLMs.	
Parents and teachers should be given Internet allowances to facilitate communication and online access.	

Brief # 4. Student Engagement. The brief on student engagement covered how much time learners studied per day, learner comfort levels and motivation, the extent to which teachers connected with learners at home, what HLPs did to teach and/or support learners at home, the challenges they had, and strategies both HLPs and teachers used to engage and motivate learners. Study findings indicated that on average learners studied 2 hours a day. In general, Grade 3 learners spent more time in home learning than did Grade 1 learners. However, approximately 25 percent of Grade 1 learners and approximately 15 percent of Grade 3 learners spent 1 hour or less on home learning.

Most HLPs reported they spent 1 to 2 hours a day supporting their children. These hours increased by mid-year but then decreased by the end of the year. Forty percent of the teachers interviewed stated that they visited learners during the period of the study. Home visits by teachers often depended on the levels of COVID-19 infections in school districts. To increase and/or support learning at home, school heads and teachers encouraged HLPs to set up routines and structures for learners. More than half of HLPs reported that they did not set a place and time for learning. Those who did stated that their children studied in living rooms and bedrooms.

As can be expected from young learners, staying motivated to engage in home learning and staying focused was a challenge, for learners and for HLPs. This brief provides considerable insight into these challenges and how they were mitigated. Strategies parents used to motivate learners included offering encouragement and tangible rewards, monitoring learners' work, providing supplementary materials, direct instruction from teachers in the home, and reading with learners. HLPs still reported, especially toward the end of the year, that it became increasingly challenging to keep learners focused and interested in their schoolwork. **Table 9** includes recommendations for strengthening learner motivation.

Table 9. Recommendations for Motivating Learners

Recommendations for Strengthening Learner Motivation	
Teachers, HLPs, and learners collaborate to develop schedules that accommodate home contexts.	
Teachers need to regularly connect with learners (at least once a week) through home visits or socially distanced group meetings with learners in community spaces, and/or through phone calls and social media applications.	
Introduce learning activities and supplementary materials that are more engaging.	

Brief #5. Overcoming Challenges. The findings in this brief describe the barriers to continuity of learning and how school communities tackled, adapted, and overcame the various challenges they encountered when implementing remote learning. The summary in

this report focuses primarily on the strategies school heads, teachers, and HLPs used to support learning at home. As described in the briefs above, school communities identified challenges related to teaching and learning materials, the ability of HLPs to teach their children, and communication with learners and HLPs. Regarding teaching and learning materials, teachers translated, contextualized, and adapted content to fit the needs of their learners. Schools set up schedules to structure and organize the distribution and pick up of the SLM. Teachers and school heads reached out to neighbors and community members to distribute SLMs to children who lived in remote areas. Orientation sessions were held for HLPs, and teachers found ways to meet and/or communicate with them to support learning at home, like the use of two-way radios and megaphones to make announcements. Teachers and school heads met during learning action cell meetings to determine how to support learners who were struggling. Reading assessments were administered during home visits to help identify gaps, and teachers offered remedial sessions. These briefs indicate that most school communities made varying efforts to adapt to the situation and ensure continuity of learning at home.

The next section of this report summarizes and discusses a selection of 10 school case studies to address Research Questions 3 and 4.

3.2 Summary of Case Studies

3.2.1 Introduction

In addition to the set of study briefs that were developed based on data from the entire sample population and survey and interview data combined, the team selected 10 of the 20 schools for a school case study analysis. Ten school case studies are reported separately in **Appendix 2**.

The case study exercise helped to address Research Question 3: *“What school, teacher, family, and student factors are catalysts or barriers to remote teaching and learning during remote learning in the 2020–2021 school year?”* and Research Question 4: *“Did schools that were more successful in language and literacy instruction, evidenced by increased EGRA scores from 2013–2019, create conditions for maximally supporting continuity of learning during the pivot to remote learning in the 2020–2021 school year, or was performance in remote learning more likely to be associated with conditions in the home and community?”*

To this end, school selection for the case studies was strategic. We selected schools from diverse regional demarcations, geographical locations, municipal populations, and kindergarten to Grade 3 enrollments. Other criteria included percentage of indigenous families in school, average family wealth, and past school performance in increasing Grade 3 reading outcomes. The distribution of case study schools across categories in five overarching demographics and the four regions in the Philippines are shown in **Table 10**.

Table 10. Distribution of Case Study School Demographics by Region

Demographics	School Total (n=10)	Regions				
		North Luzon (n=3)	Visayas (n=2)	Mindanao (n=2)	BARMM (n=2)	Manila (n=1)
Location						
Last-mile rural	3	1			2	
Rural	2		1	1		
Urban	2	1	1			
Highly urban	3	1		1		1

Demographics	School Total (n=10)	Regions				
		North Luzon (n=3)	Visayas (n=2)	Mindanao (n=2)	BARMM (n=2)	Manila (n=1)
Municipal Population						
0–9,999	2	1	1			
10,000–99,999	3			1	2	
100,000–499,999	2	1	1			
500,000++	3	1		1		1
Enrollment (K–Grade 3)						
0–99	1	1				
100–199	4		1	1	2	
200–399	2	1	1			
400–999	2	1		1		
1,000+	1					1
Percent Indigenous Persons						
None	6	2	2	1		1
1–25%	0					
26–50%	0					
51–75%	2			1	1	
76–100%	2	1			1	
Family Wealth						
1st Quartile	1				1	
2nd Quartile	5	1	2	1	1	
3rd Quartile	4	2		1		1
4th Quartile	0					
Reading Gains (2013–2019, EGRA)						
Increased reading fluency	5		1	2	1	1
Decreased reading fluency	5	3	1		1	

The structure of each case study was based on the analysis framework given in Table 3 of this report. The findings from these case studies were then further analyzed across the 10 case study schools to categorize the schools according to their ability to implement and adapt to the remote learning program based on local needs and to provide continuity of learning to students. Based on the school data, each of the 10 case study schools were assigned to one of four groups or levels, which organize schools according to their relative success at implementing the remote learning program. These are listed below.

1. **Poor Initial Transition, No Adaptations.** These schools struggled to transition to remote learning and demonstrated little evidence of improvement over the school year and therefore, negligible support for continuity of learning was provided.
2. **Challenged Initial Transition, Small Adaptations.** These schools struggled to transition to remote learning in the initial part of the school year but demonstrated some special school qualities and/or made small but important adaptations during the year, which helped support continuity of learning.

3. **Challenged Initial Transition, Major Adaptations.** These schools experienced challenges when transitioning to remote learning initially but managed these challenges promptly and made major adaptations during the year, which helped maximize continuity of learning.
4. **Smooth Initial Transition, Many Major Adaptations.** Schools in this category, demonstrated a rapid pivot to remote learning and continued to improve and adapt to the situation in major ways, maximizing continuity of learning at home.

In the first sub-section below, based on the survey data and qualitative interview findings, we characterize schools that have been assigned to each of four levels of success in supporting children's continuity of learning at home through distance learning. This analysis informs Research Question 3.

In the second sub-section we discuss the role of certain school factors (e.g., past performance on improving reading, location, and wealth,) in predicting the relative success of schools in pivoting to remote learning and supporting continuity of learning at home, addressing Research Question 4.

3.2.2. Characteristics of Schools by Four Levels of Success in Implementing the Remote Learning Program

Research Question 3: What school, teacher, family, and student factors are catalysts or barriers to remote teaching and learning during remote learning in the 2020–2021 school year?

Level 1. Poor Initial Transition, No Adaptations. Struggled to transition to remote learning and demonstrated little evidence of improvement over the school year, and therefore, negligible support for continuity of learning was provided.

Two of the 10 case study schools demonstrated challenges supporting their learners throughout the school year. Like most of the schools in this study, the initial transition was plagued with challenges, including the development and/or translation of modules; printing, reproducing, and delivering modules to families; and funding of equipment maintenance and consumables such as paper. Like other schools, this burden was lightened when maintenance and other operating expense (MOOE) funds and assistance were provided later in the school year.

What stands out among Level 1 schools is the multiplicity of factors that impeded their ability to support learners' continuity of learning at home, combined with limited instructional leadership capability to support teachers in addressing these challenges. Like other schools, the schools assigned to Level 1 faced challenges that were magnified by low literacy levels of parents, working parents, and little to no access to the Internet or mobile technologies for teachers and/or households. These latter challenges were more prominent in these two schools than other case study schools. Teachers in these schools struggled throughout the school year. In the interview taking place at the end of the school year, one teacher commented,

"We've not really adjusted. It's like we are in shock."

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Factors impeding teaching and learning in Level 1 schools.

- **Limited communications** with learners and HLPs due to reasons including remoteness of communities; limited access to telecommunications; policy prohibiting home visits; and little school head or teacher initiative to mitigate these challenges. Consequently, teachers only sporadically connected with learners. The module collection schedule allowed some communication with HLPs, but not all came.
- **Limited learner time on task and direct support from HLPs** were two seriously limiting factors. Learner engagement and HLP learner support ranged from less than 1 hour per day to a maximum of 2 hours per day in these schools.
- **Limited instructional leadership.** Though some teachers recognized that the school head was approachable and “cared about their well-being,” teachers received little to no direct instructional guidance from the school head. School heads mostly focused on supporting materials production and delivery.
- In these two schools there were **no clear performance targets**, which added to the constraints of monitoring and assessing learner progress.
- Except for supporting printing, reproduction, and delivery of materials, **neither school heads nor teachers demonstrated initiative to address resource limitations.**
- The **mother-tongue language and literacy SLMs were not aligned with the language spoken in the home.** In one school over 85 percent of families spoke a different language. Thus, the need to translate these materials to Filipino or other mother-tongues added an additional burden for teachers throughout the year. This issue was shared by many other case study schools, not only those in Category 1.

Level 2. Challenged Initial Transition, Small Adaptations. These schools struggled to transition to remote learning initially but demonstrated some special school qualities and/or made small but important adaptations during the year, which helped support implementation.

Four schools were assigned to Level 2. Like Level 1 schools, these schools faced challenges in printing, reproducing, and delivering SLMs to families; however, school heads immediately supported these tasks by resourcing funds and community assistance to ensure printers and consumables were available to teachers and provided hands on assistance and outreach to ensure all families received the modules in a timely fashion.

School heads were approachable and caring and made deliberate efforts to include teachers in making decisions about how best to adapt to and support home learning. School heads in these schools attended more to instructional leadership and teacher support and development responsibilities than was demonstrated by the school heads in the Level 1 schools. Unlike in the Level 1 schools, teachers in three of the four Level 2 schools were allowed to have home and school visits with social distancing. Teachers also used cell phone calls, group chats, and/or two-way radios to reach HLPs and learners. However, teacher connections with their learners and HLPs were not extensive nor systematic and were limited by the fact that most families did not have access to mobile technologies. Thus, even with these improved attempts to reach learners, many learners and HLPs could not be reached on a regular basis.

The ability of teachers to make home visits and engage directly with HLPs and learners made a difference in their appreciation of the role of the parent in distance learning. At the end of the school year one teacher summarized,

“Without the assistance of parents, I don’t think any of the programs I mentioned would work.”

A school head noticed that learners were adjusting to the program, but it took time,

“[The learners] are doing better compared to the beginning of the school year because now most of them have adjusted to the new reality.”

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Factors impeding teaching and learning in Level 2 schools.

- **Non-universal access to Internet and mobile technologies.** Most of the homes did not have access to phones nor stable connectivity to benefit from these communications.
- **Reading materials in the SLMs were problematic,** including too many modules, difficult content for younger and struggling learners, and insufficient literacy materials.
- **Mismatch in mother-tongue materials.** Reading materials were sometimes in a different language than that used in the family.

Factors that improved teaching and learning in Level 2 schools.

- **Instructional leadership.** The school heads in these schools were not only approachable, caring, and included teachers in decision-making, they provided instructional leadership through the following:
 - Regular teaching-related communications via individual calls and/or group chats
 - Direct assistance to teacher work planning
 - Professional development through instruction-oriented learning action cells, where teachers worked with their peers and their head teacher to plan, develop materials, and collectively address challenges
 - Organization of teacher-to-teacher support networks by matching technically strong with technically weaker teachers or designating master teachers to a variety of teacher support activities.
- **School head outreach to engage community assistance to families.** School heads made deliberate efforts to engage community assistance beyond provision of printing consumables needed for printing and module delivery. For example:
 - One school head developed the “Pagtutulungan sa Pagbasa sa Panahon ng Pandemya,” a community partnership program to support struggling families. Using this initiative, the school head and teachers worked together to identify and engage high-school students, college students, and capable parents to work with learners whose parents needed assistance in facilitating home learning.
 - Parent support networks and two-way radio support for communications to mitigate the barriers from limited cell phone or online connectivity and unallowable school visits.
- **Teacher initiatives to stay connected to and support learners.** Teachers in Category 2 schools made efforts to connect with their learners at least once per week and augmented literacy materials with activity sheets, additional stories, and materials appropriate to different abilities.
- **Learner and HLP engagement in home learning.** Learner engagement and HLP support to children’s learning ranged from 2–6 hours per day with an average of 3 hours per day for both the learner and HLP. Though not extensive, this amount of time was still greater than 2 hours per day, which was the average learner and HLP engagement for 20 schools in this study.

Level 3. Challenged Initial Transition, Major Adaptations. Challenges were experienced transitioning to remote learning initially, but the school met these challenges quickly and made major adaptations during the year, which helped maximize continuity of learning.

Two schools were assigned to Level 2. Like schools in Level 2, instructional leadership and teachers' dedication and initiative in supporting their learners and HLPs helped support continuity of learning in the home setting. However, these schools stood apart from schools assigned to Level 1 and Level 2 because of school heads' and teachers' *systematic approaches to instructional leadership and instruction in the remote setting*, respectively.

Furthermore, the combination of home visits and much improved (though still not universal) family access to communications technologies contributed greatly to the ability of HLPs to support their children and for teachers to stay connected with their learners and their parents. With *better access to technologies* both teachers and HLPs could and did access online materials through the DepEd Commons and could access other learning supports such as DepEd TV and educational YouTube offerings. Hybrid approaches to instruction including some online teaching and the use of mobile video calls and Group Chats to support learning and performance monitoring as well as SLMs were used in these schools. This was not possible in Level 2 schools where few households had access to technology. Teachers in all of the Level 3 schools had frequent and regular communications with HLPs and considered these partnerships vital to the success of the remote learning program and the continuous learning of their children. Teachers stated the following about the importance of partnerships with parents:

The parents of my students know that I'm one chat or one text away if they need any questions regarding the module."

"I like seeing parents who are so involved with their children's education. Unlike before that they leave everything to the teacher, now they ask a lot of questions about the module and how to answer the activities in the module."

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Factors impeding teaching and learning in Level 3 schools.

- **Challenges with SLMs.** As did teachers in Category 2 schools, teachers in Category 3 schools found SLMs to be problematic, either because the number of materials was more than the learners could handle or because of inadequate supplemental reading materials. All teachers in these schools worked together to mitigate these problems, as did teachers in Category 2 schools.
- **HLPs often completed the learner's modules.** This was not an issue unique to Category 3 schools but more prominent in the interview narratives of these schools. This issue impedes teachers' abilities to target instruction to learner needs and conduct valid assessments of learner performance.

Factors that improved teaching and learning in Level 3 schools.

- **Systematic approaches to instructional leadership.** School head leadership and teacher support were organized and systematic in these schools, which was an improvement from the instructional leadership given in the Category 1 and Category 2 schools. For example:
 - The school head in one school developed a *cascade training model* for providing teacher guidance and support through master teachers, involving weekly master training guidance, which was cascaded down to teachers as they supported, mentored, and assisted teachers in planning, instructional guidance, and learner performance monitoring.
 - Identification of community-based *para-teachers* to support learners in homes that did not receive sufficient HLP assistance.
 - *Regularly scheduled* (monthly) instruction-oriented learning action cells.
 - *Early assessment and systematic continuous performance monitoring of learners* allowed for identification of and targeted approaches for supporting struggling learners, allowing for adjustments in materials as learners progressed and eventually caught up.
 - Scheduled *weekly learner feedback*, tailored to the most effective modality for each learner (e.g., video calls, online communications, home visits).
 - *Shared school governance* to ensure all teachers had a voice in decision-making and co-create adaptations to support better implementation.
 - Scheduled regular *bonding activities* to maximize and sustain teamwork.
- **Teacher-driven adaptations to mitigate module inadequacies**, including strategically reducing content and supplementing reading materials through the following:
 - Learning activity sheets
 - Augmenting materials with pictures, folk stories, song lyrics, and poems
 - Downloading and distributing materials from the DepEd Commons
 - Making suggestions for educational programs on YouTube and television
 - Video-taping demonstration lessons to share with HLP.
- **Frequent and regular communications with parents and other HLPs.** In these schools, teachers communicated with HLPs once or twice per week. Teachers were in constant communication with parents, accommodating their different needs in supporting their child's learning needs.

Level 4. Challenged Initial Transition, Major Adaptations. These schools adapted to the remote learning context, putting into place changes to the remote learning program during the initial part of the year—leading to a quick and effective transition to remote learning—and continued to improve and adapt to the situation in major ways, maximizing continuity of learning at home.

The underpinning reasons that enabled these schools to transition seamlessly to the remote learning program were the schools' exceptional leadership and teachers' positive spirit, creativity, and commitment; partnerships with government and community; and more extensive involvement of HLPs in their child's learning because of higher education levels of HLPs. The school heads provided systematic and continuous instructional leadership, teacher support and development opportunities, and proactive and productive community outreach. The teachers themselves applied and maintained creative, practical, and supportive communication between home and school. Most parents and other HLPs in these schools had high school or college degrees, which put them in a good position to facilitate home learning. They were able to tap into Internet-based resources and educational programs to support their children's learning.

At the start of the school year and in some cases prior to the time the remote learning year began, the school heads actively reached out to stakeholders to secure resources for the remote learning program. The responses were unusually favorable and enabled these

schools, unlike other case study schools, to leverage technology and use online learning and mobile technologies for more direct learner instruction, HLP guidance, and learner performance monitoring. Even with these opportunities, teachers made a point to directly and regularly connect with individual learners and their parents when households did not have access to online learning. Thus, the schools were creative in implementing a blended approach and mitigating poor access to the online modality.

School heads judiciously utilized data from the learner enrollment survey proactively and regularly sought feedback from HLPs and learners on their home learning experiences. This allowed them to plan their actions and make informed decisions throughout the year to maximize learners' benefit from the remote program throughout the school year.

One school head summed up her experience in the first year of remote learning like this:

“Our target is not only the students, but the parents as well. We also need to motivate them. If the parents are not inclined to [recognize] the importance of education, our efforts will be wasted.”

A teacher noted:

“School leadership does their best to support us, teachers. The administration really works for the good of the school, teachers, and learners. For this school year, our goal is that no one, no pupil, be left behind.”

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Factors impeding teaching and learning in Category 4 schools.

- Some HLPs lost jobs because of the pandemic and could not provide their learners with resources needed such as access to the Internet and communication devices for online classes.
- Unreliable Internet connectivity challenged both teachers and learners; however, school heads were able to mitigate this challenge through community outreach and support.
- Mismatch in the learners' mother tongue and that of the SLMs from the division office.

Factors that improved teaching and learning in Level 4 schools.

- Schools made plans and actions based on the learner enrollment survey, thus ensuring that timely and well-coordinated decisions were made before and during the implementation of remote learning.
- The school heads in this category **proactively reached out to and secured extraordinary government and private sector materials and service inputs** to support remote learning. For example:
 - One school received one laptop for each teacher and one tablet loaded with offline e-resources for each learner.
 - A school head established a “Project Load” initiative that raised funds to give data load allowances to learners whose HLPs could not afford Internet connectivity.
- School head facilitated a realignment of MOOE funds to support teachers' and learners' needs.
 - Hired additional teacher assistant to download, print, and reproduce the modules so that teachers could focus on preparations for online classes.
 - Used MOOE to establish Internet connectivity in school to support teachers who had limited or unstable Internet access at home.
- **Unique aspects of Category 4 instructional leadership.** The systemized instructional leadership described for the Category 3 schools was also characteristic of Category 4 school heads. However, there were some unique aspects of Category 4 leadership. For example, leadership:
 - Required teachers to frequently participate in DepEd-led webinars on remote learning.

- Engaged master teachers more extensively in teacher support and supervision by observing online classes and teacher recordings of video lessons for observation-based supervision and support.
- Accessed and used SLMs from another division office to provide instructional modules that were aligned with the household mother-tongue language.
- **Creative, proactive, and supportive approach to instruction.** Due to mobility restrictions, teachers applied a variety of strategies to reach and support HLPs and learners who could not participate in online learning. For example:
 - One school head personally reached out to parents of struggling learners to dissuade their learners from dropping out of school and provide encouragement.
 - Master teachers were assigned to help teachers address the needs of struggling learners by providing direct remedial instruction to selected learners.
 - Teachers in one school gamified some activities using computer apps and software to pique the learners' interests and keep them focused.
- **Exceptional HLP Facilitation.** Given the education of these HLPs, they were able to make use of technologies to assist their learners by, for example:
 - Provision of additional materials and activities like educational videos and printing of reading passages and activity sheets sourced from the Internet.
 - Budgeting wisely to ensure their child had the data load to attend online classes.
 - Patience and understanding of their learners' moods and study behavior.
 - Partner with fellow HLPs and teachers to seek assistance with materials, struggling learners, or learner behaviors.

3.2.3. Discussion of Factors that Help to Explain Schools' Differential Success in Implementing Remote Learning

Research Question 4: Did schools that were more successful in language and literacy instruction, evidenced by increased Grade 3 EGRA scores from 2013–2019, create conditions for maximally supporting continuity of learning in the remote learning context during the 2020–2021 school year, or was performance in remote learning more likely to be associated with conditions in the home and community?

To answer Research Question 4, we combined what we learned about the characteristics of 10 case study schools demonstrating four different levels of success in implementing the distance learning program in the 2020–2021 school year (i.e., described in preceding sub-section) with data on 3 school demographics. **Table 11** below shows the distribution of the 10 case study schools across their respective levels of success in supporting continuity of learning in the remote context and across levels of 3 school demographics: past school performance in improving reading outcomes, municipal population where schools are located, and school aggregates of family wealth. Thus Table 11 presents three cross-tabulations, which are: level of success by school performance in improving reading outcomes, level of success by municipal population, and level of success by family wealth.

The small number of school case studies conducted (i.e., a total of 10 schools) to provide the in-depth information required to evaluate schools' relative success in distance learning precluded the use of statistical analyses to ascertain which school factors best predict a school's ability to create the conditions for maximally supporting continuity of learning in the remote learning context—the basis of Research Question 4. However, the cross-tabulations presented in Table 11, combined with what we learned about schools' relative success in supporting continuity of learning (i.e., described in the preceding sub-section), are helpful in suggesting some themes that could be followed up on in future studies of remote learning.

Table 11. Distribution of Case Study School Demographics by Level of Success

Demographics	School Total (n=10)	Success in Supporting Continuity of Learning			
		Level 1 (n=2)	Level 2 (n=4)	Level 3 (n=2)	Level 4 (n=2)
Crosstabulation 1: Reading Gains (2013–2019, EGRA)					
Increased reading fluency	5	2	1	1	1
Decreased reading fluency	5		3	1	1
Crosstabulation 2: Location					
Last-mile rural	3	1	2		
Rural	2		2		
Urban	2			1	1
Highly urban	3	1		1	1
Crosstabulation 3: Municipal Population/Location					
<10,000 (Very Rural)	2		2		
10,000–99,999. (Rural)	3	1	2		
100,000–499,999 (Urban)	2			1	1
> 500,000 (Highly Urban)	3	1		1	1
Crosstabulation 4: Family Wealth Quartile (School Average)					
1st Quartile	1		1		
2nd Quartile	5	2	2	1	
3rd Quartile	4		1	1	2
4th Quartile	0				

In Table 11, the school counts shaded light grey are schools that were assigned to the two lower success levels (Level 1 or Level 2) while the school counts shaded in dark grey are schools that were assigned to the two higher success levels (Level 3 and Level 4). By reviewing the patterns of distributions in these three cross-tabulations, it can be seen in Table 11 that only Location and Municipal Population appeared to suggest a relationship with a school's relative level of success implementing the remote learning program. Schools in remote and rural locations, with small municipal populations, had more difficulty creating the conditions needed for continuity of learning in the remote setting. Schools in urban or highly urban areas had more success, falling in either Level 3 or Level 4. A review of the data in Table 11, based on these 10 case study schools, suggests that neither a school's past performance in increasing reading outcomes nor the average family wealth of households in the school bore any relationship to the relative success of schools in implementing distance learning.

The characterizations of Level 1 to Level 4 schools described in the preceding section suggest some emerging factors that appear to be associated with a school's ability to establish the conditions that will maximally support continuity of learning in the remote context. To reiterate early words of caution, these emerging factors are given by the evaluation of a limited number of schools, 10 in total. This precludes the ability to make definitive conclusions about what conditions predict a school's success, but rather points to areas that can be further explored with future research. These suggested factors, combined with the school location factors mentioned above, are summarized in **Table 12** below.

Table 12. Emerging Factors Associated with School's Ability to Create and Provide Conditions for Continuity of Learning during Remote Learning

School Leadership
School head leadership, initiatives, or systems established to provide instructional leadership and support to teachers. This may mean school head interactions with teachers about instruction and assessment during remote learning or the initiatives taken to provide instructional support through a cascade of learning and support given by master teachers or peer-to-peer teacher networks.
School head regular and direct check-ins with teachers through a mix of online, mobile, and face to face communications to support individual instructional support or psycho-social support needs.
School head leadership in mobilizing external support to schools, for example, to secure additional resources and assistance from DepEd, local government, private sector, and individual community members. This may be community outreach to secure equipment (e.g., printers, laptops, tablets), consumables (e.g., paper for printing, funding to households for pay for data, load, or airtime needed to maintain Internet or mobile phone connectivity), or services (distributing modules, reproduction of materials, or remedial instruction, parent support networks to help households that are not able to provide instructional support to their learners).
Teacher Support
Ability of teachers to regularly connect with learners to provide direct instruction and monitor learning performance through a mix of online, mobile, and face to face communications.
Ability of teachers to regularly connect with parents and other HLPs to provide direct guidance related to their learner's progress and how to facilitate and maximize that progress through a mix of online, mobile, and face to face communications.
Partnerships with Parents
It is not the willingness nor capability of parents and other home learning partners to support their learners but the <i>partnerships with HLPs</i> that stand out as a differentiating factor in a school's success in creating and providing the conditions that support continuity of learning at home. Not all HLPs are available because of competing work demands or feel capable because of literacy levels or limited education. It "takes a village" to support all learners at home. Therefore, partnerships among school heads, teachers, HLPs, and other community members (e.g., neighbors, willing and capable youth, and others in the community who can assist households) are needed to ensure that all households have regular guidance and ensure that all children receive the learning support they need.
The importance of providing regular, meaningful communications and guidance to parents and other HLPs (e.g., guidance in providing learner support and psycho-social guidance) – either through direct communications or through partnerships – is critical in maximizing continuity of learning at home.
Technology
Availability of access to Internet or cell phone connectivity such as a cell tower or satellite connection in the municipality where the school and households are located.

4. Discussion

In our final review and discussion about the findings of this study, we observed different experiences and school capabilities in delivering education in the remote setting, from the beginning of the school year to the end of the school year. In the review of these findings and discussions we also identified findings that have important implications for enhancing education as schools begin to open and children return to the classroom. These are discussed in the two sub-sections of this section.

4.1. Characteristics of the Pivot to Remote Learning at The Beginning, Middle, and End of the School Year

Looking at the experiences of school actors as they pivoted to remote learning because of school lockdowns, secondary to the global COVID-19 pandemic, we note different experiences related to different times in the school year: (1) experience of the initial transition, (2) understanding and adapting to the different challenges arising, and (3) transformation.

Initial Transition. The school experience of the initial transition to remote learning was often chaotic because, for most schools, there was an enormous task of printing, reproducing, and delivering the SLMs to households. Some of the original modules were not aligned with the home languages and needed to be adapted for use in the local context by translating and/or supplementing the modules, i.e., with activity sheets or stories. Teachers bore the bulk of the responsibility for these tasks. This was combined with the urgent need for school heads, teachers, and HLPs to receive a proper orientation and guidance about how to deliver instruction remotely. School head leadership and partnerships with teachers and DepEd offices upstream played an underpinning role in the success of getting the SLMs to HLPs and providing for an orientation to distance learning for all. It was a task of “all hands on deck,” which included the mobilization of community, not only to help with the work of module production and delivery but also to provide needed health and hygiene supplies. The initiative of the school head was critical for successful community outreach and securing the additional resources and assistance needed to meet the challenges presented by the initial transition to remote learning and to enlist their continued support throughout the year. For many teachers, the emotional pressures of these new responsibilities (i.e., printing and reproducing the SLMs) on top of their responsibilities of children’s learning presented, for many, considerable psychological stress. Probably more than ever before, the school head needed the psycho-social and communication skills to be responsive to the personal as well as professional needs of their staff.

Adaptation. As school heads, teachers, HLPs, and learners began to understand the challenges and needs of each other, the collaborations became more about making the adaptations needed to create the learning conditions that would maximally support children’s continuity of learning at home. Once again, the leadership of school heads and their ability to collaborate and co-create strategy with teachers and other stakeholders was crucial. Teachers’ initiative to continuously assess learner and parent needs and to adjust accordingly, providing adaptive instruction and psycho-social support was equally critical, but collaboration with other teachers was needed. School heads and teachers worked together to set up opportunities for staying connected to their professional peers so that no one person was isolated in trying to address the many challenges of remote learning. A school’s ability to make strategic adaptations to mitigate specific challenges in distance learning that arise in the school was observed to be one of the pivotal characteristics of schools that best supported continuity of learning in the distance education context.

Transformation. Moving into the third quarter of the school year, and in some schools more than others, many of the adaptations were no longer novel but were implemented with more ease and sometimes emerged as shifts in the school systems and operations. For example,

teachers more systematically adjusted materials and differential instruction for struggling learners, community/neighbor assistance to learners who were not receiving home support became routine and were established as a school-community practice or “program,” and providing instructional support and monitoring through cell phone audio and video recordings became more systematic as teachers and HLPs became more confident in using mobile technologies. These emerging routines and systems of home learning support represent the resilience capability of schools demonstrated by systemic shifts in school operations or “school transformations” in response to the COVID-19 crisis. These school transformations had enormous utility in meeting the needs of learners and their parents in remote learning, but also strengthened schools’ ability to transition back to the classroom and maintain and enhance teaching and learning by applying such transformations to the future.

4.2. Study Findings that Inform Education Planning for Re-opening Schools and Classrooms after the COVID-19 School Closures

Schools in the Philippines and elsewhere were slowly reopening at the time of this writing. In this section, we present findings from this study that hold potential for guiding a better future for learning when schools open and children return to the classroom.

Partnerships with Parents. Study findings underscored the value of partnerships with parents and other HLPs that were developed as schools pivoted to remote learning. Not only were the teacher–parent/HLP partnerships crucial to home learning but the findings underscored the enormous value of increased and meaningful involvement of parents and other HLPs in their child’s learning. The importance of maintaining these relationships and partnerships as children return to the classroom cannot be overstated. This is good for not only children’s academic learning but for their psycho-social well-being and social emotional learning as well. In this study many parents spoke directly to the joy they felt in working closely with their children to support their learning. These are just two of the parent statements about their positive experiences.

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“I feel joyful knowing that I am directly helping my child to learn. Unlike before where I only prepared her food. Now, I not only get to teach her, but I also get to spend time with her.”

“When all the [my] children are studying, I also learn a lot from their lessons. That makes me feel happy and fulfilled as a parent.”

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We recommend that school heads and teachers work together to ensure that these positive parent experiences in supporting their children’s learning will continue as learners return to the classroom. How can schools ensure that parents and other HLPs maintain their direct involvement in supporting their children’s learning?

New Technological Skills and Applications. During the first year of remote learning most school heads, teachers, parents, and learners developed new skills in using technology for education. Though only few schools introduced online learning, most school heads and teachers applied information communication technologies for guiding parents, delivering instruction, and learner performance monitoring. These included the use of mobile technologies for sharing information, talking to parents and learners, group chats, and providing guidance and tips on engaging learners at home through the provision of audio and/or video models of reading practice. Online platforms such as Facebook, Google Teach, and Zoom were developed and used in new and exciting ways, providing opportunities to connect parents and education professionals in groups to discuss ways to support learners, not to mention the expansion of educational television programs. Online platforms became

an avenue for education professionals to come together to discuss and resolve issues and to provide mutual psycho-social support as well as a new avenue for teacher professional development.

It will take a concerted effort, collective school leadership and teamwork, to strategically leverage these new technical skills and communication technologies into education programs when schools open, but will be worth the investment.

Teacher and Learner Connections. Study findings underscored the critical importance of regular communications between and among teachers, school heads, parents, and learners. Teachers staying connected to their learners was a crucial condition for providing continuity of learning at home. However, connecting with learners was not always possible. In some schools, teachers were prohibited from making home visits because of high infection rates, and limited access to the Internet and poor cellular connectivity often precluded Internet or phone communications. Consequently, some learners had little to no connection with their teachers or fellow classmates during the time of school closures. Learners may have felt disconnected from their schools and classrooms and anxious about returning to school.

It is recommended that as part of preparations for opening schools, school heads and teachers work together to discuss ways in which they can help children reconnect and rebuild their sense of belonging to their schools and classrooms when they return and develop strategies to support learners' social and emotional well-being and minimize any anxiety children may feel about returning to school.

Professional Connections. Study findings also underscored the value of regular communications between teachers and school heads and regular opportunities and spaces for professional dialogue within and across teacher and leadership groups in preparation for and throughout the year of remote learning.

Based on these findings, we recommend that the professional networks established to support remote learning be continued and strengthened when schools open. More opportunities for professionals to meet and network face-to-face will be available. In addition, the communication technologies advanced during the first year of remote learning can and should also be leveraged to support regular teacher-parent and intra- and inter-professional communications.

School Leadership. It is no surprise that school leadership was found to be an underpinning factor in the success of schools to implement remote learning. Remote learning called for a new kind of leadership, *collective leadership* (see textbox). School heads in the most successful schools were described by teachers as approachable and inclusive in making decisions about teaching and learning in the remote context. For example, school heads who worked closely with teachers and community members found solutions for getting support to households where HLPs were not readily available to help their children. In addition, resource management was most successful when school heads pro-actively reached out to and secured contributions from a broad base of community stakeholders.

Collective Leadership

"A district or school needs to be founded on respectful relationships where educators can work collaboratively to consider and adopt new programs and approaches, learn together, and effect change over time with a shared vision...[of] a healthy learning community for all staff members that mirrors the positive culture they work to build with students."

-Berger, R., Berman, S., Garcia, J., Deasy, J. (2020). *A practice agenda in support of how learning happens*. Aspen, CO: The Aspen Institute National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Learning.

Finally, the psycho-social stress of pivoting to remote learning presented new opportunities for school heads to understand and support teachers' social and emotional needs as well as their instructional support needs. This was an area where school heads "stepped up to the plate." Most school heads were responsive to teachers' psycho-social needs and sometimes

set up special trainings or bonding activities to ensure teachers got the social and emotional support they needed.

The roles described herein are not necessarily new school leadership roles and responsibilities, but the remote learning experience served to highlight the importance of collective leadership, pro-active community, and deeper levels of teacher support. These values are no less important for school leadership in the conventional school context.

The leadership experience in remote learning will no doubt enhance the leadership capabilities of school heads as school re-open. It is recommended that school heads and division supervisors consider how school leadership can be strengthened as they prepare for the re-opening of schools. For example, this could be accomplished by strengthening some of the pivotal leadership roles that were required during distance learning, such as collective leadership, targeted pro-active community outreach, and support for teachers' well-being.

Maintaining high levels of parental involvement; integrating new skills and innovative communication technologies into education; supporting children's social and emotional well-being and reconnection to school and classroom; and strengthened school leadership practices such as inclusive decision-making, pro-active community outreach, and support for teacher well-being are some of the key learnings from this study that could enhance day-to-day management and instruction in schools when they open again. If integrated into conventional education programs when schools open, these new or strengthened school capabilities hold promise for a different and enhanced education for children in the future.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Findings Briefs

Philippines Remote Learning Study

FINDINGS BRIEF #1: SUPPORTING HOME LEARNING PARTNERS

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, 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 home learning partners.

About the Sample

The majority of HLPs in this sample were working in the informal sector (52%), were aged 30 to 50 years (62%), and had only a high school education at most (49% completed high school; 29% less than high school). 36% were unemployed. Not all respondents were available at each time point. No HLP were interviewed in November as recruitment was still underway.

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Context

The Philippines is no stranger to school closures. Monsoon rains, typhoons, military takeovers, earthquakes, and other natural calamities regularly interrupt schooling. However, the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic imposed a year-long pause in classroom-based learning in 2020–2021 for all grade levels. This imposes considerable responsibility on parents or other home learning partners (HLPs) to facilitate, monitor, and support children, especially the youngest learners who do not have the literacy or academic skills to be self-directed. The extent to which HLPs can be effective depends on their *availability* and *ability* to support their children in understanding and completing their schoolwork in the absence of regular teacher contact time.

Although schools in this study differed in socio-economic status, geographic location, school resources, and languages, HLPs shared many of the same challenges in supporting their child's reading development. First, for HLPs, the sense of self-efficacy related to home learning support was often low. This is likely related to the level of HLPs' education and literacy skills; HLPs who reported challenges understanding the modules and giving instructions to their children were largely those with only a high school education. Second, juggling domestic chores and/or work outside of the home and providing home learning support was a frequently mentioned challenge. Finally, parents had a difficult time keeping their children focused and on task. Some children, they said, resisted accepting instruction from their parents, would rather play, or lost interest because they did not understand the assignments or grew tired because of the amount of work they had to do.

All HLPs need to develop a clearer understanding about *how* to help their children work through the modules and need more guidance on how to enhance their child's interest and to maintain their attention to school tasks. Although schools were limited by mobility restrictions during community quarantines, they found ways to support HLPs to help their children stay on track academically. This brief provides some of the practices described by participants.

Bayanihan: A Collaborative Approach

The term “bayanihan,” also known as “damayan”, is a Filipino custom which refers to system of mutual help and concern among members of the community. It means working together toward a goal as part of the community. Due to the challenges posed by the pandemic to education, teachers, school heads, community members, and parents themselves exercised bayanihan and worked together to find solutions for each family's unique needs.



Image courtesy of [Francis Albert Martinez](#)

*“Sometimes we sleep at the school so we can maximize our time to go to the pupils’ houses.”
(Teacher)*

“I do home visits to those students who live nearby. I feel sorry that I can’t do face-to-face teaching to all of them.” (Teacher)

*“During home visits we saw that there were parents who have difficulty teaching the children since they have not been at school.”
(Teacher).*

“Since we cannot face the children, we call for meetings of parents or go to their homes if there are things or topics that they do not understand. We teach them some techniques to better understand and teach the lessons.” (Teacher)

Supporting HLPs through home visits

Where allowable and possible—some students are in hard to reach or mountainous areas that are too far to get to—teachers made good use of home visitations, a practice done traditionally only for students at risk of dropping out. Home visits were opportunities for teacher and student interaction and for directly supporting HLPs. During home visits, teachers assessed the student individually, listened to them read, and provided reading instruction. They also coached HLPs. The teacher visits helped maintain important relationships, critical for learners’ and HLPs’ sense of connection to “school.” Parents found this time extremely valuable, both for their children’s learning and motivation and for their own learning about how to work with their children and to keep their child engaged and interested. See also *Brief #4, Student Engagement* for more details of contact time and methods.

The number of teachers who met with students face-to-face increased slightly over the school year and reached a high of 41% of teachers in the study at the end of the year. Of those who did meet students face-to-face, over half of Grade 3 teachers maintained weekly face-to-face contact with their pupils over the course of the school year. Grade 1 teachers who met students once per week increased from 43% to 50%. By the end of the year, most teachers in Grades 1 and 3 met with students once per week or more (50% and 100% by grade, respectively).

Schools, principals, and teachers worked together to make home visits happen, but according to interviews, they prioritized households where students or HLPs were struggling. Teachers were aware of the differential needs of both learners and HLP through communications and outreach through phone, social media, and even two-way radio (see below). Although teachers and school heads were doing everything they could to make home visits, half of teachers still reported at the end of the year that they never met their students in person.

On-site instruction for HLPs

HLPs sent messages anytime of the day and night to ask questions, and teachers were generally accommodating of these requests. However, teachers also took advantage of module distribution schedules as the time to support parents. For example, one school explained the process as follows. *Meetings were usually set for an hour in a staggered fashion, usually by grade, and with permission from the Division. Parents came to school once or twice a week to hand over finished work and claim new modules. Teachers gathered a small group of parents, a maximum of 10, to explain the directions for all activities in the modules. Teachers gave them a step-by-step guide to the modules. HLPs were oriented for the week’s activities and encouraged to ask questions before leaving the school. Teachers wanted them to clearly understand the modules so they could focus on guiding their children at home. Other schools and parents reported similar support schedules linked to module distribution.*

Similarly, staggered schedules were developed by grade for students to come to the school for some socially distanced face-to-face instruction. In some schools this strategy involved all the students, and in other schools only the struggling students would be invited. Overall, schools all made a concerted effort to reach out to struggling learners and families.

Community support

A common concern in provinces is the very long distance of the student’s home from the school. Rivers, mountains, rough dirt roads, and long walks made going to school difficult even before the pandemic struck. As a result, the once-a-week module exchanges in school could not be done by some parents. If they had a question or misunderstanding about the lesson in the module, it was difficult to contact the teacher. In these cases, **parateachers** or more knowledgeable people in the community came to their aid. The Division of Northern Samar employed **Learning Support Aides (LSAs)** for selected schools. LSAs were college

“I give the supplemental readings to the parents face-to-face so that I can instruct them on how to guide their children at home.” (Teacher)

“I provide direct instructions to the children especially to the younger learners (Kindergarten–Grade 1) who need coaching in reading because they have to know letter names and sounds and how to say them correctly.” (Teacher)

“In other grade levels like in Grade 3, only those who are having difficulty reading are coached one-on-one. Those who are more independent readers, they don't get coached anymore.” (Teacher)

graduates who were not professional teachers but could assist and guide HLPs and students in their studies. They were based in the community, could speak the local dialect, and did house visits. These individuals were very helpful to parents who finished only elementary or secondary education, elderly grandmothers and grandfathers, and working parents who had several children.

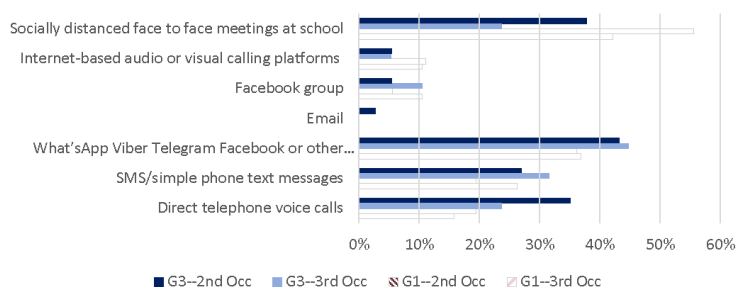
Where teachers have limited in-person interaction with parents, seeking help from other parents and community members is needed more than before. Teachers in this study needed support in contacting parents who did not answer calls, texts, and instant messages online. Here, neighbors and fellow parents helped in sending information and even receiving modules for them. **Parent leaders** were mentioned by four different families. These individuals connect parents to spread word about a meeting, for example. In Bulacan, “mother leaders” were assigned to help during module distribution and retrieval at schools. These mother leaders implemented health protocols and took attendance of HLPs.

Moreover, the **barangay staff** also contributed to connecting with parents. The *barangay tanod*, a type of voluntary community peacekeeping officer, sometimes helped in delivering modules and looking for HLPs who were non-responsive, since they know the area and residents well. In Bicol, they set up the barangay hall as the drop-off and pick-up point for modules in boxes labelled by grade level. One box was for parents to drop their child's completed work, and one was for claiming new modules. In a town in Western Visayas, where a home visit could cost 300 pesos (USD 6.00) one-way via horse ride, the local government unit arranged for the teachers' transportation to make sure that the self-learning modules and feeding ration of the children reached them safely and in a timely manner. Youth groups in Rizal Province led by the Sangguniang Kabataan (youth council), also supported younger learners especially in literacy and math learning by providing tutorial sessions for families where adults have low literacy and in areas where the LGUs and school officials deem such activities safe.

Creative Problem Solving

Technology was used to provide support to HLPs. For example, teachers created group chats in Messenger and groups in Facebook, the two most accessible platforms for HLPs. These messaging apps provided a way to give instructions, and answer questions. In some cases, HLPs were encouraged to create video or audio recordings of their children's reading to help the teacher monitor progress and send by messenger. Teachers from five schools reported creating video presentations to help parents understand the instructions, and one school held online *kumustahan* (check-ins) for parents. Elsewhere, voice messages were sent to the parents' phones, or to the nearest neighbor or designated parent leaders.

Figure 1: Ways That Teachers Communicate with HLP (according to HLP)



“I feel joyful knowing that I am directly helping my child to learn. Unlike before where I only prepared her food. Now, I not only get to teach her, but I also get to spend time with her.” (HLP)

“When all the children are studying, I also learn a lot from their lessons. That makes me feel happy and fulfilled as a parent.” (HLP)

“I wish they'd also give more story books and not just textbooks and modules.” (HLP)

“Distance learning is good if they can also allow a face-to-face at school with limited numbers of students in one class.” (HLP)

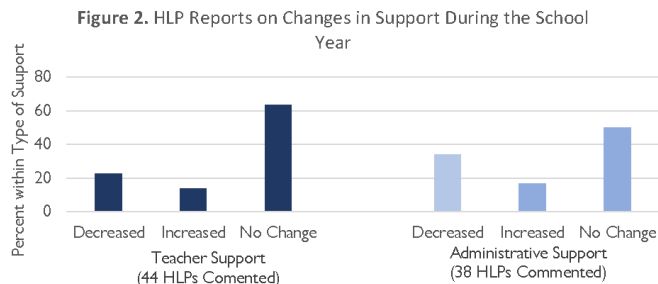
“I recommend that the DepEd provides internet load, especially to those families who are in need.” (HLP)

The ways in which HLPs described communicating with teachers is shown in Figure 1, above, by grade and by time point (2nd occasion=mid-year [March] and 3rd occasion=end-of-year [June]). The most frequent strategies were in-person meetings at school and WhatsApp or other mobile messaging services. See also Brief #3, *Use of Technology*. HLPs were given **Weekly Home Learning Plans** along with the modules to serve as the schedule and guide for parents and HLPs.

In general, **communication** emerged as a recurring theme among HLPs, who emphasized that communicating often, having an open line of communication, and communicating encouraging messages were strategies teachers used to support them. This was also done in a **spirit of acceptance, tolerance, and adaptation**. With a few exceptions HLPs did feel very comfortable reaching out to the school and teachers to discuss concerns, discussing with children the experience, and jointly finding solutions. HLPs have been challenged by this new responsibility and need support, but during interviews, HLPs and teachers reflected on the positive aspects of learning from home, especially the opportunities given to parents to regularly see their children's learning. For many HLPs, this time has been fulfilling, joyful, and an opportunity to bond. It has helped HLPs learn new subjects as well. This level of comfort showed an upward trend between the middle and end of the school year. This positive shift in HLP comfort over the year is reflected in the observations of School Heads that HLPs are adapting to remote learning, while still recognizing that there are still challenges.

How did support change over the course of the year?

During the end-of-year interviews, HLPs were asked if and in what ways teacher and administrative support had changed over the school year. For both cases, the majority of HLPs who answered indicated that they had not observed any changes in support. Those who noted decreased or reduced quality in support from both teachers and administrators mentioned reduced communications (e.g., updates on the remote learning program) and a reduction in the number or quality of materials provided. Comments on increased support from both teachers and administrators referred to increased updates, check-ins, and advice as well as increased materials or distribution efficiency. HLPs also noted increases in teacher monitoring and assessment of their children's performance over the school year.



HLP Suggestions for Support in Coming School Year

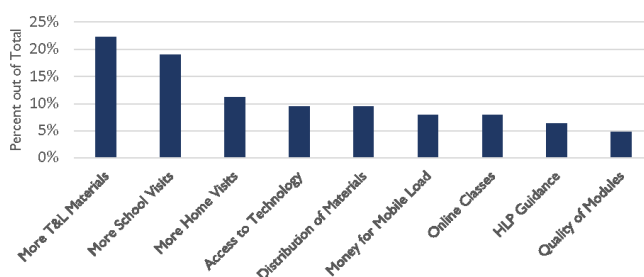
During the end of year interviews, HLPs were asked what recommendations they had for home learning support in the following school year. Of 76 HLPs interviewed, 45 provided a total of 63 recommendations. Most of the recommendations fell in one of two categories: recommendations for more learning materials - especially supplementary reading materials (22%) and for more direct instruction from teachers (30%), either through limited school visits with social distancing or home visits. Figure 3 presents the HLP recommendations.

“At the start of the school year, learners and parents are not very enthusiastic about this, but as we went on, they are now more excited and participative.”
(School Head)

“The parents relate to us and there is already development, before they are having difficulty, now there is development.”
(Teacher)

“See some mothers who really monitor closely their child's reading. Some parents assist their children, and they understand when they ask. They are able to do the strategies I told them.” (Teacher)

Figure 3. Suggestions for Additional Support During Future Remote Learning from 47 HLPs Interviewed End of Year



Recommendations

- Given the importance of home visits, consider whether classroom assignments can be based on proximity to the teacher rather than only by grade level. Team teaching or parateaching—where someone other than the child's assigned teacher makes the home visit—could be another solution. Considering the likelihood of missed learning in 2020-2021, student ability may not align closely to a traditional grade level.
- 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.
- Increase recruitment of parateachers or other aides who can provide orientation and support to HLPs on how to use the SLMs and how to access other resources. 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 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. Additionally, having engaging supplemental reading materials would support this priority.
- 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.
- 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).
- Remembering to speak with acceptance and tolerance can reduce resistance and negative attitudes, consequently making other strategies for engagement more effective.

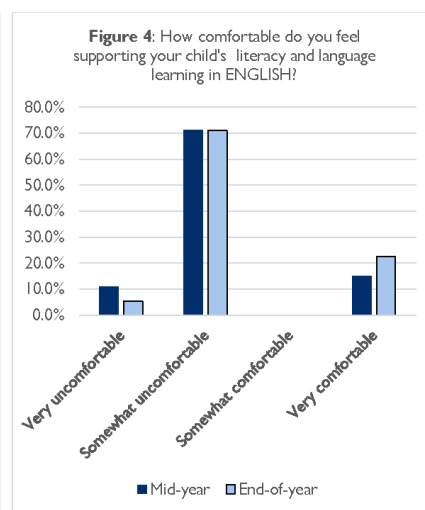
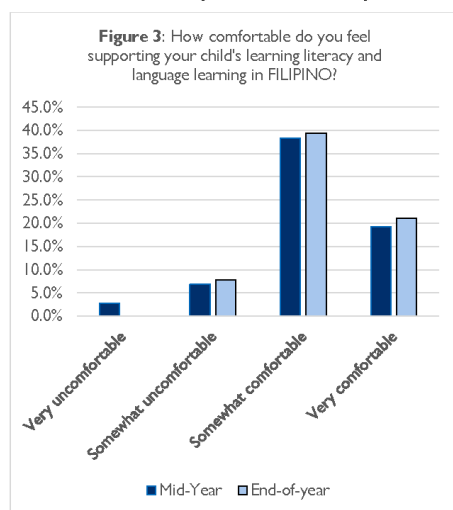
Specific guidance and advice for literacy

When teachers provided support to parents, some of the advice they gave for teaching literacy follows:

- Teach children about letters, sounds of letters, and "kating and patinig."
- Introduce abakada, to introduce the letters one by one.
- The learners should be writing; identify the letters and the names [of the drawing]
- I request the parents to guide their children in reading whatever materials they have at home along with the ones we give them—the modules, the Marungko books, story sheets, etc.
- Start with the easy tasks, like begin with syllabication instead of making the children read whole words immediately.
- The HLP reads, the child listens. Before the HLP reads, he/she sees to it that the child is focused on the HLP. Moderate speed of reading, reading with feelings to engage the child to listen.
- The HLP asks questions, we instruct the HLP to let the child speak. If the child is wrong, the HLP corrects him/her in a way that the child is not offended.
- The child should associate letter to sound before they progress to phrases.
- Understand that reading is not learned overnight, so practice from sounds of letters, to blending of sounds, association of sound to letters, until they can read words.
- Make the activities relatable to the children's experiences so that they can learn better.
- I told them to teach their children even just two letters a day.
- Give incentives every time they finish a module. Just to make learning more fun and exciting.
- Make it a point to read every day for at least 30 minutes with each child.
- The student must answer the modules themselves, even if their answers are wrong.

Comfort levels supporting mother tongues were relatively high at the first time point—49% were “very comfortable” and 45% were “somewhat comfortable.” By the second time point, this shifted to be majority “somewhat comfortable” (56%) and only 33% “very comfortable.”

On the other hand, feelings remained more consistent related to Filipino and English. Parents were relatively more comfortable supporting their children's Filipino literacy development, but mostly uncomfortable with English, as shown in Figures 3 and 4, below.



See also *Brief #7: Literacy Instructional Practices*.

Philippines Remote Learning Study

FINDINGS BRIEF #2: TEACHING AND LEARNING MATERIALS

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, 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.

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 parents were interviewed in November as recruitment was still underway and only 7 teachers were surveyed. Children were also asked to fill out a literacy assessment worksheet, but very few parents returned this worksheet at each occasion. This is one of seven briefs prepared based on the results of this study. See shared.rti.org for the full series of briefs.

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Context

Due to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic all schools in the Philippines were closed during the 2020–2021 academic year. What did teachers, school heads, and home learning partners (HLPs) do to ensure continuity of learning during school closures? What teaching and learning materials (TLMs) were used to support early literacy learning, in particular? This brief explores the strategies and adaptations these educational stakeholders made to support at home learning through the use of TLMs and gives recommendations to further improve the use of TLMs as school closures continue.

Using Teaching and Learning Materials

Self-learning modules

When schools closed in 2020, the Department of Education (DepEd) quickly developed a set of most essential learning competencies (MELCs) for the country's curriculum. These MELCs were used to develop printed self-learning modules (SLMs) for learners at home. Survey analysis reveals that these SLMs for reading in mother-tongue languages, Filipino, and English were the primary support used by most schools for remote learning. According to the school heads in our study (N=20), 50% of schools used the SLMs as their primary and sole learning delivery modality. Both teachers and school heads found the SLMs to be very helpful. The majority of HLPs in the study (N=76) found use of SLMs as a modality to be somewhat effective (65%), while others claimed they were somewhat ineffective (12%) or not at all effective (7%). This may be due to difficulties HLPs had in supporting children, especially if the HLPs lacked strong literacy skills (see *Brief#1: Strategies for Assisting Home Learning Partners*).

Supplementary materials provided by teachers

Teachers were resourceful in gathering and reproducing learning materials for their students that supplemented the SLMs from the DepEd central office, particularly learning activity sheets and leveled readers that came from existing materials in the classroom or personal files. Some teachers also used DepEd Commons or Learning Resources Management and Development System as a toolbox of curated and quality-assured learning materials. This was a challenge for others, though, due to difficulties accessing the Internet (see *Brief#3: Use of Technology*).

Similar to the teachers, most HLPs stated that they had enough resources in mother tongues, Filipino, and English to support learning at home. Eighty-three percent of HLPs (N=76) agreed or strongly agreed that their children had the TLMs needed to learn mother-tongue languages while 87% stated the same for Filipino and 80% for English. Additionally, HLPs stated they used the SLMs the most, followed by the learning activity sheets and the leveled readers provided by the school.

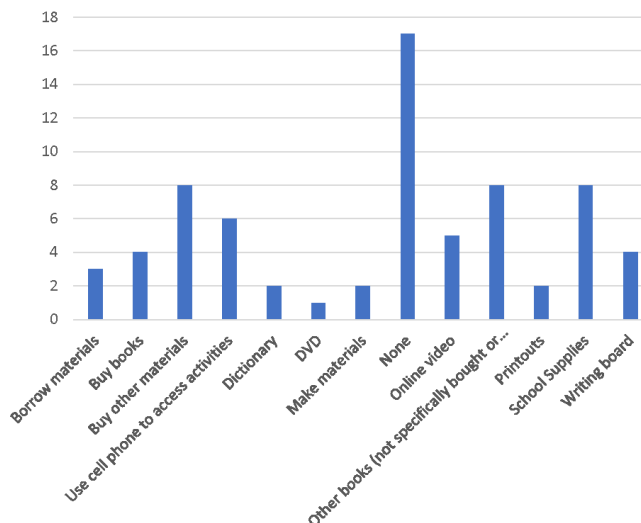
Supplementary resources provided by the family

At mid-year, when asked if they used any other resources not provided by the school, 17 HLPs stated that they only had the SLMs and nothing else. On the other hand, 42 HLPs described ways that they created, borrowed, found or bought other

“Aside from the modules and the aforementioned video calls by the teacher, we have our own story books. I encourage them to read and draw from time to time instead of them just playing outside. Sometimes I notice that they role play as teacher and student.” (HLP)

resources such as alphabet charts, flash cards, chalk, drawing materials, notebooks, small blackboards, manila paper, and DVDs. Figure 1 below shows the answers HLPs provided during interviews. It shows that many parents spent household resources to support children’s learning, encouraged reading beyond what the school provides, and used cellphones and the internet to access supplementary activities or videos.

Figure 1: Other materials used outside of what school provided (HLP responses) N=59



This shows resourcefulness, on the one hand; but it also highlights how remote learning may widen the inequality gap for families who do not have the resources or skills to access supplemental resources for their children. It also suggests that resources found outside of the school may be more intuitive or engaging than what the school provides in the form of SLMs. This is unsurprising, since many commercial or internet resources were designed specifically for use in the home or in the absence of a teacher.

Example Practice

WHAT: The “PIVOT 4A” Learner’s Materials developed by DepEd CALABARZON were a simplified version of the central office’s original SLMs. The content was unpacked into a more open layout, self-assessment tasks, and easier learning activities suited to the learner. Aside from it being conducive to learning at home, the PIVOT 4A was less bulky, too. A module good for a week had 38 pages, but the same number of pages was already good for a whole quarter in PIVOT 4A.

WHY: Teachers reported that the original SLMs were too difficult, contained too many activities, and were not differentiated to learner needs. They found ways to reduce, adapt, and be more flexible in helping students get the work done.

Challenges with Using Teaching and Learning Materials

The SLMs are especially important for families that have little or no access to technology for remote learning. Although most teachers and HLPs found the DepEd materials useful and beneficial, they also commented about the **limitations**

“A typical module now has 1–3 activities in one subject and lesson explanations.” (Teacher)

“We saw in the modules there are many activities that are too hard for the parents. They struggled with teaching their child. We replace the difficult activities with something that is not difficult for them to teach.” (Teacher)

“The modules are all the same for all children.... we need to simplify for the slow learners...the content is difficult...” (Teacher)

of using printed materials, particularly regarding the use and distribution of these materials.

School heads, teachers, and HLPs noted that the SLMs were **too lengthy**. Many teachers and administrators commented that they had to spend a considerable amount of time and funding on downloading, printing, and distributing these modules. School heads sought ways to obtain printers, copiers, bond paper, and ink cartridges. For some schools in far flung areas, fixing hardware and replenishing supplies were challenges as well.

The number of pages was a critical factor in motivating both students and HLPs in studying and answering modules. In the first few weeks of the school year, it was overwhelming for the parents to bring home bundles, and even reams, of paper. Seeing volumes of paper for student work added to the worries of HLPs and their discomfort with the change from school to home learning. **Translating SLMs into appropriate mother-tongue languages** also took up a considerable amount of time. Some teachers also noted that the modules were too challenging for students and not easily adaptable for different learner needs. However, the emerging findings of this study indicate that teachers, school heads, HLPs, and communities did their best to adapt and work on changing and adapting TLMs to suit the needs of their students and contexts (see example at left).

To address the challenge of lengthy modules, teachers started to decrease the activities in the modules or the number of subjects per day and reduce redundant activities after the first quarter.

Recommendations

- 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.

Philippines Remote Learning Study

FINDINGS BRIEF 3: USE OF TECHNOLOGY

Context

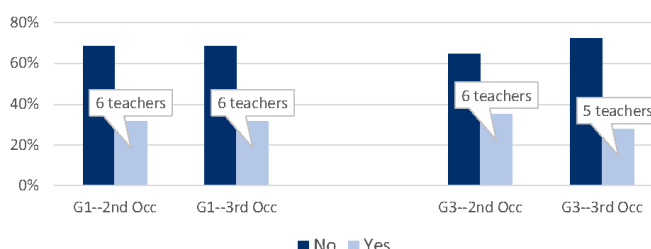
When schools in the Philippines closed due to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, the Department of Education (DepEd) and educational stakeholders quickly pivoted to using technology and various forms of distance learning modalities to ensure continuity of learning. Forms of digital technologies used to support learning and communication among school heads, teachers, and home learning partners (HLPs) included mobile messaging technologies, social media platforms such as Facebook, online tools for teaching and learning such as Google Classroom, and one-way communication media such as television and radio. These platforms were largely available through mobile devices rather than home computers. This brief discusses emerging findings from the remote study regarding the use of digital technologies for at-home learning; the ways in which it was both enabling and challenging for teachers, HLPs, and school heads; and how it **revealed the digital divide** and inequities in the Philippine educational system.

Using Digital Technologies

Various types of digital technologies were used to support learning at home and communication among educational stakeholders.

Realtime video and Internet. The Internet was critical in allowing teachers, supported by school heads, to download and print DepEd self-learning modules (SLMs)—the most prevalent type of remote learning resource (see Brief #2 on teaching and learning materials). For their own professional development, 43% of teachers used Internet-based visual calling platforms like Zoom, Skype, and Google Meet to conduct learning action cell meetings. However, it is important to note that not all teachers could or did make use of these digital technologies. Only 8.3% of teachers used online multimedia like DepEd Commons and YouTube—2 teachers mid-year and 4 teachers at the end of the year. Only 8 teachers (22%) at most reported using visual calling platforms like Facebook or Google Meet to communicate with HLPs. As shown in Figure 1, below, in Grades 1 (G1) and 3 (G3) alike, only 32% of teachers ever used live remote instruction with students, and this showed little change between mid-year (2nd occasion [March]) and the end of the year (3rd occasion [June]). Occasion 1 (November) is not graphed because of low sample size from teachers, who were still being recruited into the study at the start of the year.

Figure 1: Teacher question: Do you ever do remote, live instruction with your students?



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. Data was collected at three time points—November, March and June—from 20 school heads, 37 teachers and 79 home learning partners to gain insights on school administration, teaching and learning, and the home environment.

Key Data

Before schools closed 12% of schools had some kind of school-based technology. Four schools have purchased wifi connection since the start of the year. Most schools have had to buy, rent or get donations of printers and copiers for the SLMs.

This is one of seven briefs prepared based on the results of this study. See shared.rti.org for the full series of briefs.

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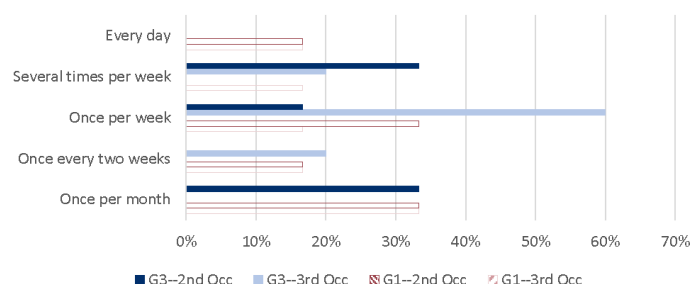
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December 1, 2021

Among the teachers who did say they conducted remote instruction using the internet (n=23), only teachers of Grade 1 said they did live classes every day. More Grade 3 teachers were holding live sessions at the end of the year (Occ. 3) than mid-year (Occ. 2).

Figure 2: Teacher Question: How often do you conduct live, remote classes?



“Some of my teachers then had no computer knowledge, but we have to learn how to use Google Sheets, the DepEd links.” (School head)

“The most difficult part job of my job now is adjusting to technology but we are learning. I am learning.” (Teacher)

“Online classes are held every day via Facebook Messenger. The teacher reads a lesson and asks a student from the class to answer.” (Home Learning Partner)

Messaging apps. 56% of teachers surveyed, on average across grades and time points, said they used short message service (SMS) to communicate with HLPs. 40% of teachers used SMS to provide feedback to students on their assignments, but in most cases, SMS was used in combination with other modalities such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and Viber messages or group chats. The social media platforms that were reported most often by teachers and HLPs were Facebook and Messenger, possibly because these platforms were zero rated (so they cost the user no data charges) in the Philippines. In one case, class advisers created group chats in Messenger and groups in Facebook, and these applications functioned as an e-learning management system for an easy flow of communication between teachers and HLPs. School heads also used a variety of modalities to communicate with teachers and HLPs including video calling platforms like Zoom, Facebook, Skype, and Google Meet. Two schools reported using two-way radio to communicate with teachers and HLPs.

Broadcast technology. Only 3 teachers made use of television broadcasts, but 13—up from 9 mid-year—used radio broadcasts. Parents from 6 different schools mentioned use of DepEd TV during interviews, as did teachers from 4 schools out of 20. Comments suggest that very few teachers aligned students’ lessons to television and radio broadcasts, but instead encouraged students to watch selected episodes and tune in to scheduled lessons for their grade level. Division offices also supported this by creating their own video lessons. In Region IX Zamboanga Peninsula, the Division of Isabela City produced its own “TELEdukasyon.” The different mother tongues of the region were used in the contextualized video lessons available online and on local cable TV.

Technology and Literacy Instruction

Teachers who could use technology found creative ways of doing so; for example, one-on-one oral reading lessons were conducted using video calls or voice calls, or parents would submit video recordings of students for teachers to review. Teachers prepared reading materials and set a schedule prior to each student’s reading exercise. This practice gave both teachers and parents peace of mind that the students were being assessed by authorities. A common concern of teachers was the uncertainty of whether students were really learning and answering the modules themselves. (See Brief #7, *Literacy Instructional Practice*).

“Before, teachers are the ones who teach their children about the lessons but now their children are the ones who teach them in creating video lessons. And that’s the 21st century skills that the teachers need to develop.” (School Head)

“Some teachers are having a hard time learning and using technology/ICT for online classes so I advise them that they can go to school—There’s a computer laboratory there where some staff can teach them or assist them while they conduct online classes” (School Head).

“We also need gadgets and modern technology. We don’t have television and electricity. We are really struggling. We can only access Messenger. It’s hard for us to download.” (Home Learning Partner)

No more than 2 teachers in any grade or at any time point found offline multimedia to be among the most useful strategy for literacy, probably because this was also not widely used. On the other hand, online media like YouTube was considered very useful by more Grade 3 teachers than Grade 1 teachers, and the percent of teachers finding it useful increased from 12 to 25% from mid-year to end-of-year. More teachers in Grade 1 and Grade 3 (between 3 and 6 at each time point and grade) found radio broadcasts to be most useful and one teacher at any grade/time point found television to be most useful. In interviews, school heads and teachers revealed that many of them did not know how to use digital technologies and had difficulty adjusting to their use. However, they all turned to information and communications technology specialists, and sometimes their own children to help them create video lessons, use learning management systems, conduct online classes, and participate in online webinars for their professional development.

Digital Divide

Findings on the use of digital technologies during school closures reveal the inequities and digital divide in the education of Filipino children. For example, in the National Capital Region, where devices and the Internet are more easily accessible, the Division of Pasig City was given tablets and laptops by the city government so that each child had a device loaded with offline resources. Online learning was utilized, and reading instruction was done on video conferencing platforms such as Google Meet. However, very few schools and families in our sample outside of Metro Manila had such an opportunity. Only 13% of school heads stated that they already had computers or tablets for students of any grade in their school. Most families did not have broadband Internet connections, stable cellular signals, and a dedicated smartphone or other device for the student.

Even if devices were available, some schools and families did not have reliable electricity to power the devices needed for communication and printing materials, nor sufficient internet speed for downloading materials. HLPs required financial assistance for mobile load allowances to be able to attend online classes, send videos of performance tasks, download learning materials, and open media links sent by the teacher.

Recommendations

- 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 reuse.

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 for the full series of briefs.

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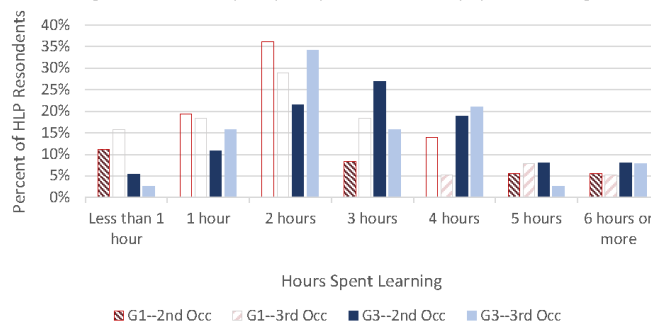
December 1, 2021

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)

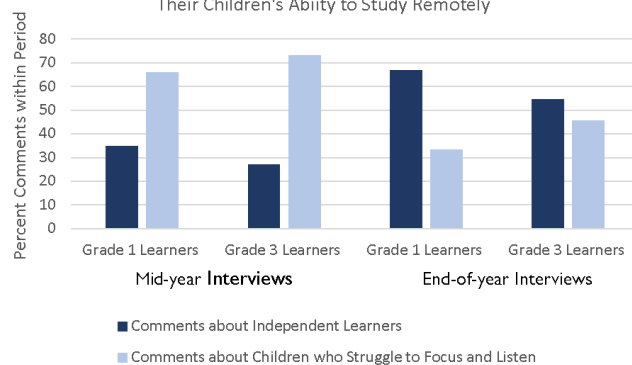
“Before, the HLPs and the pupils were active in going to school to receive their modules on Mondays and submit it on Thursdays. But recently, some pupils won’t even go to school, it seems like they’re tired with the situation, they won’t receive or submit their modules. It’s like if their interest in 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

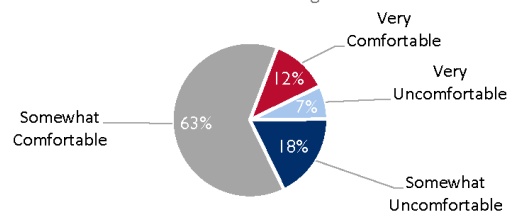
Some HLPs reported during interviews that their children were active in their learning, independent readers and confident. These learners reached out for help when they needed it and even reviewed content and prepared for daily tasks in advance. However, as expected of early grade learners, other HLPs 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



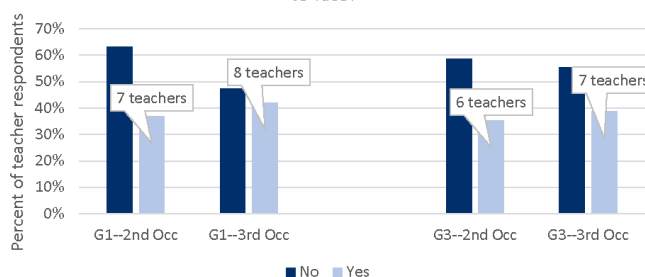
¹ USAID, November 2020. Best Practices on Effective SEL/Soft Skills Interventions in Distance Learning <https://www.edulinks.org/sites/default/files/media/file/Remote-SEL-FINAL-508.pdf>

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.

Teacher-student contact time

Maintaining connections between learners and their teachers is crucial for effective home learning.¹ 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.

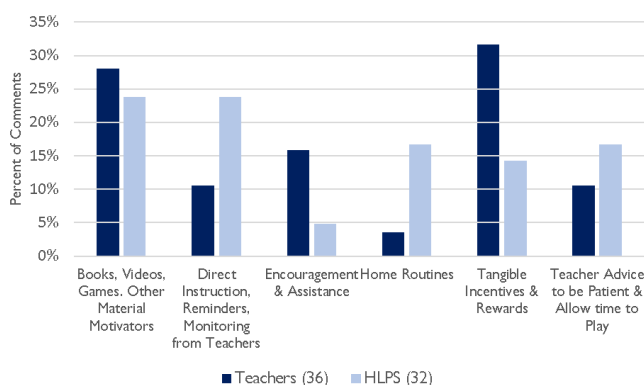
Table 1: HLP-reported strategies for supporting children (survey responses at occasion 3)

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

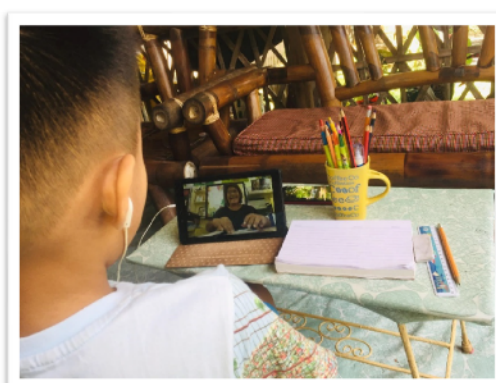
To summarize, Philippine teachers and families have gone to great lengths under extraordinary circumstances to keep children engaged and learning from home. There is a strong need and desire for more contact time from the teacher to help this become a reality. Table 2 below summarizes recommendations 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"> 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. 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. Teachers must have regular check-ins with HLPs and learners to discuss the success in following the plan and adjust if necessary. Allocate a comfortable and well-lit spot, if possible, for children to study.
Limited connection between teacher and learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers recognize the critical need to regularly connect with their learners and develop a plan to check in directly with learners. 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.

Impedes Learner Engagement	Suggestions to Enhance Learner Engagement
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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.
HLPs have difficulty keeping their children engaged and focused to complete their assignments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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. 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.
Overwhelming volume of content or tasks to complete	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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.
Fatigue with the modules	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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. 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.

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



Philippines Remote Learning Study

FINDINGS BRIEF #5: OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

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.

This is a longitudinal mixed-methods study involving surveys and interviews with the same set of participants: the school head, two teachers (a Grade 1 and a Grade 3 teacher), and four families and students. Phone interviews only were conducted with the home learning partners. Data collections took place in November, February and May.

This is one of seven briefs prepared based on the results of this study. See shared.rti.org for the full series of briefs.

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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

Challenge	Adaptation
Materials (content and distribution)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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.

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

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.

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 to at least check on well-being 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.

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.

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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

Philippines Remote Learning Study | I

“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.

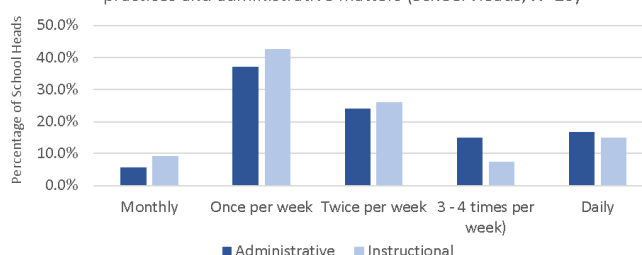
Teacher Support

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)

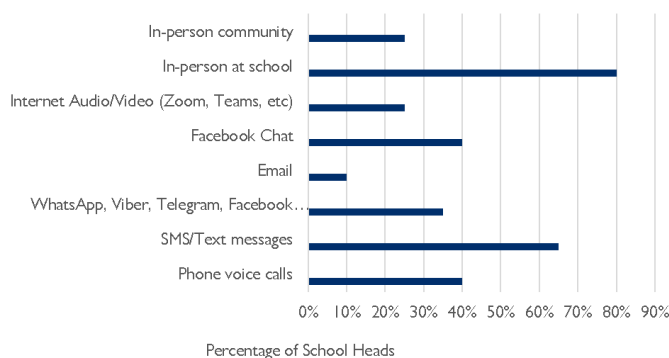


Over the course of the school year, 6 school heads reported increased frequency of providing teacher feedback, whereas 5 reported decreased frequency (the other 9 either reported no change, or the responses both increased and decreased).

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.

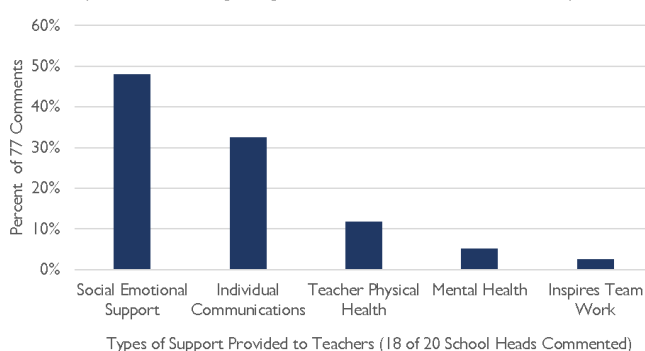
During interviews, teachers spoke to the openness and approachability of school heads, and school heads discussed the priorities they placed on giving teachers a chance to discuss both personal and professional challenges. Interview comments from both school heads and teachers centered on open communications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

Philippines Remote Learning Study

FINDINGS BRIEF #7: LITERACY INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICE

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, 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.

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 parents were interviewed in November as recruitment was still underway and only 7 teachers were surveyed. Children were also asked to fill out a literacy assessment worksheet, but very few parents returned this worksheet at each occasion.

This is one of seven briefs prepared based on the results of this study. See shared.rti.org for the full series of briefs.

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Context

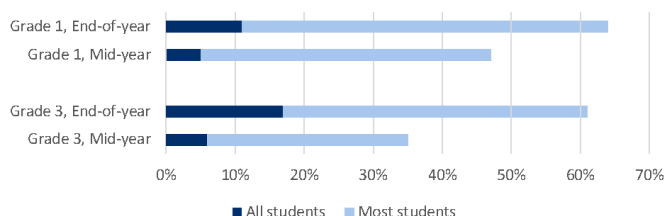
Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the entire school year 2020-2021 in the Philippines was delivered remotely, in addition to several months of the end of school year 2019-2020. Under the mother tongue-based multilingual education curriculum (MTB-MLE), children begin school in their home language (if available) and then learn Filipino and English as second and third languages. How is such a challenging curriculum of foundational skills delivered when students are separated from their teachers due to pandemic restrictions? This study aimed to gather insights to help the Philippines Department of Education (DepEd) address gaps in service delivery and anticipate where students might be when schools reopen. Home learning partners (HLP) in the study came from a wide range of contexts, but most work in the informal sector and few have higher education (see Brief #1, *Strategies for Assisting Home Learning Partners*), so they may also be unaccustomed to supporting their children across these three language domains.

Shifting from classroom to remote learning

Prior to pivoting to home-based distance or 'remote' learning, most Grade 1 and Grade 3 teachers rated their own ability to teach literacy in the mother tongue as "good" or "very good" (89% and 82%, respectively), and similarly for Filipino with 88% of teachers in both grade levels assigning that rating. Confidence in English was lower for both grade levels, with only 68% and 76% of Grade 1 and Grade 3 teachers, respectively, feeling "good" or "very good" about their ability, with the remaining reporting average preparedness. However, teachers **were less confident transferring these skills to the remote learning environment**. At least 10 percentage points fewer teachers reported feeling "extremely confident" or "somewhat confident" in teaching literacy in the mother tongue (79%/72%, G1/G3), Filipino (73%/72%, G1/G3), and English (68%/50%, G1/G3). More Grade 3 teachers seem to struggle than Grade 1, but this may also be that the curriculum is more demanding (i.e., English is not yet taught in Grade 1, and Filipino is only oral at that stage).

At the end of the school year 62% of teachers—or 23 out of 37—felt that teaching literacy through distance learning is effective for "all" or "most" children; about 22% or 8 teachers felt that it was effective for only "half" of the students and, finally, 16% or 6 teachers felt it is only effective for a few (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Teacher survey responses: Language and literacy during distance learning is effective for:



“To teach the correct pronunciation of words, teachers sometimes take a video of themselves and send them to HLPs and student. First teach how to read ‘Marungkko’ or letter sounds and phonics.”
(School Head)

“We give the audio together with the reading materials for the child. The parent will play it and let the child listen. So that he/she can hear how the words are being pronounced. Mostly in English, the parents can’t pronounce it properly.”
(Teacher)

“I hold classes via Google Meet or Zoom once or twice a week to better teach language and literacy and better gauge the skills of my students.” (Teacher)

This self-reported rating seems highly positive considering the number of challenges that teachers raised during the interviews (see analysis and quotes, next page). In fact, the positive attitude increased from mid- to end-of year and was not considerably different between Grade 1 and Grade 3 teachers.

Modalities for Delivering Literacy Instruction

Teachers delivered instruction in a variety of ways. Instructional delivery included the sole use of printed self-learning modules (SLM), home visits, use of digital technologies, and online teaching. The following breaks down the combination of modalities used across the 20 schools participating in the study.

Figure 2: Instructional modalities for teaching literacy, from teacher interview data

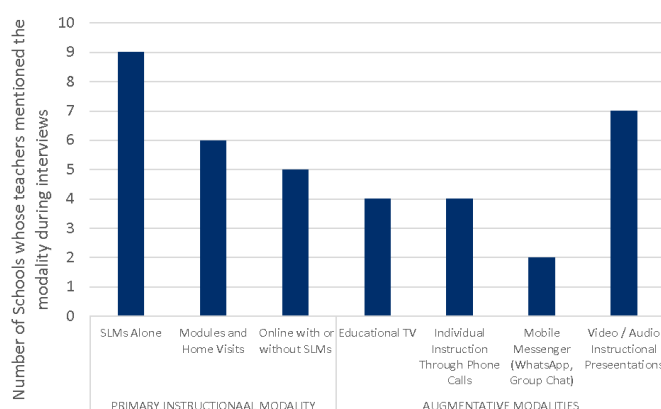


Figure 2 shows teacher reports during interviews and shows that there is not one model that all schools adopted, rather they made use of the modalities available to them—often more than one. During interviews, teachers discussed a variety of ways they adapted their teaching practices to teach reading. From survey responses, half of the schools in this study (50%) **used SLMs as the sole means of remote learning and teaching** and found these materials to be very useful

Teacher-student contact time

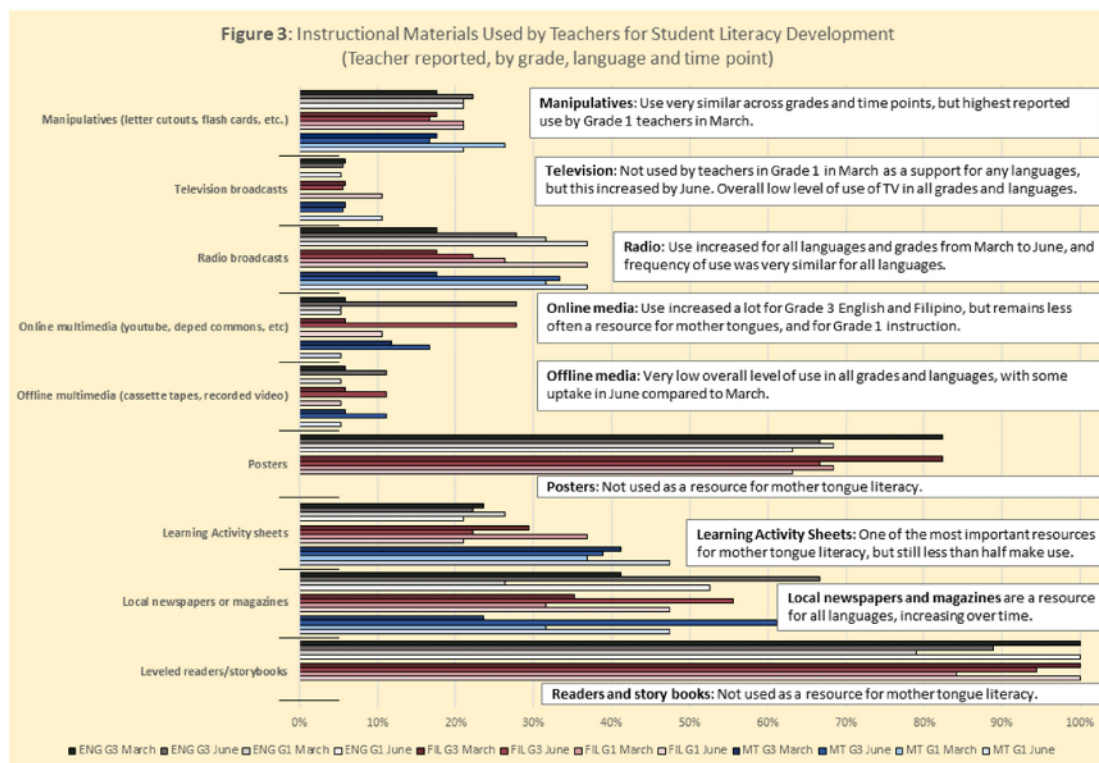
There was very little face-to face teaching. Teachers who could, visited children in their homes, however because of COVID-19 restrictions, very few of the teachers could do this. According to the survey responses, less than half of the teachers said they conducted any home visits with children. Twenty-seven percent of teachers started the academic year making home visits, and this number rose to 41% by the end of the academic year. Of those who could make home visits, thirty-one percent stated that they met with learners once a week for 10-20 minutes. This is enough time perhaps to check in with learners, but not enough to support learners who are struggling and give HLPs help they might need. Less than half of the teachers (37%) spoke directly to children at least once a week to check on their learning, whether in person or from a distance. This number was highest, at 44% in the middle of the year, but dropped to 32% by the end of the academic year. Some teachers pointed out during their interviews that it was challenging to reach out to every child in the class. The number of teachers who taught online increased over the school year from 9% at the beginning of the year to 30% in the 4th quarter.

Literacy teaching practices

For the most part, teachers taught children directly through distance modalities mentioned above and/or by providing specific guidance to HLPs on reading instruction. Analysis of interview transcripts show that most comments made by teachers focused on describing adaptations they made to direct instruction.

First, to support children in learning letter sounds and syllables, or the *Morungko* method, some teachers would take a video of themselves and send it to HLPs and students. Second, the DepEd materials were adapted—modified for level of difficulty and translated when needed—and sometimes supplemented with teacher-made or downloaded reading materials. Teachers gave instruction on how HLPs could help their child read and understand through “shorter stories” than what might be provided in the regular curriculum materials. Teachers who gave online classes, made use of these materials to listen to children read. Teachers also provided specific instructions for parents, including coaching on reading fluency and giving children a chance to answer questions or talk about what they have read. (See also *Brief #1 Strategies for Supporting Home Learning Partners*). Teachers also tailored their support to parents, according to the parent’s skills to help fill these gaps. The focus on reading practice was mentioned by many, with one teacher mentioning a “Drop everything and read” program on Fridays, when children were not required to do modules, just read.

Figure 3, below, provides more detailed survey responses regarding instructional materials used for supporting literacy development in each of the three languages of the curriculum. It indicates that resources for mother tongue literacy instruction are scarce, and there are fewer types of resources available.



“I cannot ask my learners to read. I don’t know who among them are readers and not.”
(Teacher)

“I wouldn’t say that the modules are not working. It’s just that there’s no way for me to verify if it’s really working or not because even the summative test is done at home.”
(Teacher)

“I give a reading material to bring home. I ask them to answer it. I am not sure who is answering though. When I check, all have perfect scores. Even if I keep sending them learning materials, if the parents keep answering for the students, it’s nothing”
(Teacher)

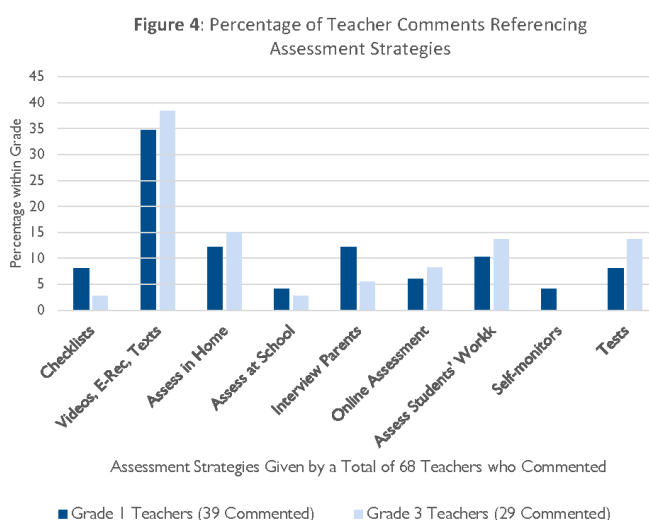
“We have a self-monitoring tool where each student is asked at the end of the module if they were able to learn the lessons/skills after completing the module.” (Teacher)

Between 11 and 21% of teachers in Grades 1 and 3, at each time point—March and June—said they were not teaching mother tongue at all. See also *Brief #2 Teaching and Learning Materials*. Only 7 teachers were surveyed in November, so this analysis uses only occasion 2 and 3.

Literacy assessment practices

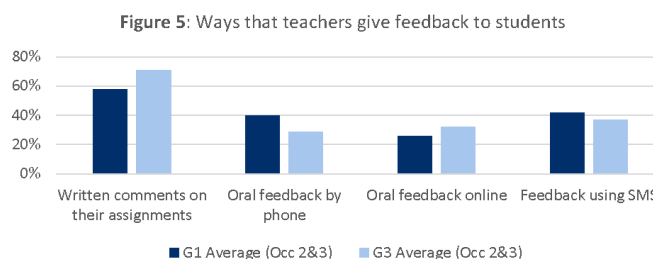
The most frequent comment made by teachers about monitoring their students’ learning activities and progress was the use of direct assessment through the telephone, Facebook Messenger, or Group Chats with children reading to their teacher or through exchanges of video- or audio-recordings of children reading. These mechanisms limit children whose parents don’t have a phone, but teachers encouraged parents to call on neighbors to share their phones for this purpose.

Teachers also provide feedback directly on activity sheets and writing assignments submitted by the students. Some teachers provided an “Assessment Checklist” to parents to check in on student progress on daily tasks and completion of modules. Teachers are cognizant of the importance of more regular assessments or quizzes to keep children on task and to gauge progress more regularly, in addition to the use of summative tests at the end of each quarter, but they also find it difficult. Figure 4 provides a breakdown of the percent of comments made by Grade 1 and Grade 3 teachers during interviews about different assessment approaches. There were a total of 171 comments (98 from 39 Grade 1 teachers and 73 from 29 Grade 3 teachers), as shown in Figure 4, below. Most comments (35% of Grade 1 comments and 38% of Grade 3 comments) concerned the use of audio and video recordings.



The self-administered teacher survey also asked about **assessment practices**. According to the survey, most teachers (80%) require students to turn in completed language and literacy assignments weekly. There was little difference in practice between Grade 1 and Grade 3 teachers, except that four G1 teachers answered “daily”, but no Grade 3 teachers said ‘daily’. Most teachers evaluate this student work and provide feedback weekly as well (about 60%), again with the exception of a few teachers who provide G1 students feedback daily or several times in a week.

Teachers **communicate feedback** to their students in a combination of ways, as shown in Figure 5 below. The pattern is similar for both grades, although Grade 3 teachers were more inclined to give written or oral feedback. Written feedback increased at the end of the year by 21 to 25 percentage points for G1 and G3, respectively, compared to mid-year (not shown in graph, which provides the average between occasions 2 and 3).



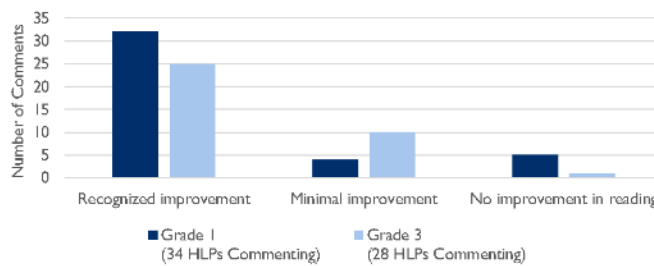
Challenges and achievements

Teachers' greatest concerns about teaching literacy in the remote learning context centered around children's learning and assessment. Assessment of student performance is one of the greatest challenges that teachers face in remote learning. Many teachers expressed their frustration in not knowing how their students are progressing. For example, some teachers are not able to make home visits and aren't providing online instruction—two of the most effective ways to gauge progress. With only the students' learning activity sheets to evaluate, they still can't listen to their students read nor ask them comprehension questions. Another challenge faced by many teachers is that some parents complete their child's work. **Teachers were concerned about whether children were learning to read**, learning to read fluently and if they were progressing in their reading and language proficiency. There is genuine care and concern that children are not progressing as they should be, and teachers were uncertain about their student's abilities in reading as this is difficult to assess without in-person contact.

Yet teachers are also being very creative about teaching and assessing reading. Teachers mentioned a wide variety of the positive comments about their instruction in the remote learning context, the most frequently mentioned was what the parents were experiencing and learning. Teachers mentioned the opportunity of parents "seeing for themselves how children learn". They mentioned the opportunity for bonding with their children through their support for their child's learning. Other positive aspects mentioned included use of games for enhancing interest and engagement; increased communication with parents; finding materials on the internet; hearing strong feedback from parents on the value of the SLMs; learner independence and time management skills and allocating more focused reading time.

During the end-of-year interviews, parents were asked if they had observed any improvements in their child's reading ability. The reported observations for Grade 1 and Grade 3 learners are presented in Figure 6. Of the 62 HLPs who commented on learners' reading, most observed recognizable improvements. Though a few HLPs related these to English or Filipino, most did not specify the language.

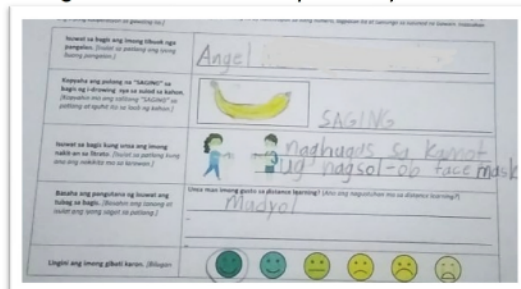
Figure 6. HLP Observations of Learners' Reading Improvements
(Comments from End-of-Year Interviews)



Recommendations

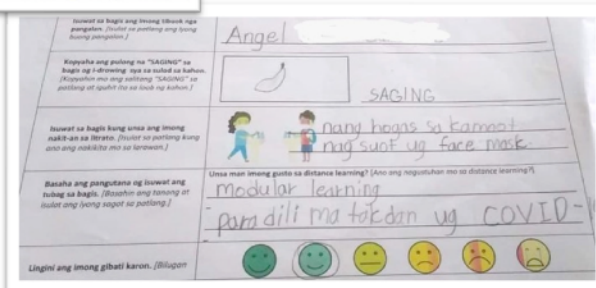
- Increase opportunities for teachers to have direct contact with students, if not in person, then by regular phone contacts or if possible online learning. Teacher child connections are crucial both for teacher's sense of the child's progress and for the child to be connected and maintain their relationships with teachers.
- Audio- and video- communications and exchange of recordings is one avenue in which any teacher can 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.
- Teach HLPs how to support children without placing undo burden on them.

Image 1. A Grade 1 child's mid-year literacy work



As part of the study design, we created a written literacy check-in. The HLP was asked to read the instructions to the child in the local language. Researchers provided instructions. Some families did not return the assessment at both time points, and there was less than three months between check-ins. Images 1 and 2 provide examples of student work at these two time points.

Image 2: The same child's work at end-of-year interview



Appendix 2: Case Studies



ALL CHILDREN READING—PHILIPPINES

Remote Learning Study: School 1 Case Study Description



School and Community Context

This school is in one of the most populated urban centers of the Philippines, with the main source of income for the community being fishing, trading, and marine-related industries, including sardine packing and seaweed industries. Within the past decade the urban center experienced armed conflict, which resulted in displacement of persons affected and an ongoing rehabilitation of impacted areas of the city. Approximately 30 percent of the population in the city is living in poverty, which according to the school principal, presents certain

special challenges to an effective remote learning context.

Working parents felt they had limited availability at home to support their child's learning, and some parents felt they did not have the education they needed to provide that support. Language was also an overarching challenge. Though the modules and texts for the early grades were written in Chavacano, 89 percent of the children were Sama and other learners were Badijao and Tausug. None of the families from these language groups spoke Chavacano. Thus, the teachers translated the materials into Tagalog/Filipino to reach most of the children. To complicate the language challenge, at the outset of remote learning, teachers had not received training in teaching in the mother tongue, though they did receive this training later in the year. There was a change in the school head mid-year, which resulted in more active instructional leadership in the school and improved relationships and communications with teachers.

School's Remote Learning Model

This school delivers distance learning through self-learning modules supplemented by teacher-developed learning action sheets that are distributed and returned to the schools by home learning partners (HLPs) on a regular schedule. The printing, delivery, and return of completed modules and learning action sheets was the greatest concern at the beginning of the school year. Teachers were doing the printing themselves, and there were insufficient printers, staffing, and paper in the first part of the school year, with increased access to supplies by mid-year. The transition to remote learning was not easy for this school. When asked to respond to the statement, "My school transitioned seamlessly to using the selected Learning Development Modules," the

Continued >

school head selected "Neutral" (e.g., not agreeing or disagreeing with the statement) at the beginning of the year, mid-year, and toward the end of the year.

In the last third of the school year, there was another strict lockdown. Parents were not allowed to come to school to collect the modules or return the completed ones. In this school, where there was no online teaching and limited use of cell phones to communicate with parents, this situation presented a fundamental problem. When the parents were able to collect the modules again, there was quite a build-up of new modules, which was difficult for HLPs to get through.

Leadership

In this section we describe how the school head applied elements of the Philippines Department of Education (DepEd) standards of leadership—"instructional leadership," "resource management and outreach," and "teacher support and development"—to the school's transition to remote learning and to the support of learners' continuity of learning in this context.

At the opening of the school year, teachers reported that they were not prepared sufficiently for the pivot to remote learning and did not receive instructional guidance from the school head, except for keeping teachers abreast of regular updates from DepEd central through group chats. Teachers were responsible for all the printing, including the purchase of paper and maintenance of their home printers. Some teachers even took out a loan to have the materials they needed to print the modules in eight subjects. In the beginning of the school year, the school head did not help with these tasks, teachers said. Leadership support was limited to helping to distribute the modules to families and keeping teachers abreast of DepEd updates related to the remote learning program.

Instructional Leadership. There was a shift in leadership in the middle of the year and adequate orientation was provided teachers by mid-year. However, communications with teachers about best practices in teaching and the provision of feedback on teaching practices was reported to take place only monthly, the school head reported. The Grade 3 teacher "agreed" that the school head communicated with them every week; however, the Grade 1 teacher "disagreed" or was "neutral." The

new school head provided guidance to teachers about communications with parents, reminding them to encourage parents to talk to their learners in "a good way" and to let learners complete their modules rather than doing the work for their children. Though the school head encouraged teachers to communicate with parents regularly, teachers reported the need for more direct assistance in reaching out to learners and parents.

Teachers described the new school head as "approachable" and responsive to teachers' material needs.

Resource Management and Outreach. The new school head accessed maintenance and other operating expenses (MOOE) funds to provide printers in all grades and televisions, to buy consumables such as paper, and to beautify the school grounds. HLPs received small packages of learning supplies such as pencils and scissors and a hygiene kit mid-year. This positive shift in school leadership was reinforced by responses to the teacher surveys.

Survey results showed that there was more frequent monitoring of teacher preparation and instruction according to the Most Essential Learning Competencies—increasing in frequency from monthly reviews to weekly reviews. However, according to teachers, school head communications and feedback on instruction attenuated over the school year, with teachers reporting that they received feedback only once per month by the end of the school year. Communications with individual teachers varied. The Grade 1 teacher "disagreed" or was "neutral" to the statement, "My school head makes time to talk to me every week" while the Grade 3 teacher "agreed."

Teacher Support and Development. The new school head was perceived to be more approachable and responsive to teachers' material needs toward the end of the school year, compared to the beginning of the school year. At the beginning of the year teachers disagreed with the statement, "I feel comfortable approaching my school head with any issues I have with implementation," but "agreed" with the statement by the end of the year. Teachers' perceptions that the school head cares about them also improved over the school year. The school head increasingly connected with school head peers over the school year. At the end of the school year the school head

"strongly agreed" with the statement, "I regularly connect with my fellow school heads in the district to discuss challenges."

Both teachers and school heads need peer support in general, but especially with the uncertainty that remote learning presents to education. With peer support, teachers can work out day-to-day challenges together, getting the psycho-social support they need to cope. With peer support, school heads are in a better position to support their teachers.

Continuity of Learning

In this section we describe the steps taken by the school to provide for learners' continued education in the distance learning context, according to five dimensions of continuity of learning given by UNICEF.¹

Curriculum and Content. The greatest curriculum and pedagogical challenge in this school was language related. The modules were printed in Chavacano, but few learners and their families spoke or could read Chavacano. Approximately 90 percent of families were Sama and spoke and read in Tagalog/Filipino. Thus, according to the Grade 3 teachers interviewed in this school, many learners struggled with content more than they had the previous year. Some teachers translated the modules into Tagalog, but even many teachers struggled with Chavacano and used Google Translate for the translations. By the end of the year, according to the school head, the division office was preparing the modules in both Chavacano and Tagalog.

Survey results suggested that the Grade 1 teacher was less satisfied with the availability of pupil and HLP resources for teaching literacy in the mother tongue, Filipino, or English than was the Grade 3 teacher.

The Grade 1 teacher was either "neutral" or "disagreed" with the statement, "Children and HLPs have resources needed to support learning in the mother tongue (as well as Filipino and English) at home," while the Grade 3 teacher either "agreed" or "strongly agreed" with this statement. HLPs from this school tended to be satisfied with the resources they received.

Pedagogy and Contact Time. Both the Grade 1 and Grade 3 teachers in this school had increasing confidence in teaching the mother tongue, Filipino, and English over the school year, progressing from "somewhat not confident" at the beginning of the school year to "somewhat confident" at the end of the school year.

Except for the sporadic attempt to listen to learners read through a cell phone call, teachers did not engage directly with learners to teach. Furthermore, there was no evidence of regular or systematic communications with parents to guide them in how to support their children's learning, excepting the occasions when parents collected the modules at school. Teachers did not meet with their learners face-to-face either at home or in the school and did not provide lessons live, online.

The Grade 1 and Grade 3 teachers interviewed were concerned about their pupils' learning, and both reported observing that there were increasing numbers of pupils who needed remediation. The Grade 1 teacher noted,

"I think there are lot of learners [who] need remediation. Even during face-to-face there are number of children [who] need remediation much more now during modular approach. There is not enough learning."

Teachers provided additional and leveled materials to support these children who were struggling to learn. The Grade 1 teacher indicated that she sometimes provided remedial work for struggling pupils, while the Grade 3 teacher reported that she always provided remedial work.

¹ Alam, A., & Tiwari, P. (2020). Putting the 'learning' back in remote learning: Policies to uphold effective continuity of learning through COVID-19. Office of Global Insight and Policy, Issue Brief. UNICEF. In *Education and COVID-19 Pandemic*, 1-6.

Learner Monitoring, Assessment, and Remediation.

The school head was either neutral (mid-year) or disagreed (end-of-year) with the statement, "Our school has established clear performance targets for student reading achievement." The absence of learning targets likely impeded effective monitoring and assessment of student performance, adding to the challenge of monitoring learning in the distance learning context. The main source of performance monitoring was weekly reviews of completed modules and learning action sheets, which were returned to students with feedback from teachers. Some teachers made phone calls to listen to learners read, but this was not regular or systematic. The Grade 1 and Grade 3 teachers reported that over the school year there was an increase in the number of learners with whom the distance learning program was effective. The Grade 3 teacher reported that distance learning was effective for fewer learners than did the Grade 1 teacher (i.e., Grade 1—from half to most learners benefiting from the beginning to the end of the year; Grade 3—from few to half the learners).

Learner Engagement and Motivation. On average, HLPs reported that their learners engaged in schoolwork about 2 hours per day, with some decline from mid-year (2.2 hours, on average) to the end of the year (1.5). The HLPs all reported having a dedicated space and schedule for home learning, usually twice per day. Direct engagement of learners by teachers was not frequent, with teacher contacts, at most, once per month through cell phone.

HLP Facilitation. Three of the four HLPs surveyed in this school reported that they felt "somewhat comfortable" in supporting their learners' literacy and language learning from home, while the other HLP reported being "somewhat uncomfortable." All the HLPs, however, said that they were "somewhat uncomfortable" supporting their learners in completing the modules.

Supporting learning in the home language was a challenge for HLPs in that the mother tongue language used, Chavacano, was not a language known or spoken in the home for about 90 percent of families. To deal with this challenge HLPs sought assistance from the teacher or a relative.

The HLPs interviewed did not extensively share information with the interviewers on the ways in which they engaged with their children and facilitated their learning and completion of modules. However, at the end of the year they reported that they felt their learners had made progress in reading, especially in Filipino and English.

When asked about their positive experiences in home learning, one parent talked about the bonds made with their child:

"Teaching at home became our bonding. I think it is for our child so that they are still learning even during pandemic."

Another parent spoke about her newly found empathy for teachers:

"I realize the feelings of teachers. I think it is hard to be a teacher, especially now there are more modules."

Well-Being

HLPs were supported primarily by the provision (at the end of the school year) of supplies such as a notebook, pens and pencils, and a hygiene kit. Though they received some guidance related to their interactions with their learners, such as encouragement to "talk good" to their learners and to be patient with them, communications with HLPs were limited in this school, mostly only taking place weekly when parents came to school to collect the modules or deliver the completed ones.

When HLPs were asked about how they were coping, there was improvement from the beginning of the school year. At mid-year and the end of the year, HLPs rated their well-being as "OK" or a score of 5 on a 10-point scale or reported that "it was not all that difficult" and gave a score of 10. One teacher explained her self-rating of 10 in the following way:

"It's tiring to teach but I give 10 because I'm happy to teach [my child]."

Teachers from this school did not comment specifically about their well-being but did comment on their belief that holding a positive attitude is helpful.

Teachers reported that learners were “coping” but at the same time, at the end of the school year, one teacher acknowledged that she had not met any learners since the beginning of the school year, and because of this there was much uncertainty about learners’ well-being and ability to cope. The teachers had great concerns about their learners’ learning, and this was a stress to them, they said.

Resilience: Adapting to Distance Learning

The school had a rocky start with considerable challenges related to the printing and distribution of modules. This challenge was met by accessing MOOE funds for providing supplies to support the printing of modules in the middle of the year, and toward the end of the school year, the district office picked up this responsibility. Again, a second challenge was that the modules were written in a language that families (and some teachers) were not familiar with, and initially teachers had to translate the modules into Filipino. This was resolved by the end of the year when the district office produced modules that were written in both the home language and Filipino.

Except for providing additional and leveled materials to support struggling learners, there were no mentions of ways in which the school or teachers made adaptations to enhance the effectiveness of the remote learning program.

In this school there was limited contact with HLPs outside of the module distribution and collection at the school and little direct contact with learners. The amount of time learners engaged in their schoolwork was limited and decreased over the year (e.g., from 2.2 hours per day, on average, at mid-year to 1.5 hours at the end of the year. However, HLPs testified to their children’s learning progress and valued the bonds they made with their children as they worked together on their studies.

Grade 1 and Grade 3 teachers observed that over the year there was an increase in the numbers of learners who needed remediation, which was addressed by one teacher who provided additional and leveled reading materials.

Initially, though this school had significant challenges with the printing and translating of modules in the beginning of the school year, this was mitigated with school head and district support over time. However, the transition to remote learning was challenged by poor communications between teachers and learners, which led to an increase in children falling behind over the school year. Stronger school head leadership, teacher support, and community outreach to develop systems to address learners who were struggling was needed.

Summary and Discussion

This school faced some unique challenges in distance learning, especially in the beginning of the year. First, teachers used their own printers (which they maintained with personal funds) and paper; teachers were expected to print the modules from home, with limited support from the school head. The mother tongue materials were in a language different from what most families and learners spoke at home, therefore teachers had to translate, even when they were not strong in the mother tongue language used in the curriculum. These early challenges were mitigated in the middle part of the year when a new school head assigned was able to provide the equipment and supplies needed for printing. By the end of the year, the district office was printing the modules, removing the teacher burden for printing. Furthermore, the district developed modules that were written in the home language and Tagalog to reduce the translation burden for teachers.



ALL CHILDREN READING—PHILIPPINES

Remote Learning Study: School 5 Case Study Description



School and Community Context

This small, remote school is located in the Basilian Province. Most learners and teachers cross a river to reach the school, which can be especially challenging or even impossible during seasons of heavy rain. Nearly 50 percent of the municipality's people live below the poverty line, and most home learning partners (HLPs) have not completed high school. Many families make use of the area's natural springs as their main source of water. The school itself relies on a solar panel for electricity. There is little to no cellular signal or Internet connectivity in the area.

Yakan is the mother tongue spoken in this area. The teachers in this school teach 146 learners in multi-grade classrooms. The school's principal teaches kindergarten learners in addition to fulfilling her responsibilities as school head. The majority of learners attending the school are indigenous peoples. Many parents struggle to support their child's learning due to their own inability to read and write.

During the beginning of the school year, the school, along with many other schools in the district, did not receive school maintenance and other operating expenses (MOOE) funds. The division office supplied modules for Grades 4–6, but the school was responsible for production of modules for lower grades. The principal and teachers used their own money to print modules for learners. In the middle of the year, the school received some MOOE funds and other money from the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao Regional Office, which it used to support printing modules. At the beginning of the school year there were no cases of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), but by the end of the school year, the number of cases had begun to increase.

School's Remote Learning Model

All schools in the division provide distance learning solely through self-learning modules developed by the division office. HLPs or parent leaders retrieved modules from the school according to a distribution schedule. During the end of the year, with Ramadan, parents asked to receive the modules for the one month fasting period in advance; however, because of the number of modules to cover HLPs were delayed in returning them.

Continued >

Leadership

The Philippine Department of Education (DepEd) has professional standards for school heads, which are instructional leadership, teacher support and development, and resource management and outreach. The section below applies these three elements from the professional standards to the instructional and administrative roles and responsibilities of the school head as they transitioned to distance learning during COVID-19 school closures.

Instructional Leadership. The school head held an in-person orientation meeting on the remote learning program with parents near the barangay at the start of the school year. Throughout the year, the school head communicated monthly with HLPs via socially distanced face to face meetings at school when HLPs came to pick up or drop off completed modules. The school head reported having weekly in-person communications with teachers during the time that teachers were in the school. With the exception of school head support in the printing, reproduction, and distribution of modules, the school head provided minimal instructional support to teachers and did not formally monitor or assess staff or learner performance.

Teacher Support and Development. As mentioned in the preceding paragraph, school head support mostly involved assistance with the printing and distribution of modules rather than instructional support. Though the multi-class teachers did report that the school head was approachable and confirmed that they had weekly communications with the school head, the teachers' attitudes about teaching in the remote learning context were unique. Teachers reported that they had less work and more time to rest when not teaching face to face, and they only prepared modules for HLPs to retrieve.

Resource Management and Outreach. This school struggled to transition to remote learning in part due to the minimal support the school received from the division and regional offices. The absence of MOOE funds and lack of support from the community also made it challenging. There was

little evidence from the data that the school head tried to mobilize assistance from outside sources to help provide needed resources or service to mitigate these limitations.

Continuity of Learning

The following sections describe how the school community—the school head, teachers, and HLPs—collaborated to ensure the continued education of learners at home using UNICEF's¹ continuity of learning dimensions during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Curriculum and Content. The school uses Yakan as the mother tongue language of instruction. Teachers at the school self-reported average abilities to teach reading in the mother tongue as well as other languages. As a result, teachers were neutral or not confident about their abilities to teach reading through remote learning modalities. The learners received only modules (inclusive of learner activity sheets), which did not offer differentiated content based on the level of the learner.

The two multi-class teachers interviewed in this school were "neutral" (e.g., not agreeing or disagreeing) when asked to respond to the question, "Children and HLPs have the resources they need to support learning in the mother tongue, Filipino, and English." Due to the lack of materials and inability of teachers to access DepEd Commons, teachers were rarely able to provide learners with additional learning materials or resources. Teachers commented that only sometimes did they give students who were falling behind remedial assignments. Though the school head stated that she modified some of the modules received from DepEd because they were too challenging for the kindergarteners, the multi-class teachers usually just gave learners the printed DepEd modules with no adaptations nor modifications.

Pedagogy and Contact Time. The multi-class teachers at the school self-reported average abilities to teach reading in the mother tongue as well as other languages. As a result, teachers were neutral or not confident about their abilities to teach reading through remote learning modalities.

¹ Alam, A., & Tiwari, P. (2020). Putting the 'learning' back in remote learning: Policies to uphold effective continuity of learning through COVID-19. Office of Global Insight and Policy, Issue Brief. UNICEF. In *Education and COVID-19 Pandemic*, 1-6.

Throughout the school year, learners had little or no interactions with their teachers. Teachers rarely conducted home visits or otherwise connected with learners individually and, therefore, were unable to provide any direct instruction to them. One teacher stated that when she did try to visit learners at home, she was informed by learners' parents that they were out playing. Other forms of communication between teachers and students such as cell phone communications were rare due to the limited signal in the area.

Socially distant, brief interactions between HLPs and teachers occurred weekly at the school when HLPs picked up or returned modules. According to both parents and teachers, teachers occasionally provided general tips and encouragement to HLPs during module distribution but did not provide any specific instruction or guidance related to the module content.

Learner Monitoring, Assessment, and Remediation. The school head was neutral when asked if the school had established performance standards for student reading achievement. Teachers did not report using any approaches to assess learners' abilities. Teacher monitoring of learners' literacy progress and language development was limited to checking written assignments and modules that learners completed and providing feedback. One teacher commented,

"I have difficulty because we are not face to face. Modular is good, but the learners are having difficulty, and the teachers as well can't monitor the learners. The only good is, somehow, the teachers can rest from teaching."

In middle of the school year, teachers and the school head decided to try to assess learners by having them go to the school in small groups. This plan did not come to fruition, however, because the area began to have an increasing number of COVID-19 cases, and the movements of community members were restricted.

Learner Engagement and Motivation. On average, HLPs reported their learners spent less than 1 hour per day (about 30-45 minutes) on learning tasks as guided by the modules. Teachers often received feedback from HLPs that their child struggled with focusing on learning. Children also struggled with the content and overall difficulty level and were often unable to complete the modules.

Most learners' parents had less than a high school diploma.

HLP Facilitation. Though parents attended an HLP orientation organized by the school, limited and inconsistent communication between the school/teachers and the HLPs left many parents feeling confused and anxious about their role and responsibilities in supporting their child at home. This made it challenging for HLPs to support their children at home. One parent said,

"I feel worried, the children don't learn from me. I am not a teacher."

On average, HLPs spent less than an hour a day supporting their child with learning and frequently commented that they found it hard to provide support because of their own inability to understand the modules. Most commonly, HLPs' support consisted of providing a learning routine in the home (e.g., location to study and schedule), encouragement, and motivation to their learners. On occasion, some HLPs were able to provide direct instruction or explanation for new concepts being learned or to review completed work. For example, an HLP of a Grade 3 learner commented,

"At night, that's my only time. During the daytime I have to work. At night during my rest time that's the time I can teach my son."

At the end of the year, parents felt that their learners had minimal to no improvement in terms of their reading skills. Additionally, the school head noted that both parents and learners had gradually lost interest in learning during the year. Fewer parents picked up modules, and fewer learners completed the modules they had.

Well-Being

The school head and teachers rated their well-being at 5 on a scale of 1 to 10. This largely remained unchanged throughout the school year. The school head also reported a neutral or negative attitude about the school's level of preparedness, ability to transition, and support received from DepEd. Teachers tended to feel hopeless and shared concerns about the challenges and inability to teach and connect with learners. On average HLPs rated their own well-being at 5 with no change even at the end of the school year. HLPs felt worried about their learner's learning and expressed concerns about the learning modality

and lack of support they received. Teachers at the school provided very little psycho-social and teaching and learning support to HLPs and learners. The school staff did, however, try to bond among themselves through meetings and getting together to “beautify” the school grounds, the school head said.

Resilience: Adapting to Distance Learning

Interviews with the school head, teachers, and HLPs indicated that all had a keen awareness of the challenges of the pandemic and barriers to learning. However, they showed very little resilience by way of adapting and changing this situation to better support learning at home over the school year. Teachers and the school head did try to respond to HLP needs and requests, but minimally so; however, interviews suggested there were no specific efforts from the school head, teachers, nor HLPs to adapt or make changes that would improve learners’ remote learning experience. Community member support was negligible.

Summary and Discussion

It is evident that leadership from the division office and from the school head was limited in this school, and this impeded the school’s ability to provide for the continuity of learning required for learners to progress while learning from home. For example, district offices relied on multi-class Grade 1–Grade 3 teachers to produce modules for these learners, and the school head was responsible for teaching the kindergarten class and, therefore, unable to be fully responsive to the needs of staff and HLPs.

Teachers’ limited contact with learners and limited evidence of teachers’ agency to address and mitigate the challenges they encountered over the course of the school year also weakened the children’s continuity of learning in the remote learning context.

Though the remoteness of the school and absence of Internet and reliable phone receptivity rendered communications with learners and HLPs almost impossible, there were no systematic school-level or teacher initiatives undertaken to address this challenge. Communication was mostly limited to interactions with HLPs when they came to the school to collect or return modules, and teachers found it very difficult to connect with and check-in with learners.

Furthermore, the school head was “neutral” (neither agreeing nor disagreeing) to the statement, “I regularly connect with my fellow school heads in the district to discuss and solve challenges.” Thus, due to the remoteness of the school and poor connectivity, the school head had little access to be supported by peers in the division.

To add to the challenge of transitioning to remote learning in this school, parents, most of whom had received little formal education and many not literate, struggled to support their children at home. Learners were therefore largely unengaged and spent little time on learning activities (e.g., less than 1 hour daily). The following comment by one of the multi-class teachers underscores the serious difficulties and inability of this school to adapt to remote learning and maintain any continuity of learning for their learners.

“We’ve not really adjusted. It’s like we are in shock.”

In summary, this school’s lack of leadership and teacher initiative, combined with the limited to no communications with HLPs and learners because of the remote location and non-existent Internet or cell phone connectivity, resulted in a challenging transition to remote learning in the beginning of the school year. There was little adaptation and even less evidence that this situation improved over the course of the school year to ensure the continued education of learners at this school.



ALL CHILDREN READING—PHILIPPINES

Remote Learning Study: School 7 Case Study Description



School and Community Context

This school can be found in one of the 16 cities that make up Metropolitan Manila, the National Capital Region of the Philippines. This highly urbanized city is made up of residential, commercial, and industrial areas comprising businesses, factories, and warehouses. Five percent of the families in this city are living in poverty. Filipino is the primary language spoken in the city. This area was under general community quarantine during the study.

School's Remote Learning Model

This school used a blended form of remote learning. Since the city was under quarantine, learners had the option of receiving printed

Department of Education (DepEd) remote learning modules or participating in online classes. Findings from a survey of home learning partner (HLP) preferences for modality of instruction indicated that more HLPs had opted for online learning for their children after the first quarter of the school year.

Teachers, HLPs, and students favored online learning for various reasons. Teachers found it easier to monitor children's progress, parents could observe classes, and children were excited about this new way of learning. HLPs found the modular approach "more difficult and time consuming." Online learning was not without challenges. HLPs sometimes interfered in lessons, and some teachers found the presence of parents uncomfortable. A few teachers had to participate in training to build their capacity for teaching online. However, the major challenge with online learning was that not all HLPs had the financial means to buy data for their children's online learning. Describing the effects of offering a blended form of remote learning, the school head said,

"We employ a combination of synchronous and asynchronous sessions so that they will be more relaxed and so that there is variety. They are not anymore pressured to complete all tasks in synchronous sessions."

The next section of this case study describes efforts made by the school community, to ensure continuity of learning, starting with the roles and responsibilities of the school head and efforts made by teachers, HLPs, and the greater community to ensure the education of learners continued during school closures.

Continued >

Leadership

In this section we describe how the school head applied elements of the DepEd standards of leadership—"instructional leadership," "resource management and outreach," and "teacher support and development"—to the school's transition to remote learning and to the support of learners' continuity of learning in this context.

The school head reported that the school had transitioned seamlessly to using the selected learning development modalities even though both administrative and instructional leadership responsibilities had increased with the transition.

Instructional Leadership. To launch the online distance learning modality, school maintenance and other operating expenses (MOOE) funds were used to set up Internet connections in the school. The school also had enough funding to hire assistants to download and print the remote learning modules. The school head conducted a survey and interviews with teachers at the beginning of the year, which gave the school head a sense of teachers' remote learning instructional needs and how to provide and address these needs.

The school head conducted interviews with parents to ascertain why their children were not enrolling in school and to encourage them to reenroll. The inability to use technology and/or connect to the Internet were the main explanations given as to why learners were not enrolled in school. In addition to teacher professional development, insight into the socio-economic status and levels of education of learner's families, led the school head to also schedule orientation sessions with parents and implement a DepEd program for parents who needed support to use technology. Master teachers were assigned to HLPs to help them with the remote learning modality. Other orientation sessions were on how to use the self-learning modules and how parents could help their children with learning at home. The school head expanded on this,

"There are a lot of learners and even HLPs who cannot keep up and/or cope with the current learning set-up. The most challenging part for me is trying my best to convince them not to give up on learning."

Teacher Support and Development. To support teachers who were unfamiliar with the use of educational technology, the school head created "IT buddies." This meant pairing teachers who were unfamiliar with using information technologies with teachers who were familiar with using technology. Teachers were also encouraged to use the computer labs at school to complete their work and to strengthen their skills. Weekly learning action cell sessions (LACs) were held with teachers as well as informal brainstorming and problem-solving sessions. Teachers were encouraged to participate in professional development for online teaching.

Finally, to assist teachers more directly and regularly, the school head assigned master teachers to each grade level and also took time to observe teachers' online lessons and provide feedback. In general, teachers felt the school head was approachable and included them in making teaching and learning decisions, although the Grade 3 teacher interviewed at the end of the year was neutral on these questions.

Resource Management and Outreach. The school head believed that it was vital to engage the community in supporting the school. To this end she stated,

"We keep on trying, and we always look for entities in our community to be tapped and encourage them to donate. We need to have a good relationship with the community. There are many people who have a big heart from the private sector/businesses."

The school head directly approached the private sector and businesses in the community as well as the local government to help with various resources and technology. Through this initiative to mobilize contributions from community and local government, all students in the school were given tablets to use for online classes. The school head also implemented "Project Load" in the middle of the year, which ensured that all necessary programs and learning materials were downloaded on student tablets. Additionally, a senator set the school up with Wi-Fi, the barangay provided the school with money for HLPs to buy Internet data, and the mayor provided teachers with laptops. The school head also engaged parents who were willing and able to support the school through activities such as helping teachers print the supplementary learning materials.

Continuity of Learning

In this section we describe the steps taken by the school to provide for learners' continued education in the distance learning context, according to five dimensions of continuity of learning provided by UNICEF.¹

Curriculum and Content. During the mid-year and final teacher surveys, the Grade 1 teacher "agreed" that learners and HLPs had the resources they needed to support literacy learning in mother tongue, Filipino, and English. The Grade 3 teacher agreed that materials were adequate for mother tongue and Filipino, but was neutral (neither agreeing nor disagreeing) with the adequacy of materials for literacy teaching in English.

This school, however, was particularly responsive to learners' differential learning needs. The school head and teachers adapted and modified the self-learning modules sent by DepEd according to student's interests and developmental levels. In this regard the school head stated,

"If there is a need to adjust to their level, we have to do it. We continue to adjust, improve, and create opportunities in order for the students to learn."

The school head also noted that it had been easier to implement the mother-tongue-based multilingual education when teachers could meet with children face to face.

Pedagogy and Contact Time. The blended model of remote distance learning conducted by this school comprised the options of using self-learning learning modules at home and a combination of synchronous and asynchronous sessions for online learners. Depending on the grade level, teachers offered online classes a minimum of three times a week. On the days learners did not have class, they were expected to complete the hard copies of the self-learning modules. Teachers introduced various strategies and activities, including online games through computer applications. Grade 3 learners were required to complete performance tasks such as reciting a poem or reading aloud. As they learned more about teaching online through webinars and their own research, teachers shared

these strategies and implemented them over the course of the academic year. The Grade 3 teacher described their instructional strategies using digital technologies saying,

"The good thing in our selected [learning delivery modality] is that we can use various media to teach our students, such as video lessons, reading materials, and other learning materials, which we can find [in] the Internet and send to our students."

Learner Monitoring, Assessment, and Remediation. At the beginning of the first quarter of the school year, the school administrators conducted an integrated assessment on Facebook for parents who had access, and on hard copies for parents who did not. Part of the survey included questions that required HLPs to provide the school with feedback about their children's literacy skills so teachers could monitor student progress.

Online attendance was taken every day. Assessments for Grade 3 learners included recordings of them reading aloud and video clips of their responses to listening or reading comprehension questions. In this regard the Grade 3 teacher stated, "I give questions in our Facebook Messenger group chat, then ask my students to respond using the voice clip feature to check if they've listened attentively." The Grade 3 teacher also said that she found it challenging to assess and monitor the progress of her learners, especially on work assigned for learning at home. One major concern in this regard was that the teachers and the school head were unsure as to whether the parents had completed work for the learners. The Grade 1 teacher grouped her students into reading levels to help her target the areas of support learners needed. After her online classes, the Grade 1 teacher extended the class period to go over areas where learners were struggling. This 15-minute time for remediation was held three times a week. The Grade 3 teacher also noted that many of her learners had difficulties with completing their assignments on time. Teachers therefore frequently extended deadlines for handing in assignments.

¹ Alam, A., & Tiwari, P. (2020). Putting the 'learning' back in remote learning: Policies to uphold effective continuity of learning through COVID-19. Office of Global Insight and Policy, Issue Brief. UNICEF. In *Education and COVID-19 Pandemic*, 1-6.

Learner Motivation and Engagement. HLPs reported that students spent from 2–5 hours per day on schoolwork, depending on the HLP reporting; an average of 3.7 hours per day across the 4 HLPs surveyed. The Grade 1 and Grade 3 teachers interviewed tried to use teaching approaches and activities that engaged learners. Both teachers described using interactive activities and positive feedback, as well as various online teaching applications they learned about during teacher trainings to keep learners engaged and motivated.

The Grade 3 teacher reported that three to five of her learners could not attend class regularly due to intermittent Internet access. She therefore visited them in their homes, delivered printed modules, and spoke to their parents about how they can support their learners and keep them engaged in learning. The school head talked to teachers about the need to adapt to the situation and to remember their mission to deliver quality education. However, both teachers were still anxious about the extent to which learners were achieving learning outcomes. The Grade 3 teacher noted,

"I'm anxious because I am not confident if I'm teaching or helping my students well in this new normal."

HLP Facilitation of Learning. The time that HLPs spent directly supporting their child's learning decreased from the middle of the year to the end of the year. For example, HLPs reported spending approximately 4 hours, on average, supporting their child's learning in the middle of the year. This dropped to 2 hours per day at the end of the year.

Most HLPs participating in the mid-year HLP survey reported that they were "very comfortable" in their ability to support their child's learning. When asked about their comfort level supporting their child's literacy and language learning specifically, two of the HLPs improved, reporting at mid-year that they were "somewhat uncomfortable" and at the end-of-the year were "very comfortable." One of the HLPs reported being "somewhat uncomfortable" at both the middle and end of the year and one of the HLPs felt "very comfortable" at both the middle and end of the year.

At home, HLPs described setting up schedules and routines for their children. A parent described making sure pencils were sharpened and books ready at night for the next day's lessons. Some learners studied in the living room, others in the

bedroom, and one parent described how challenging it was to have two school children in a one room living space,

"It's chaotic ... sometimes because we have no space to move around but we are getting by. Since we don't have Wi-Fi now, it's financially challenging for us to load for Internet every day. ... I try to budget wisely".

Similar to the HLP above, the other three HLPs noted that intermittent Internet connectivity and/or lack of financial means to buy Internet data, led to inconsistent attendance to the online classes. All four HLPs reported assisting their children at home whenever they could, finding time between taking care of other siblings, household chores and work to help with homework or making sure children were focused on the online lessons. "As soon as my baby sleeps, I teach and review every night about the lessons taught ... during the day", a first-grade parent said. One mother called on an older sibling and the child's father as well as neighbors to help with learning at home when she had to go to work. All four HLPs bought various learning materials including posters and reading books to support their children with learning at home. They also reported encouraging and motivating their children daily to study and focus on their lessons. However, as the academic year continued the HLP of one of the third graders noted that her child was losing interest in school and the online lessons. Despite the many challenges, HLPs also noted some benefits to assisting their children with learning at home. These benefits include spending quality time with their children, finding out how their children learn, and learning to manage their time better.

The Grade 1 and Grade 3 teachers in this school indicated that they communicated with HLPs daily about supporting their learners.

Well-Being

The school head tried to create a school environment where teachers felt supported and inspired to do their best to teach learners well. The Grade 1 teacher put it this way,

"The moral support of the leaders is more than enough."

To ensure teacher well-being, the school head made every effort to make herself available to teachers regarding their personal and professional needs. She encouraged and motivated them through face-to-face meetings and/or phone calls. Teachers also kept in touch with HLPs regarding the well-being of their children. HLPs said they felt comfortable talking to their children about the pandemic, encouraging and motivating them to continue to attend their online classes and complete their schoolwork. The school head also reached out to HLPs in a variety of ways to keep channels of communication, stating,

“... we were able to communicate with [HLPs] through social media and through their families and neighbors. Right now, we were able to reach everyone.”

The school head also made home visits to families whose children were struggling and who teachers were concerned about.

Resilience: Adapting to Distance Learning

This school adapted its remote learning modality to ensure equity for vulnerable and marginalized groups, engage communities to support learning and families, modify remote learning materials to closely align with student needs. These deliberate efforts demonstrated the school's resilience capacity to respond to the COVID 19 crisis and the pivot to home learning.

The school head made every effort to cater to and motivate families with low socioeconomic status who struggled financially. She stated, about families whose children attended her school,

“The greatest struggle of the families now is still the financial challenge since most of the families are not well-off. Some parents do not have jobs, and some students even beg for money in the streets.”

For the school head, HLP engagement in continuity of learning was key and vital regardless of family socioeconomic status. She believed,

“Our target is not only the students but the parents as well. We also need to motivate them. If the parents are not inclined to [recognize] the importance of education, our efforts will be wasted.”

In response to these needs, the school head provided data for these families and reached out for community support to find ways of addressing the challenges of these families. Additionally, DepEd learning resources were adapted and contextualized to ensure continuity of learning for all learners. The blended learning model was adapted to ensure that learners remained engaged.

Summary and Discussion

This school harnessed all the resources possible to ensure learners were learning at home and online. It offered a blended remote distance learning modality and provided extra support to children from poor families. Teachers modified and contextualized the teaching and learning materials during the year to ensure that materials were aligned with learners' abilities and interests to better support their learning. A major quality or characteristic of the school head's leadership was continuous communication and engagement with learners, HLPs, teachers, and community stakeholders. She stated,

“I keep on asking for feedback from the parents, teachers, as well as the learners specifically on the challenges they encounter in whichever learning modality they use.”

Through information gathered from teachers and HLPs, the school head led efforts to change and adapt teaching and learning during the school year to ensure continuity of learning. Although school heads and teachers engaged parents in their children's learning, they said little about involving parents in decision-making, which is vital for sustaining change.

In summary, the school's use of multiple learning delivery modalities; communication and mutual support between and among the school head, teachers, HLPs, and learners; and the targeted adaptations to help struggling learners were some of the underpinning factors in the school's strength in responding to the COVID-19 crisis and ensuring, as much as possible, the continuity of learning for all learners within the context of distance learning.



ALL CHILDREN READING—PHILIPPINES

Remote Learning Study: School 9 Case Study Description



School and Community Context

This school is surrounded by mountains and situated in Kalinga Province of the Cordillera Administrative Region.

All the learners in the school belong to a recognized indigenous people's group, and their mother tongue is Linulubo, but many also know the Ilokano dialect. One of the several tributaries of Chico River, the largest river system in Northern Luzon, passes through the town, which makes the area perfect for farming—the main livelihood of the families in the community. However, during heavy

rains, the river easily overflows and causes flooding that damages crops and properties. This contributes to high poverty incidence in the municipality; 39 percent of families live below the poverty level with monthly income below PhP9,452.00 (\$189.00) per family. There is no public transportation in the area and the closest jeepney stop from the main road is 2 to 3 hours by foot. There are four hospitals in the municipality but because of the terrain, the closest one is still 40 minutes away by car. There were no reported cases of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) in the area, however the local government imposed general community quarantine in the municipality to limit movement and transportation and prevent transmission of the virus from other municipalities.

School's Remote Learning Model

Limitations in connectivity and access to technology made the school opt for printed self-learning modules as the modality for distance learning. The school gets the modules from the division office, and the teachers translate and contextualize them to Linulubo before printing and distribution to the learners. Parents are reminded via text messages to collect the modules from school on Mondays. Teachers would visit those without mobile phones at home to personally hand the self-learning modules to home learning partners (HLPs). The following Monday completed modules were retrieved, and new ones were distributed.

Teachers took note of feedback on remote learning from the HLPs during module distribution and retrieval. Many parents in remote communities like Tanudan were not able to attend or finish school, and they found it challenging to teach their children at home. According to the school head, many HLPs requested face to face classes since there were no reported COVID-19 cases in the area during the first quarter.

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Leadership

In this section we describe how the school head applied elements of the Philippines Department of Education (DepEd) standards of leadership—“instructional leadership,” “resource management and outreach,” and “teacher support and development”—to the school’s transition to remote learning and to the support of learners’ continuity of learning in this context.

The school head manages two schools, and this made her struggle in terms of administrative workload. She needed to organize her time well and maximize task delegation in both schools. Not only is the workload increased by being responsible for two schools, but the school head reported that both administrative and instructional leadership responsibilities have increased considerably with the transition to remote learning.

Instructional Leadership. The school head conducts weekly faculty meeting and learning action cells to guide teachers in their transition and adjustment to distance learning and to discuss guidance from the division office. Master teachers support the school by making supplementary instructional materials. Teacher observations during home visits and in learning action cell sessions are also delegated to master teachers. Teacher preparations and teaching of the Most Essential Learning Competencies are reviewed weekly.

Teacher Support and Development. Constant communication is the school head’s way of supporting the teachers. She also encourages them to participate in learning action cells organized by the district. Outside of the regular faculty meetings and mentoring sessions during cell meetings, the school head messages and calls teachers every day to check in on them, give reminders, and encourage them to forge ahead. Meanwhile, the teachers also report receiving support from each other and their own families.

Teachers from this school reported that their school head was approachable and included them in making decisions about teaching and learning in the remote context.

Resource Management and Outreach.

Anticipating the demand for supplies to make sure that all learners receive self-learning modules, the school head worked with the parents, the community, and the local government unit for support. She organized orientations for parents and community members who in turn donated papers for the modules. Parents also helped haul supplies for the feeding program. Barangay officials supported enforcing health protocols during distribution and retrieval of modules and during school feeding. Meanwhile the local government unit donated supplies and equipment for printing and reproduction of the modules.

Continuity of Learning

In this section we describe the steps taken by the school to provide for learners’ continued education in the distance learning context, according to five dimensions of continuity of learning given by UNICEF.¹

Curriculum and Content. The school continued to use the mother tongue as mode of instruction. Teachers translated the modules to Linulubo and contextualized the content by adding stories and passages from local folklore. However, they found it hard to teach because of several unfamiliar words no longer used by the younger generation. The school head saw this as a challenge for kindergarten and Grade 1 learners who were not yet able to read and were still developing their vocabulary. Teachers had to consult the elders of the community to explain the meaning of the words so that they could replace them with texts more appropriate for younger learners.

Where the teachers found it appropriate, they downloaded and translated exercises from the Internet and added them to the learners’ practice activities. They also provided books from the school to supplement the module.

Pedagogy and Contact Time. Teachers reported that they communicated with HLPs weekly to discuss ways to support their children’s learning at home and make regular, usually weekly, visits to learner’s homes. When teachers visited learners at home, they spent from 30-40 minutes providing

¹ Alam, A., & Tiwari, P. (2020). Putting the ‘learning’ back in remote learning: Policies to uphold effective continuity of learning through COVID-19. Office of Global Insight and Policy, Issue Brief. UNICEF. In *Education and COVID-19 Pandemic*, 1-6.

direct instruction. More time was given to struggling learners (see below).

Though they initially struggled in the translation during the first quarter, teachers believed that their learners learned to read sooner because their reading materials and activity sheets were in the learners' mother tongue. They also find the activity sheets and the one-on-one reading exercises during home visits helpful in promoting literacy learning and reading comprehension.

The case was different, however, for families whose HLPs were not able to finish school and were struggling with teaching at home. Teachers sought the help of more knowledgeable HLPs to support those who needed assistance in teaching their children. They also provided direct reading instruction to struggling learners. The Grade 1 teacher spent 1 to 2 hours during home visits with struggling learners, distributing leveled reading materials and activity sheets, and had one-on-one reading sessions. The multigrade teacher gave additional activities during home visits and allowed learners needing remediation to come to the school for direct instruction. These practices were supported and even encouraged by the school head to make sure that the learners were ready for the next grade level by the end of the school year.

Though the teachers adjusted well to modular learning, there remained persisting concerns such as struggling learners not being able to cope due to the number of activities in the module that needed to be completed, which piled up week after week. The number of modules for checking every week was also challenging for the multigrade teacher, as she handled two grade levels with eight subjects each. This was on top of her other tasks such as preparation of supplementary activity sheets, printing and reproduction of modules, home visits, and so on.

Learner Monitoring, Assessment, and Remediation. Most families did not own mobile phones, so teachers communicated with HLPs and monitored their learners through regular home visits. The Grade 1 teacher scheduled home visits thrice-a-week for one-on-one reading sessions, while the multigrade teacher scheduled home visits once-a-week to check in on the learners and their families and to guide them in answering the activities in the modules. Every 2 weeks or after every two completed modules, learners were given summative tests to determine their level of

understanding of the lessons. To assess reading, teachers asked learners to read passages during home visits.

Learner Motivation and Engagement. The four HLPs reported that their learners spent from 1 to 3 hours per day working on their modules and activity sheets, with an average of 2.5 hours per day across the 4 HLPs. HLPs reported different levels of motivation, confidence, and independence among their learners. Some HLPs shared that their children enjoyed learning and could work independently on the modules so that they only needed to check the answers and review the lessons with the children once they got home from the farm in the afternoon. For example, one parent shared,

"In the afternoon, there should be a finished module. I leave my children at home to answer, then I ask for their modules when I arrive home. They are very confident of their work."

Meanwhile, another parent shared,

"They like to learn. They read by themselves. They get busy studying their modules. They're dedicated."

One HLP shared that she experienced challenges when her child did not listen to instructions and only wanted to play, unlike in the earlier parts of the school year. To address this, she made sure that her child had a time to rest and play once the activities in the modules were done.

Teachers had their ways of keeping the learners engaged, too. The Grade 1 teacher brought crayons and activity sheets and did reading sessions during home visits, which the learners enjoy. Meanwhile the multigrade teacher provided links to DepEd videos to learners who had access to the Internet and could navigate smart devices. She added that those videos also served as additional references for the learners when they could not understand certain lessons in the modules.

HLP Facilitation of Learning. HLPs in this school seemed to have adjusted well in balancing their work demands and in guiding their children's home learning. All four HLPs reported that they allocated 2 to 4 hours to studying with their children every day, following a routine that worked best for both.

They expressed satisfaction with their children's ability to work independently and learn from home.

Prior to the opening of classes, the school provided orientation to parents on how to support learning at home. HLPs were provided weekly home learning plans to guide learners in their tasks and to support children's literacy. The school head and teachers also communicated with HLPs regularly, and they were able to establish a parent support system by having more knowledgeable parents support those who were struggling to assist their children.

Well-Being

The school head seemed to cope well when she was assured that the teachers were able to facilitate learning. She made sure that the teachers received guidance from the division, were mentored well either by herself or the master teachers, and were monitored enough. The school head also regularly connected with fellow school heads in the district to discuss challenges and to support each other. Teachers also coped with the support of peers and their families.

HLPs were able to see that their children were well and adjusted to modular learning. They kept children healthy by providing proper nutrition and allowing them to go only to places safe from COVID-19. When they observed stress or restlessness among the children, they gave the children pep talks, spent time with them while doing chores at home or on the farm, and allowed them time to play with other children when schoolwork was done.

Resilience: Adapting to Distance Learning.

This school showed capacity to adapt to challenges throughout the first year of remote learning, particularly in terms of curriculum and content and supporting learners who were struggling. Partnership, proactive leadership, and a timely response to feedback allowed the school to adjust to the challenges of remote learning. The school head proactively engaged community to provide additional resources to print and reproduce the needed modules and to assist struggling parents through a critical parent support system.

The school head provided strong instructional leadership by delegating tasks to master teachers to ensure efficient mentoring and monitoring of all teachers. The regular learning action cells and faculty meetings also paved the way for raising concerns and brainstorming ways to address them.

Home visits were adjusted based on need—those in the lower grade levels and those needing assistance were visited more frequently for individualized instruction. When the teachers and school head learned about learners not being able to complete all the activities in the module, they reduced modules to only the essentials. They also did quarterly parent-teacher feedback sessions to discourage parents from answering the modules for their children and to discuss strategies to support learning at home.

Summary and Discussion

School 9 is a last-mile school situated in a town where the poverty threshold is close to 40 percent and with 100 percent of learners belonging to the indigenous peoples' community. The village gets ravaged by flood waters during strong typhoons; the most recent was in 2018, which left the school severely damaged. It seems that challenging experiences have brought the community and the local government unit together so much so that when the pandemic affected school operations, the local government unit and the parents were quick to support the pivot to remote learning. The unit provided both material and human resources to help ensure that modules were printed, reproduced, distributed, and retrieved in a safe manner. Though there was limited connectivity and communication infrastructures, the school and the parents were able to maintain connection through regular home visits and parent networks to update families living in far-flung areas and to support learners whose parents lacked skills to teach their own children. Since families lacked access to online learning materials or signals to watch educational TV shows, teachers compensated by printing additional learning and literacy materials for the learners. The role of the master teachers was also critical in mentoring and supporting the teachers in learning delivery as well as in monitoring and assessing their learners.



ALL CHILDREN READING—PHILIPPINES

Remote Learning Study: School 10 Case Study Description



School and Community Context

This school is situated about an hour away from Manila in Pampanga Province in the Central Luzon region. It has a newly constructed two-story building in addition to its original building.. Several rivers flow through the municipality, which make it and the school prone to flooding, especially during wet seasons and typhoons. Despite the municipality's urbanicity and relatively low poverty level (about 7 percent), many families and learners in the school do not own cell phones or televisions nor have access to a reliable Internet connection.

This made it challenging for the school to offer online learning as a response to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic and meant that some learners were not able to access the TV-based learning program set up by the regional and provincial governments free of charge. As a result, the school invested a lot of effort in the modular approach. During all three rounds of interviews, this school was under modified general community quarantine.

Kapampangan is the predominant mother-tongue language spoken in Pampanga and is the school's original mother-tongue-based multilingual education language of instruction designated by the Department of Education (DepEd). The school recently transitioned its mother-tongue-based curriculum to Tagalog after the school head conducted a survey and found that nearly 70 percent of students spoke Tagalog; however, the printed modules the school received from DepEd central and division offices were in Kapampangan. Some home learning partners (HLPs) translated the materials to Tagalog for their children.

School's Remote Learning Model

The school used modular and TV-based instruction to create a blended learning approach for students. With the modular approach, the school was greatly challenged by the fact that the modules provided by DepEd's central office and the division were written in Kapampangan. As a result, the teachers and HLPs improvised adaptation of the modules to Tagalog. In some cases, the school borrowed Tagalog modules from other regions but still found that the content was not contextualized and localized for their learners.

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Lessons and content were delivered by teachers via TV-based instruction. The governor of Pampanga Province responded quickly to the remote learning situation by financing “TeleSkwela” to be broadcast on the regional TV station. However, most of the programs on the station were based on the Kapampangan mother-tongue curriculum. The school head encouraged both learners and HLPs to watch the video lessons, and teachers reinforced her message by allotting time in learners’ weekly home learning plans that aligned with their respective grade or lessons’ broadcast time. Not all students in the school had the means to view the programs, but those who did tended to watch when DepEd national programs were taught in Tagalog.

Teachers at this school did not conduct home visits. Rather, the teachers relied heavily on group chats and direct messages or phone calls to learners and HLPs. Some teachers at the school were able to meet virtually with the learners who had access to gadgets and reliable Internet connection. The Grade 1 teacher reported that she conducted online live instruction with her learners, though she noted that few students attended, and attendance was inconsistent as it depended on HLPs’ schedules and a reliable Internet connection. One Grade 1 HLP mentioned that their child met with the teacher on video calls while the other Grade 1 HLP stated that instructional communication from the teacher was received via Facebook Messenger/chats.

Leadership

This section of the case study describes the school head’s leadership role during school closures according to DepEd professional standards for school heads. The findings are described as per three professional standards indicators—instructional leadership, teacher support and development, and resource management and outreach.

Instructional Leadership. The school head implemented a ‘skeletal force’ on-site schedule for teachers, meaning only a few teachers reported in person at a time while ensuring coverage of teaching and learning activities for all learners.

With no classroom observations, the school head prioritized coaching and mentoring teachers. She mainly monitored and supported her faculty through group chats and virtual meetings. Of this the school head said,

“I am flexible and accommodating. I regularly schedule virtual meetings with my teachers. I tell them not to be too strict, to be understanding and lenient enough and try to focus on the need of the learners, especially that not all learners have the same skills.”

Each week the school head shared an action plan with teachers. The plan ensured teachers had a weekly plan (lesson plan) and weekly home learning plan (schedule for the HLPs and learners that included a daily lesson log) that were then shared with learners and families. At the end of each week, teachers were required to submit an accomplishment report based on their completion of tasks from the action plan. Teachers’ reports often included pictures and descriptions of activities completed on certain days. In addition, the school used a monitoring tool to track whether modules were printed and distributed appropriately.

Teacher Support and Development. The school head focused on being flexible and accommodating to the individual needs of her staff. The school head organized monthly learning action cell sessions. Through these sessions, the school head provided instructional support such as training teachers on how to develop video presentations and integrate them into their teaching.

Resource Management and Outreach. The school used the school maintenance and other operating expenses (MOOE) funding to purchase additional printers for the reproduction of modules. MOOE funds were also used to purchase personal protective equipment and health-related goods such as vitamins, sanitizers, and masks for teachers. The school head stated that they received a lot of support from the community. This included the youth council in the area, school alumni, and the barangay. According to the school head, they were provided with riso machines from the mayor and the municipality. The municipality and the division gave the school printers, and parents donated bond paper. The school’s security guard and the janitor assisted in module retrieval and distribution.

Continuity of Learning

Steps the school community took to ensure that children were learning at home during school closures are described below according to UNICEF's five dimensions of continuity of learning.¹

Curriculum and Content. The school used Tagalog as the mother-tongue language of instruction; however, as noted, the materials provided by DepEd were in Kapampangan. Some HLPs were able to speak Kapampangan and translate the materials for their children. For those who did not speak Kapampangan, the school tried its best to borrow and then contextualize and print Tagalog content from other regions. The printed modules contained pre-lessons (such as reviews and/or motivation for the new topic), the lesson, lesson activities, and assessment.

In addition to modules, the school (along with other schools in the province) relied on TV-based instruction. Learners were able to view video lessons on local TV stations. Teachers also distributed to learners supplemental reading materials, which mostly included textbooks or leveled readers from the school. Teachers also did their best to differentiate instruction based on the needs of their learners. One teacher said,

"For the fast learners, we give a different set of materials. For the slow learners, we have a checklist and if they have not mastered or understand, we do not progress in the reading materials."

Pedagogy and Contact Time. Although teachers at this school did not conduct home visits to provide direct, in-person instruction to learners, weekly home learning plans included 1 hour and 25 minutes of TV-based instruction per day. Teachers reported that they spoke directly with each learner several times a week, though the communication mechanism and amount of contact time varied for learners as it depended heavily on families' access to devices and connectivity, and HLPs' availability. Teachers made use of online classes (with multiple learners joining at one time), video/phone calls (held one-on-one with teacher and learner), and Group Chats (messages between teachers and

groups of learners through cell phones) to deliver instructional content to students.

Learner Monitoring, Assessment, and Remediation. According to the school head, teachers were expected to assess learners' progress at least once a week. Teachers made use of a variety of methods to check on learners' learning progress and provided substantive feedback. Teachers expected their learners to complete and turn in written assignments each week, and they were given written and oral feedback on their work. In addition, teachers requested HLPs to submit videos and pictures via Facebook Messenger to help monitor learning and progress. When possible, teachers met virtually with students to assess their reading skills. Teachers also made use of module distribution to ask for information and provide feedback directly to HLPs and learners. The Grade 1 teacher explained,

"Aside from using Group Chat, I tell [HLPs] to send photos and videos of the child doing activities. We also do Google Meets, and we get feedback from the HLP during module distribution. We monitor the progress of the children."

Learner Engagement and Motivation. HLPs from this school reported that their children spent between 1 and 3 hours a day learning (Grade 1: 2–3 hours; Grade 3: 1–2 hours). For most learners, this time was spent completing modules (including activity sheets) and reading. For some learners, this time included watching TV-based video lessons and/or participating in video sessions with the teacher.

Learners' study time and daily schedules varied because HLPs tended to consider the mood of the child and wait until the child was ready to study. At the end of the year, HLPs commented that their child's willingness to engage in learning and their focus improved. This was achieved in part due to HLPs giving and assigning time for learning.

HLP Facilitation. At the beginning of the school year, the school administration communicated with HLPs once or twice a week mostly about administrative matters. As the year progressed, direct communications between the school head

¹ Alam, A., & Tiwari, P. (2020). Putting the 'learning' back in remote learning: Policies to uphold effective continuity of learning through COVID-19. Office of Global Insight and Policy, Issue Brief. UNICEF. In *Education and COVID-19 Pandemic*, 1-6.

and HLPs were less frequent (about once a month). Rather, school-level information and messages from the school head were communicated indirectly to HLPs on a regular basis through teachers.

The frequency and mode of communication between HLPs and teachers varied depending on the teacher and the HLP. Based on communications between teachers and HLPs and other communications from the school's administration, HLPs reported that they felt very prepared to support their child's learning at home. Most HLPs had a high school degree or college education, which contributed to their capacity to support their children during remote learning. HLPs' support included ensuring their child had time and space for learning at home, monitoring their child to ensure they were on task, and providing direct instruction to their child for new concepts being learned. HLPs commented on positive experiences saying,

"I learned to teach, and I learned to understand my child. We often talk now."

"Through my teaching, my child gets to understand the lesson better. I also learn some things as I teach my son the lessons."

Well-Being

The school head's self-reported rating of her own well-being remained a 7 out of 10 throughout the year. Similarly, teachers' self-reported well-being ratings (average 7.5) did not change over the course of the school year. On average, HLPs self-reported rating increased from 6.75 to 8.5 by the end of the year. In the beginning, parents found it hard to adjust to the situation and often complained. The school head and teachers provided constant yet flexible support depending on individual families' needs. The amount and quality of TV-based instruction increased throughout the school year, which also helped ease the burden placed on HLPs. The school head, however, still shared concerns for students who did not have access to TV-based instruction and/or had limited means of communication with teachers. When possible, the school head talked to parents in person to ask how they were. More commonly, she joined Group Chats between parents and teachers to provide moral support and words of encouragement. The school did not have an active PTA but facilitated dialogue between parents

("Homeroom PTA") through Group Chats. The school head used learning action cell sessions to support teachers' well-being. Some sessions especially focused on safety and mental health and provided teachers with an opportunity to conduct personal assessments and take part in physical exercises. Teachers found the moral support, trainings, and other resources provided by the school administration sufficient and helpful. The school provided faculty with vitamins, masks, face shields, alcohol, bond paper, and copiers. One teacher commented,

"[School leadership] does their best to support us teachers. The administration really works for the good of the school, teachers, and learners. For this school year, our goal is that no one, no pupil, to be left behind."

Resilience: Adapting to Distance Learning

At the start of the school year, the region and province began investing in TV-based instruction in addition to the modular approach. As the year progressed, more videos and content were developed and broadcasted to supplement modular learning. The school, teachers, and HLPs used this to their advantage. For most parents, this reduced the burden of delivering and teaching instructional content to their children. Teachers continued to use a variety of communication channels, depending on individual needs, to reach learners and HLPs regularly. School-level information and messages from the school head were streamlined and delivered monthly.

Discussion and Summary of School Case Findings

Several key factors contributed to the progress this school made in adapting its remote learning experience, even as the public health situation fluctuated throughout the year. The school head was provided with adequate support through division-led seminars on implementation of the new learning delivery modalities. Toward the middle of the year, there was an uptick in COVID-19 cases in the barangay. Innovative initiatives, such as TV-based lessons, financed and led by the regional and provincial governments, were increasingly embraced by the school head, teachers, HLPs, and learners as the year progressed. The blended learning approach contributed to learners'

performance in a positive way. Communications between and among the school head, teachers, and HLPs was another underpinning factor in the mainly positive transition to remote learning for this school. Communication between the school and HLPs was a key component of the remote learning process from the start and improved as the school restructured how and when information was shared. Information technology solutions were leveraged, and many teachers, HLPs, and learners relied on group chat to ask questions and share updates. Where possible, teachers would use video calls or other online platforms to check in with learners and even deliver live instruction. The language of instruction posed a challenge for many HLPs and learners; however, the school and families worked together to circumvent the issue. Most students spoke Tagalog rather than Kapampangan. Some parents translated Kapampangan materials to Tagalog, and in other cases, the school printed Tagalog modules from other regions for learners to use. The school head and school community made deliberate contributions to teachers' psychosocial and physical well-being, including safety and mental health-focused learning action cell sessions and trainings and provision of personal protective equipment. Perhaps in a less intentional way, teachers' constant communication with HLPs and learners, attention to individual families' needs, and their flexibility to use various and multiple methods to stay in touch strongly contributed to HLP and learner well-being in a positive way. As the Grade 3 teacher said,

"One strategy I use is I always tell the HLPs that if they do not understand the lesson, they should not hesitate to call me."



ALL CHILDREN READING—PHILIPPINES

Remote Learning Study: School 12 Case Study Description



School and Community Context

This school began operations in 2010 and is located in a city in Bulacan Province, Central Luzon. The city's population is fairly young, with 53 percent children aged 0–15. The primary sources of livelihood are poultry, piggery, livestock feed supplies, and trading. Because the city is just a jeepney ride away from Metro Manila, many residents are also employed in nearby cities of the country's capital. Though the city is urbanized, poverty incidence is notable at 6.97 percent, which implies that there are about 9,000 households earning a monthly income of PHP9,452 (approx.

\$189). The school caters to families in this income bracket.

There is connectivity and access to technology in the city, but this continues to be an issue in the area where the school is situated. Even radio and television signals are weak, thereby limiting their access to educational TV shows and digital learning resources.

Bulacan was in general community quarantine throughout the school year of 2020–2021. This meant that there was limitation in movement and transportation and in operations of certain industries, and there was a presence of uniformed personnel to enforce the quarantine protocols. Though the city and barangay officials were supportive of the remote learning activities, children living in far-flung barangays remained unreachable by school and local government unit staff due to the strict imposition of the quarantine within the city.

School's Remote Learning Model

The school started the year with just printed modules as a modality for remote learning, then in the middle of the year, it started to introduce online classes and a digital offline modality to those who had access to connectivity and technology. Home learning partners (HLPs) came to school for module distribution on Mondays and submission of completed modules on Fridays. Prior to the opening of classes, parent orientations were conducted in the communities in coordination with the barangay. There are also quarterly online check-in sessions with HLPs; however, due to issues in access, only about 20 percent of HLPs attended these sessions. The same was true for online classes. This was augmented by communication via group chats and text messages between teachers and HLPs in their advisory classes. Where allowed by the local Inter-Agency Task Force, home visits were conducted twice a month, especially among learners who were

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struggling. The school has para-teachers who supported the printing and reproduction of the modules as well as home visitations. But these para-teachers could only provide instruction for Filipino and not in English. Teachers also gave links to the Department of Education (DepEd) Commons for supplementary materials and encouraged those who had access to watch DepEd TV and listen to DepEd Radio.

Leadership

In this section we describe how the school head applied elements of DepEd standards of leadership—"instructional leadership," "resource management and outreach," and "teacher support and development"—to the school's transition to remote learning and to the support of learners' continuity of learning in this context.

Instructional Leadership. The school head monitored whether the teachers were held online classes and who among the learners did not have access to online sessions so that they could provide other instructional support such as distribution of offline digital materials and one-on-one reading instruction through home visits, prioritizing learners needing extra assistance. The school head also encouraged the teachers and para-teachers to monitor HLP feedback and respond to questions about the modules and the children's learning. The school head shared that the situation made her practice a "shared governance" with the school staff. According to the school head,

"This means listening to their problems, having open forums, and forming suggestions to arrive at the best way to solve an issue. Each opinion and help given is respected."

Teachers affirmed this in their interviews.

Teacher Support and Development. The school head used regular online faculty meetings and learning action cell sessions to guide teachers in improving learning delivery and to monitor their activities. She discussed with them pertinent guidelines and tools for monitoring teacher performance during remote learning. She made sure that the teachers attended trainings and webinars hosted by the central and division offices.

She also maintained open communication with school staff.

Resource Management and Outreach. The school head was successful in mobilizing resources from local government and the community, reporting that support from the community poured in from the time the school year started. She maximized this to ensure that the children received much needed provisions for their health and nutrition as well as education. The local government unit donated equipment and supplies for printing and reproduction of the modules. Through coordination between the school head and the local government executives, each teacher received a donated printer, which they brought home, allowing them to work remotely. The school head also reported using the school maintenance and other operating expenses (MOOE) funds to buy additional equipment and supplies for module printing and reproduction as well as school supplies for home learning.

The local government unit consistently gave supplies for the feeding program as well as health and sanitation kits and disinfection equipment for the modules. Local security staff supported enforcement of health protocols during retrieval and distribution of modules.

Continuity of Learning

In this section we describe the steps taken by the school to provide for learners' continued education in the distance learning context, according to five dimensions of continuity of learning given by UNICEF.¹

Curriculum and Content. The school mother tongue and mode of instruction for kindergarten through Grade 3 is Filipino. Teachers and parents were comfortable using the language and the materials. Teachers also forwarded links to DepEd Commons and other resources as well as the program schedule for DepEd TV. To augment delays in module distribution early in the school year, the school created learning activity sheets that were consistent with the most essential learning competencies outlined in the learning continuity plan. As distribution of modules became regular and consistent, learning activity sheets

¹ Alam, A., & Tiwari, P. (2020). Putting the 'learning' back in remote learning: Policies to uphold effective continuity of learning through COVID-19. Office of Global Insight and Policy, Issue Brief. UNICEF. In *Education and COVID-19 Pandemic*, 1-6.

were developed and distributed as supplementary materials for literacy learning.

Pedagogy and Contact Time. The school head and teachers agreed that modular learning was not the most effective modality, especially in the beginning when learners and HLPs were overwhelmed with the number of modules and activities that had to be submitted every week. Often parents were the ones answering the modules just to help the learners comply with the requirements. To address this, teachers slightly reduced the number of activities in the modules and when allowed by the local health protocols, teachers conducted 30- to 60-minute home visits or online video calls to guide the HLPs on facilitating home learning and to do one-on-one reading instruction with the learners. They also held online sessions with Grade 3 learners who had access and recorded these sessions and other video lessons for distribution through thumb drives. Teachers believed that there were more students needing remediation than before. Teachers gave these learners a variety of activities and materials—from flashcards to short passages—depending on their literacy level. Teachers and HLPs alike found limited contact time with the learners a persisting concern. They were hoping for free Internet connectivity to be made available for online classes and remediation, as this would help the learners catch up on literacy learning and other lessons.

Learner Monitoring, Assessment, and Remediation. Learners' progress and learning were monitored and assessed through the weekly submissions of modules and activity sheets. The school head and teachers developed a monitoring checklist to determine who among the learners had been getting and submitting modules regularly. They also created weekly home learning plans to guide HLPs and learners in home learning. Learners who had access to smart phones and an Internet connection were asked to record themselves reading, doing practice writing, and accomplishing activity sheets. Those who did not have access were visited at home or called by the teacher and asked to read. Teachers also scheduled one-on-one reading assessment once a month. To help learners self-monitor, the Grade 1 teacher gave pointers on the learners' strengths and areas for improvement—something that the parents found helpful and encouraging. Summative tests were also given regularly.

Learner Motivation and Engagement. HLPs reported that their learners spent from 2 to 6 hours engaged in schoolwork each day, with an average of 4 hours per day. HLPs reported that their learners answered two modules at an average of 2 hours daily. Open communication and cooperation between teachers and HLPs helped the learners adjust to the demands and challenges of remote learning.

To keep the children from getting bored or disinterested, teachers added colorful pictures in the supplementary materials and gave alternative activities that learners enjoyed, such as color-by-numbers sheets. Toward the end of the school year, HLPs reported that the children easily got tired of the modules. To address this, HLPs gave children breaks in between activities and did not force the children to rush the modules. They extended their patience as much as possible, and when they had the means, they provided simple rewards to the children, such as snacks and praises, after finishing the modules.

HLP Facilitation of Learning. Teachers advised and guided HLPs on facilitating learning at home, and the latter were keen on following the guidance, despite competing work demands. They set a space and schedule for studying with their children, and they provided additional materials they thought could support home learning.

When HLPs were not familiar with the lessons, they learned to search answers online, consult other HLPs, and reach out to the teachers so that they could guide their children. One thing that the HLPs found positive about remote learning was that they were able to bond and learn with their children, get to know their children's behavior better, and appreciate their influence in their growth and development.

Well-Being

The school head and teachers' self-reported well-being remained high, at 8 out of 10 over the course of the school year. What helped teachers cope was their positive attitude about the situation. It also helped when HLPs expressed appreciation of teachers' efforts and the support extended by colleagues and the school leadership. Teachers also found trainings and webinars helpful in guiding their teaching practice during remote learning.

Parents, despite struggling in the beginning of the school year, adjusted well through constant communication with the teachers. Teachers' guidance and encouragement helped them improve strategies in supporting their children. In turn, HLPs helped the children cope by following the health protocols, maximizing the sanitation kits from the school, spending quality time learning and bonding, and praying together.

Resilience: Adapting to Distance Learning

This school seemed to transition from adaptive to transformative resilience throughout the first year of implementation of remote learning in terms of curriculum and content, HLP engagement, and in supporting learners who were struggling. The school head and teachers reported several challenges in the beginning of the school year and, one by one, they were able to overcome them thanks to their shared school governance practice. The school head welcomed and maximized support from the local government unit and private donors, which eased the printing and reproduction concerns of the teachers as well as ensured safety and sanitation during distribution and retrieval of modules.

Teachers were also proactive in addressing delays in availability of modules from the division office by creating back-up lessons and activities for the learners. The school also made sure that there was an open and constructive communication system with the HLPs through text messages, phone calls, chat groups, and where there was limited connectivity, a communication network among the parents themselves so that they could support those needing assistance. Teachers were patient in explaining to the parents their role as HLPs and provided them with strategies to support, especially, the children who were struggling in literacy learning.

Summary and Discussion

This school was able to seamlessly pivot to remote learning, allowing for its successful implementation throughout the school year. The school's strong partnership with the local government unit and community was one of the underlying principles of this success. Furthermore, the positive relationship between the school head and the teachers and their solutioning together helped the school address challenges in a timely manner and was as well critical to this school's success in its transition to remote learning. Teachers' guidance and support to the HLPs improved their engagement in remote learning. By the end of the school year, parents shared that they were happy to guide their children's learning and to see them grow despite the challenges of remote learning.

Still, there were areas that can be improved to support learning delivery better. Internet connectivity and weak TV and radio signal inhibit children's access to several learning resources. Children living in far-flung areas remained unreached by the school and local staff due to the strict implementation of community quarantine, and this magnified their marginalization in education and possibly other services.



ALL CHILDREN READING—PHILIPPINES

Remote Learning Study: School 13 Case Study Description



School and Community Context

This school can be found in Lanao del Sur Province in Mindanao, Philippines. It is situated in a remote area and has intermittent electricity and limited Internet access. The area was under general community quarantine during the study. This meant that there was limitation in movement and transportation and in operations of certain industries, and there was a presence of uniformed personnel to enforce the quarantine protocols. The population of the province, which is predominantly Maranao, is around 20,000 people. Forestry, farming, and fishing are the principal sources of income generation. The residents of this province are caught in a cycle of poverty, with the poverty

level at 71.2 percent. The population of the municipality is young. The age group with the highest population is 5 to 9 years, which covers the grade levels kindergarten to Grade 3.

The school has no permanent structure, the old school building having been significantly damaged during conflict in the region. It was through the school head's and teachers' efforts that a make-shift structure was built about 10 years ago. Building a permanent structure was the main priority prior to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, but now they have focused all efforts on remote learning delivery. Children in this community are considered first-generation learners whose parents were not able to go to or finish school. Therefore, not all students are independent learners, nor are all parents are able to adequately support their children's learning at home. The school is short-staffed because one teacher retired, and one was transferred. They depend on volunteer teachers to fill the gap.

School's Remote Learning Model

With the present COVID-19 crisis, the regional office opted for distance learning through self-learning modules for all its learners. The teachers print the modules and distribute them to the parents or older siblings of the learners in the school. There is a schedule for distribution per day of the week for each grade level (Monday: Grade 1, Tuesday: Grade 2, and so on).

Because of limited Internet and cellular signal in the area, the school purchased a two-way radio set using the school maintenance and other operating expenses funds (MOOE). This is how the teachers delivered lessons to the learners who had two-way radio access at home. About 40 percent of the families of enrolled children had two-way radio systems. Some teachers also bought two-way radios with their own money to freely schedule sessions with their learners. According to the school head, every week the school participated in district-wide teaching using these two-way radios.

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To support learners from extremely remote areas, parents sometimes asked another person to get the modules from the school to give to them. Otherwise, teachers would make home visits. For those who had no means of communication, an imam or sulopan (leader) was requested to help in the dialogues with the students.

Leadership

Using four indicators from the Philippine Department of Education (DepEd) school head standards—instructional leadership, resource management and outreach, and teacher support and development—this section describes the school head's administrative and instructional duties and how the school head managed resources from the division and the community to pivot to remote learning when schools closed.

Instructional Leadership. In addition to regular administrative duties, the school head led and participated in teacher contextualization and dissemination of the Department of Education (DepEd) modules. During the first half of the school year, the school head communicated best practices in teaching reading to the Grade 1 and Grade 3 teachers on a daily basis, monitored the teachers in preparing activities aligned with the Most Essential Learning Competencies twice a week, and provided feedback on their teaching practice twice a week.

Teacher Support and Development. To ensure teaching and learning continuity, the school head monitored whether teachers were able to visit learners experiencing challenges with modular learning and whether they were able to attend to inquiries of the learners and/or their home learning partners (HLPs) when the latter visited the school. There was, however, no observation of teachers. The school held limited learning action cell (LAC) sessions among the teachers, sometimes using two-way radio. Nonetheless, the school head maintained close communication with the teachers for check-ins and reassurance. In particular, the Grade 1 teacher who answered the survey strongly agreed with the statement "I feel comfortable approaching my school head with any issues I have with implementation of remote learning" and that the school head regularly involved her in making decisions about learning and teaching.

Resource Management and Outreach. The school head facilitated a donation from a community foundation that purchased school supplies and found resources for buying the two-way radios. The school head also described the challenges of printing modules at the district office, which was far away and required travel by boat: "We have to cross a river to get to the district office. The current is strong, and the river sometimes overflows." The school head solved this issue by renting a printer.

A volunteer helped the teachers in downloading the modules from the portal. The school head and three volunteer teachers with degrees in elementary education were available when there were not enough teachers to support all the learners who needed help. The school head noted that the remote learning model brought increased responsibilities, sharing that she found her role challenging because of limitations in mobility due to the lockdown or general community quarantine, and the lack of available resources to implement the learning delivery modality, the school head also expressed the need for support in the repair of the existing school structure and additional information and communication technology support (e.g., computers, printers, etc.), so that the teachers reporting for work could have a more conducive working space. In addition to these administrative and technical duties, the school head also acted as a security guard and janitor at the school. "I reassure them that we have been doing the same work before. We were just too focused on the chalk and board. Now, it's on paper."

Continuity of Learning

The major goal of schools during closures was to continue the education of learners using various forms of remote learning modalities. Applying UNICEF's dimensions of continuity of learning,¹ the section below describes efforts made by the school to achieve this goal.

Curriculum and Content. Teachers and students found teaching under mother-tongue-based multilingual education to be challenging. "Maranao is learned orally, but when we see the letters written, we cannot pronounce the words," the school head stated. The lack of learning materials in Maranao and learner and teacher preference for

¹ Alam, A., & Tiwari, P. (2020). Putting the 'learning' back in remote learning: Policies to uphold effective continuity of learning through COVID-19. Office of Global Insight and Policy, Issue Brief. UNICEF. In *Education and COVID-19 Pandemic*, 1-6.

teaching and learning in Filipino and English led teachers to focus on oral language instruction in Maranao.

There was no dedicated time for teaching literacy and language in Maranao, and reading was only taught in Filipino and English. Teachers said that it was still a challenge to teach literacy in these two languages without finding additional resources, and they therefore spent a substantial amount of time translating modules, creating worksheets, and developing supplementary materials in Filipino and English.

Pedagogy and Contact Time. In their descriptions of their actions, ensuring continuity of learning, particularly in reading, was very important to the school head and teachers. They used a variety of approaches to communicate with learners. In addition to the use of two-way radios and home visits, the school head developed a schedule for HLPs and teachers so that parents, along with their children, could meet with teachers while observing COVID 19 protocols, when they came to school to pick up modules. Teachers were expected to be available at school and they reviewed learners' work and explained assignments to parents. The Grade 1 teacher stated, "During submission of modules, I would teach reading in [the mother tongue]. Usually, the lesson lasts for 1–2 hours." For those needing one-on-one remediation, both the learners and the parents were given guides and tips so that the children could improve their reading at home.

Both the Grade 1 and Grade 3 teachers were particularly concerned about supporting learners in general, and more specifically learners who were struggling to read. They therefore placed special emphasis on meeting with learners who were struggling and/or whose parents were unable to teach them. They made sure they taught these learners face to face at home, at teachers' homes, or in the community. The school head stated, "We hold lessons once a week for students who have no teaching home partners." The Grade 3 teacher stated that she taught some of the children who lived in her neighborhood. Both teachers stated that it was hard to teach using the modules and they preferred to teach the learners face to face, with one saying, "It's difficult to teach using modules because the parents are having a hard time, and more so the children. It's like they don't understand anything if it's not face to face." Describing their

endeavors to ensure they reached all learners the school head stated,

"We hold lessons once a week for students who have no teaching home partners. They can go to their teacher's home. It's okay for us to teach anywhere, even in [sic] the riverbank."

Learner Monitoring, Assessment, and Remediation. Teachers were expected to assess student learning twice per week. Learner progress was monitored through learner read alouds, oral assessments, and writing and weekly worksheet assessments. HLPs were given checklists to help them ensure learners' completion of assignments. Learners were given written feedback on their work. The school head and teachers would then meet to examine learners' work to see where they were struggling and needed support. This was confirmed by HLPs. A Grade 3 parent stated, "They monitor the child by checking on their capability in answering their questions based on the modules they finished at home. The teacher will check them individually through different assessments like oral questions and answer as well as writing." The two teachers noted that the remote distance modality made it hard to assess learning. Sometimes it was unclear whether the HLPs had completed learner work. Also, if a learner was found to have issues in the lessons, the mobility restrictions made it hard to support the learners well.

Learner Engagement. Close collaboration with HLPs to teach, guide, and support their children to ensure continuity of learning is a strong feature of this school. The school head and teachers cited open and continuous dialogue with the parents as a positive experience in the distance learning modality. Teachers tried to differentiate work according to learner needs to avoid frustration and boredom. The first-grade teacher said she drew illustrations to make the modules more engaging for learners. Another teacher shared that she would ask the learners to dance during face-to-face sessions as this helped them learn the lessons better.

HLP Facilitation. HLPs in this area were mostly farmers with little education; 75 percent of them, the school head stated, "did not reach a higher level of education" and consequently, had challenges teaching their children at home. Similarly, the teachers felt that very few parents guided their children's learning at home because of

the tiring, day-to-day demands to earn a living. One teacher shared that many girls dropped out of school to help their parents on the farm. The parents interviewed for this study attempted to support learning at home by establishing schedules and routines and assisting learners with their school lessons. Two of the four HLPs stated that their children studied in their rooms.

Mothers discussed how they divided their time between household chores and ensuring their children were learning. "I usually spend teaching lesson with my child for 3 hours. After breakfast, I would inform him to start reading his modules, same practice after lunch, and at night. I can't give all my time teaching my child, there's a lot of work at home, that's why I have to divide my time," the mother of a Grade 3 learner stated. HLPs confirmed that during orientations, through face to face meetings during module pick up and retrieval, home visits, and using two-way radios, the school head and teachers provided HLPs with strategies and support they could use to help their children study at home, including scheduling study times and motivating their children to study. Consequently, HLPs felt comfortable enough to initiate consultation with the teachers when they had concerns with the modules or were unable to teach the concepts to the children. HLPs surveyed in the study "strongly agreed" with the statement, "I feel comfortable telling my child's teacher or other school officials about the challenges I experience in relation to my child's home learning." Meanwhile, the teachers stated that communication with the parents allowed them to understand student experiences with home-based learning. In this regard the Grade 1 teacher stated,

"It's hard for parents because they have a lot of work to do. They are mostly farmers. Even if they want to teach, they cannot. They tell us, 'Ma'am you teach my child.' They find translating hard when teaching."

Well-Being

The school head maintained close communication with the teachers through daily check-ins. She took time to talk to the school's teachers every week, cared about their emotional and psycho-social well-being, and provided teachers with information about community services or resources that could support their well-being. Given all the challenges and barriers to instruction and learning delivery, the school head constantly reassured, motivated, and

encouraged teachers. As a result, teachers felt comfortable approaching her with any problems they had. The deep concern teachers had for their learners' progress made them risk their own well-being just to deliver the lessons in the new normal. One teacher shared, "I risk my health, and I am not afraid to get sick since there are no COVID cases here." Teachers noted that they were fully aware that to cope with the challenges of modular learning, they must manage their time well, stay healthy, and pray to Allah for strength to overcome the difficulties they faced. Teachers also received social and moral support from HLPs and community members, the school district, and division office.

Resilience: Adapting to Distance Learning.

This school demonstrated adaptive resilience in its efforts to communicate and support parents and the various approaches they used to try to ensure learners continued to learn at home. The school head and teachers recognized and were aware of the population of learners who attended the school and offered any help that learners and parents needed.

Summary and Discussion

Since this school was situated in a remote area, there were a number of barriers that influenced the teaching and learning process during the pandemic identified by the school head and teachers. These were the (1) lack of instructional materials in Maranao, (2) lack of Internet access, (3) learners' ability to cope with distance learning, and (4) parents' capacity to support their children's learning at home. The school community collaborated to overcome these barriers to help learners learn at home. To make up for the lack of instructional materials in Maranao, teachers created their own teaching and learning materials. The school used two-way radios to communicate with HLPs, each other, and teach learners, thus providing solutions for not being able to teach face to face and the lack of Internet access. However, the school head and teachers will need to move toward involving HLPs in decision-making about teaching and learning to ensure sustainable change in the future. In sum, a key strength of this school was the progress the school community made over the school year in collaborating to adapt teaching and learning to support the continued education of learners during school closures.



ALL CHILDREN READING—PHILIPPINES

Remote Learning Study: School 15 Case Study Description



School and Community Context

This school is in a small coastal town in the province of Misamis Oriental, Northern Mindanao Region. Fishing is the primary source of income generation. Approximately 17 percent of the population in this village is living in poverty, and five people live in the average household. The school was established in 2005.

School's Remote Learning Model

For the school year of 2020–2021, the school delivered distance learning through the self-learning modules that were distributed and returned

to the schools by home learning partners (HLPs) on a regular schedule. The school head made sure that teachers had maintained printers and supplies to print modules for all learners, which were originally produced and sent to the schools by the Philippines Department of Education (DepEd). Teachers were tasked with printing and distribution of modules to families throughout the school year. Module distribution and collection of completed modules took place weekly, on Friday, by HLPs. When parents were unable to come to the school on the scheduled times, teachers and/or local officials delivered the modules and collected finished modules from the learners' homes. Local officials provided separate boxes for distribution and collection at the entrance of the community or barangay. According to the school head, the transition to remote learning was smooth. In the survey, the school head either strongly "agreed" or "agreed" with the statement, "My school transitioned seamlessly to using the selected learning development modules."

In the last third of the school year, there was another strict lockdown. Parents were not allowed to come to school to collect the modules or return the completed ones. When the parents were able to collect the modules again, there were 3 weeks of new modules, which were difficult for HLPs to support and for learners to complete on time.

Leadership

In this section we describe how the school head applied elements of the DepEd standards of leadership—"instructional leadership," "resource management and outreach," and "teacher support and development"—to the school's transition to remote learning and to the support of learners' continuity of learning in this context.

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In the early part of the year, the primary leadership focus in the school was to support teachers in their task to print, reproduce, and distribute modules for all learners in eight subjects. When asked about how the distance learning program had shifted their role, the school head mentioned that the role of instructional supervision had the most significant shift because of the shift away from the classroom, where direct observations could be made. The school head "strongly agreed" that in the new remote learning situation, administrative responsibilities had increased, and "strongly agreed" with a similar statement about increased instructional leadership responsibilities. This was constant from the beginning to the end of the school year. One noteworthy finding from the teacher survey speaks to the school head's inclusive leadership style. At data collection occasions across the year, teachers "strongly agreed" with the statement, "My school head regularly involves me in making decisions about teaching and learning."

Instructional Leadership. The school head provided instructional leadership primarily through twice weekly meetings with teachers by grade or bimonthly learning action cell meetings. During these meetings the school head helped teachers work through challenges and provided guidance on how teachers can support HLPs. The school head encouraged teachers to have patience with HLPs and learners and to be flexible, allowing HLPs to take more time to return the completed modules depending on the needs of their learners. The school head also helped teachers develop their weekly home learning plans during these meetings. Instructional support included the development of a monitoring template for teachers to track module distribution, collection of completed modules, and learner performance. The school head reported communicating with teachers on administrative matters weekly. Communications to share best practices in teaching remotely were reported at frequencies of once per week in the beginning and middle of the year, but only monthly by the end of the year. The teachers noted the attenuation of instructional support from their school head toward the end of the year. For example, during the third interview at the end of the school year, the Grade 1 and Grade 2 teachers reported that they did not obtain instructional assistance from the school head.

Similarly, during the middle of the year, school head communications with HLPs were reported to take place weekly but this declined to once per month by the end of the school year. This decline, however, may have been related to the decreased need for administrative communications and increased communications between teachers and HLPs related to HLP facilitation of their children's learning in the home.

Teacher Support and Development. The Grade 1 and Grade 3 teachers who participated in this study felt they were sufficiently oriented to teaching in the remote learning context, using the self-learning modules. They considered their school head to be approachable. For example, at the beginning, mid-year, and end of the year teachers "strongly agreed" with the statement, "I feel comfortable approaching my school head with any issues I have with implementing the distance learning program." The school head's inclusive leadership style and approachability were important leadership qualities for handling the uncertainty from the pivot to remote learning. Both the Grade 1 and Grade 2 teachers surveyed either "agreed" or "strongly agreed" with the statement, "My school head cares about my emotional and psycho-social well-being." However, even though the Grade 1 teacher "strongly agreed" with the statement, "My school head makes time to talk to me every week," the Grade 3 teacher was "neutral" on this.

Both teachers reported that their school head supported strategies for teachers to connect with one another during the year, an important requirement for teacher well-being during the remote learning context when maintaining professional connections and peer support were sometimes placed at risk. Furthermore, the school head reported regularly connecting with fellow school heads in the district to discuss and address challenges. Both teachers and school heads needed peer support, especially with the uncertainty that remote learning presented to education. With peer support, teachers could work out day-to-day challenges together, getting the psycho-social support they needed to cope. With peer support, school heads were in a better position to support their teachers.

Resource Management. The school head made a deliberate effort to ensure that the availability of school funds was maximized to maintain printers and to provide bond paper for printing. The school head tapped local government staffing to assist in distributing modules and collecting completed modules from all homes, even when the HLPs could not collect them. Local government officials placed drop-off and collection boxes at the entrance of the community or barangay to support this effort. The Grade 1 and Grade 3 teachers reported that the school head's most helpful support given was that of ensuring they had the supplies they needed for printing and that these were replenished in a timely fashion throughout the year.

Continuity of Learning

In this section we describe the steps taken by the school to provide for learners' continued education in the distance learning context, according to five dimensions of continuity of learning given by UNICEF.¹

Curriculum and Content. The local language used by families in this school was Bisaya. During interviews teachers commented on the consistency of the modules for teaching reading in Bisaya, the mother tongue, Filipino, and English—with a range of offerings from processing three letter words, vocabulary development, and short stories with comprehension questions for more advanced learners. The teachers commented on the usefulness of the combination of the Power V200² activity sheets, the bridging program activity sheets for struggling learners, and the English reading materials for learners who read in English. On the teacher survey and the HLP survey, Grade 1 and Grade 3 teachers and most HLPs "agreed" that learners had the resources they needed to learn reading in the mother tongue (as well as Filipino and English). At the end of the school year, one of the four HLPs surveyed "disagreed" that their learner had the English materials needed. The most useful materials were the supplemental

reading materials and textbooks, teachers said at the end of the school year.

The school head mentioned some challenges given by the curriculum and modules. The first was that the different dialects in the Bisayan language presented some difficulties in word comprehension, particularly color names and numbers. The second was the large number of modules distributed to HLPs in a quarter and the large number of pages in each module, as the school head noted:

"For each learning area, supposedly there should be 1 module in a week. But there are modules that are so long, they have so many pages 15-20 or even more. [Grade] 1 has 32 modules in one quarter in [mother-tongue based]. So, they will bring 3 modules home in a week? Then, there are 8 subjects, multiplied. How can they accomplish all of that in a week?"

Pedagogy and Contact Time. At the beginning, middle, and end of the school year, Grade 1 and Grade 3 teachers in this school reported being "somewhat confident" in teaching reading in the mother tongue, Filipino, and English in the remote learning context.

Teachers were not allowed to undertake home visits, and at the beginning of the year no teachers conducted live, online instruction. However, by the end of the school year, the Grade 1 teacher, but not the Grade 3 teacher, began to try out online instruction, accessing the Power V200 program for those learners who had connectivity. According to the school head, few families had stable access to a consistent Internet connection, and the learners in these families were thereby penalized. The Grade 1 and Grade 3 teachers participating in this study also differed in the reported frequency that they communicated with their learners. The Grade 1 teacher reported that they communicated directly with learners several times a week, while the Grade 3 teacher reported only having direct communications with learners once per month.

¹ Alam, A., & Tiwari, P. (2020). Putting the 'learning' back in remote learning: Policies to uphold effective continuity of learning through COVID-19. Office of Global Insight and Policy, Issue Brief. UNICEF. In *Education and COVID-19 Pandemic*, 1-6.

² The Power V200 is part of DepEd's "Every Child a Reader" program. Power V200 provides literacy

materials (including instructional videos) to learners to increase their vocabulary. The Power V200 is based on the hypothesis that if children know a set of 200 vocabulary words in a given language, it will be easier for them to learn to read in that language. The 200 words in Power V200 are all aligned to the Most Essential Learning Competencies.

Teachers communicated with learners through phone calls and video calls. Video calls allowed a teacher to listen to their learners read and to provide more explicit explanation about the pronunciation of letter sounds.

Through the middle of the school year, teachers were communicating with HLPs to provide guidance on their support to learners once per week but reported only monthly communications with HLPs toward the end of the year.

Teachers communicated with HLPs when they went to the school to collect the modules and, for HLPs who had access to phones, through phone calls, video calls, and regular Group Chats.

The following Grade 1 teacher provides an example of guidance given to HLPs on introducing letters to their Grade 1 learners.

"The child is not a computer. His brain cannot process many all at once. Just one letter, one day. And before the new normal, the parents said what I said, and teaching was effective. Even while washing clothes, I [tell the parents] write the letter on the floor and ask what letter it is. They help me at least. This is what I tell the parents now, too."

During the end of the year interview, the Grade 1 teacher commented on the importance of HLP involvement,

"Without the assistance of parents, I don't think any of the programs I mentioned would work."

Thus, considering that home visits were not allowed, not having a cell phone presented a serious challenge for HLPs who needed regular guidance and communications with teachers.

Indeed, according to teacher interviews, the greatest challenge in teaching in the remote learning context in this school was that some families did not have cell phones and therefore direct teaching of learners, guidance to parents, and performance monitoring were all seriously impeded. Teachers were also challenged by parents with competing demands, who had difficulty finding time to work with their learners.

Learner Monitoring, Assessment, and

Remediation. In this school, Grade 1 and Grade 3 teachers "strongly agreed" or "agreed" that there were clear performance targets for student reading achievement. Grade 1 and Grade 3 teachers differed, however, on their perceptions of the effectiveness of the approaches.

The Grade 1 teacher felt that the remote learning approaches for language and literacy teaching improved in effectiveness over the year, from "most learners" benefiting at the beginning of the year to "all learners" benefiting by the end of the year. The Grade 3 teacher surveyed reported that the approach was effective for "most learners" throughout the year.

HLPs were mixed on how they perceived the effectiveness of the remote learning approaches in advancing their child's learning. Two of the four HLPs surveyed felt that the approaches were "somewhat effective" at the middle and end-of-year data collection. The other two HLPs perceived the approaches to be somewhat effective at mid-year but at the end of the year, perceived the approaches to be "somewhat ineffective" or "not at all effective."

Teachers reviewed and provided feedback to their learners at least once per week, which included monitoring of completed modules and learning action sheets and phone calls and/or video calls for listening to and providing feedback on learners' reading. The Grade 1 teacher used checklists for tracking progress on learning letters and letter sounds. The Grade 3 teacher indicated that during the end of year interview summative tests were also used.

The school head reported that teachers were genuinely concerned about pupils who were having difficulty reading and suggested that the situation was worse in the context of remote learning. Both the Grade 1 and Grade 3 teachers reported that they "always" assigned remedial work for learners who were behind or falling behind. Support for struggling learners included the provision of additional and simpler reading materials and worksheets.

Learner Engagement and Motivation. HLPs reported a wide range of time learners engaged daily on home learning, from 2 to 6 hours per day, on average about 4 hours per day.

As expected, some HLPs had difficulty keeping their young learners focused to complete their modules. They used a variety of approaches to help their learners stay engaged, including incentives such as letting them play only when completing their modules, allowing their learners to watch educational videos, being patient and allowing more flexibility with time, and giving their learners choices in selecting reading materials.

HLP Facilitation of Learning. HLPs reported spending from 2 to 6 hours directly supporting their children's learning at home, on average 3.5 hours per day. HLPs' comfort levels in supporting their learners' language and literacy learning varied. Two of the four HLPs showed improved comfort levels over time, reporting that they felt "somewhat uncomfortable in the middle of the year" and "very comfortable" during the latter part of the school year. The remaining two HLPs reported that they felt "somewhat uncomfortable" in both the middle and end of the year.

Parents in this school had a variety of positive experiences in supporting their learners from home. These included the joy in knowing that they were helping their learners learn, having their learners home all the time, and the opportunity to monitor how their children were answering the modules. One HLP put it this way:

"Being able to teach him how to read is a positive experience for me. [I] feel joyful knowing that I am directly helping my child to learn. Unlike before where I only prepare her food. Now, I not only get to teach her, but I also get to spend time with her."

Well-Being

Teachers supported HLPs' well-being primarily by "being there for them" through regular communications and careful guidance in how to support their child's learning. During the interviews, HLPs discussed a variety of ways in which they supported their learners' well-being while learning from home. Ensuring that their learners had plenty to eat before they started their modules and

keeping readily available snacks was noted by most HLPs, along with encouragement and patience. For example, one HLP explained,

"I don't force them to work on their module if they're not in the mood to do it. I inspire them to work hard; don't force them when not in mood or tired."

Teachers and HLPs reported that learners had a variety of challenges coping in the beginning part of the year, mostly missing being in their classrooms and struggling to focus and work with their parents on learning tasks. However, by the last third of the school year, school heads and teachers observed that learners were coping much better. The school head reported,

"[The learners] are doing better compared to the beginning of the school year because now most of them have adjusted to the new reality."

The Grade 3 teacher said this about the importance of maintaining a positive mindset to cope and carry on professionally in the context of the pivot to remote learning:

"You need to be prepared, in terms of health and attitude. Being a teacher, we need to keep working. To be self-confident, healthy, and persevering."

Resilience: Adapting to Distance Learning

One of the most important adaptations was that the school head developed the "Pagtutulungan sa Pagbasa sa Panahon ng Pandemya" program, which means "Helping each other read in the time of pandemic." The school head and teachers worked together to identify high-school students, college students, and capable parents as community partners to facilitate learners whose parents needed assistance in helping their learners complete their modules.

In addition, the school head, recognizing that some teachers were struggling to assess the performance of their learners, assigned teacher-partners to assist them with their assessments and documentation of learner performance.

Summary and Discussion

In reviewing the data collected from school actors in this school, it became evident that the school head's comment that there was a "seamless transition" to remote learning was an accurate description of the school's pivot to remote learning in the 2020–2021 school year. The school head's leadership style, described by teachers as "responsive," "approachable," and "inclusive," likely played a pivotal role in this positive transition. The school head kept teachers supplied with the materials they needed for printing the modules and tapped into local government authorities to help distribute modules and collect completed modules from those who could not travel to the school. The school head joined forces with teachers to find solutions to challenges such as developing a community partnership program to support learners in families where HLPs were not able to provide regular support to their children (i.e., the "Pagtutulungan sa Pagbasa sa Panahon ng Pandemya" program). Teachers felt that the school head cared for their psycho-social well-being in addition to taking care of certain material needs.

The teachers' proactive and positive spirit also likely played a key role in the school's transition to remote learning. The Grade 1 teacher in this school was particularly knowledgeable and creative in finding solutions to challenges of teaching, learning, and assessment of learners.

This is not to say that the transition was without challenges. One of the greatest limitations in teaching and learning and the greatest challenge of teachers was that of reaching HLPs and learners. Home visits or learner visits to the school were not allowed. Though toward the end of the school year, the Grade 1 teacher introduced some live, online teaching, most homes did not have access to the Internet. Teachers utilized cell phones and video calls for communication, but even then, not all homes had phones or they had limited funds for connectivity. Thus, many learners were missed, and because of these communication limitations, monitoring and performance assessment were impeded.

Though the teachers who were surveyed felt that "most" to "all" learners benefited from the remote learning program, some HLPs felt differently. Two of the HLPs felt that the program was "somewhat ineffective" or "not at all effective" in advancing their learners' progress in school.

However, HLPs found many aspects of the program positive, especially the experience working with their learners on schoolwork and "being a teacher" and simply having more time with their learners at home.



ALL CHILDREN READING—PHILIPPINES

Remote Learning Study: School 18 Case Study Description



School and Community Context

This school is located in a highly urbanized city in Cebu Province. The city occupies most of Mactan Island and a portion of Olango Island, offshore mainland Cebu. The island is connected to the mainland by a bridge that spans 8.9km. There are also several health care facilities in the city that are close to the school. Other than fishing, there are several other income sources for the locals such as a variety of cottage industries, trading, and local employment. The city's population is roughly 500,000. Dependency ratio is at 30 percent and of

this number, 67 percent are children aged 5–9 years.

Though the city is urbanized, poverty incidence is notable at 17 percent, which implies that there are about 16,619 households earning a monthly income of PhP9,4529 (\$189).

The school's mother tongue is Sinugbuanong Binisaya. This is also the language spoken by the home learning partners (HLPs) and learners. This, the teachers and HLPs expressed, makes it easier for parents to support their children's home learning. During this study, because there was no recorded case of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) in the area, mobility was not significantly restricted by the local Inter-Agency Task Force, thereby allowing teachers to conduct home visits especially with learners who needed assistance.

School's Remote Learning Model

Based on the learner enrollment survey conducted by the school prior to enrollment, HLPs preferred printed modules over other learning modalities since some of them did not have access to technology. For this reason, the school used the other modalities (e.g., online, digital offline, and educational TV) to access supplementary learning materials and as avenues to reinforce learning (e.g., DepEd TV). Modules were distributed every Tuesday and retrieved on Fridays. Meanwhile, district supervisors shared links to the Department of Education (DepEd) Commons and other online learning resources that teachers could forward to HLPs who had access to the Internet. Teachers also shared the schedule of DepEd TV episodes with learners who had television sets.

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Leadership

School head leadership is crucial in setting direction and in the overall adaption of the school to challenges posed by the pivot to remote learning. In this section we describe how the school head applied standards of leadership—"instructional leadership," "resource management and outreach," and "teacher support and development"—to the school's transition to remote learning and to the support of learners' continuity of learning in this context.

Instructional Leadership. The school head worked with master teachers in the school in providing instructional guidance to teachers and in supporting teacher monitoring and performance assessment. In the beginning of the school year, the school head met with master teachers weekly to provide guidance on remote learning and to check on their weekly plans. Master teachers then met with the teachers assigned to them to cascade the guidance, check on their weekly home learning plans, and make sure that they were communicating well with the HLPs.

The school head and master teachers made sure that weekly home learning plans were aligned with the Most Essential Learning Competencies. Learning action cells were also conducted every third Friday of the month to discuss issuances and memoranda from the division office. Toward the latter half of the year, learning action cells became weekly to allow the teachers to discuss and resolve together issues in remote learning.

Teacher Support and Development. Teachers were prepared for distance learning through a variety of trainings and webinars on teaching and learning in the remote learning context which were developed by the central and division offices before the school year started. The Grade 1 and Grade 3 teachers surveyed in this study "strongly agreed" that they had been sufficiently oriented to teaching using the selected learning development modalities.

Recognizing the importance of peer learning and support, the school head increased the opportunities for teachers to connect with each other through learning action cells that increased from monthly (mostly for sharing division information) to weekly meetings designed specifically for teachers to learn and help each other address challenges.

The school head indicated that the frequency of feedback given to teachers increased from once per week at mid-year to twice per week in the last quarter of the school year, which was made possible in part by the school head's strategy to prepare and enlist the support of master teachers. The school head also regularly connected with other school heads in the division to share challenges and solutions to common problems, strengthening her ability to support teachers.

Responses on the teacher survey showed that Grade 1 and Grade 3 teachers either agreed or strongly agreed that their school head was approachable, made time to talk to them at least once per week, and involved them in decision-making about teaching and learning. The teachers also "agreed" or "strongly agreed" with the statement, "My school head cares about my emotional and psycho-social well-being."

Resource Management and Outreach. The self-learning modules were produced by the division office while the school was responsible for printing, reproducing, and distributing the modules. In the beginning of the school year, there was a 3-week delay in receiving the modules from the division. However, the schedule of module production was normalized midway through the school year and no more delays were experienced. In fact, the school head and teachers were able to make sure that all modules were ready 1 week in advance. In the early part of the year the school head instructed teachers to conduct learner performance assessments while waiting for the modules to arrive from the division office.

The school head reported that only 30 percent of the maintenance and other operating expenses (MOOE) funding was dedicated to module printing and reproduction, which was not enough for all learners. In the beginning of the school year, the school head used a portion of this funding to rent printers and photocopiers to prevent teachers from using their own money for printing and reproduction. Toward the end of the school year, the school head was able to facilitate procurement of one printer per grade level with MOOE funds. She also mobilized local government to donate additional needed copiers and printers and to mobilize private citizens to donate paper for printing and copying.

Continuity of Learning

In this section we describe the steps taken by the school to provide for learners' continued education in the distance learning context, according to five dimensions of continuity of learning given by UNICEF.¹

Curriculum and Content. The school head indicated that the school had transitioned seamlessly to using the selected learning development modalities, and teachers concurred with this view. According to teacher comments, distance learning was not a problem and teachers adjusted to the pivot to remote learning because of guidance from the school head and by following the Most Essential Learning Competencies, which were integrated into all the modules produced by the division office.

Survey findings indicated that Grade 1 and Grade 3 teachers as well as HLPs felt that the materials and resources from the modules and associated reading materials were sufficient for supporting literacy learning in mother tongue, Filipino, and English. HLPs found the modules easy to follow since they were presented in the mother tongue.

For the language and literacy learning modules there was always a short story and three activities for the learners to practice. By the middle of the school year, the school also developed learning activity sheets associated with the distributed modules. These provided more specific activities for the learners to complete and were easier for HLPs to use in guiding, reinforcing, and assessing children's learning at home. From mid-year teachers began to initiate some modifications in the materials, supplementing or reducing materials to meet learners' needs. This is discussed further in the following section.

Pedagogy and Contact Time. The Grade 1 and Grade 3 teachers surveyed in this school reported that from the beginning of the school year to the end of the school year they felt "extremely confident" teaching language and literacy in the mother tongue, Filipino, and English. On this survey, the teachers also indicated that teaching language and literacy using the selected learning development modalities was effective for most

learners in the school. However, HLPs were less positive about the effectiveness of the selected learning development modalities on their children's learning. The four HLPs surveyed varied in their response to the questions, "How effective do you think the learning development modalities are in advancing your child's academic achievement?" At the end of the school year HLP responses to this question ranged from "somewhat ineffective" to "somewhat effective."

Home visits were allowed in this school and some, but not all made home visits. The Grade 3 teacher participating in this study reported that she visited her learners once every 2 weeks and spent from 30–40 minutes each visit in the beginning of the year, but only about 10–20 minutes during the last half of the year. Teachers prioritized home learning visits for learners who needed assistance and those who were inconsistent in module submission. Though not necessarily face to face, teachers reported that they did speak to their learners directly, at least once per week.

Furthermore, teachers established text message and chat groups with HLPs to relay information and to guide them in supporting their children's home learning. Guiding HLPs in their support to learners is a critical element of pedagogy in the remote learning context.

Teachers were prepared for distance learning through trainings and webinars on teaching and learning delivery given by the central and division offices before the school year started. Teachers provided additional print materials and activity sheets that complemented the modules on language and literacy learning, with leveled materials for struggling learners. For these learners, teachers prepared leveled activities, beginning where the children were, increasing the difficulty level as they gained mastery until they reached the competency needed for their grade level.

From the middle of the year toward the end, the teachers started reducing the activities in the modules, retaining only the essentials, while also providing supplementary reading materials and encouraging the learners to watch DepEd TV and

¹ Alam, A., & Tiwari, P. (2020). Putting the 'learning' back in remote learning: Policies to uphold effective continuity of learning through COVID-19. Office of Global Insight and Policy, Issue Brief. UNICEF. In *Education and COVID-19 Pandemic*, 1-6.

to access learning resources in the DepEd Commons.

Reported challenges in teaching language and literacy remotely mentioned by teachers were teaching reading without face to face classes, irregular submissions of completed modules and activity sheets; and keeping up with the work that piled up, such as checking the modules weekly and recording learners' scores. What comforted the teachers were the parents who persisted in getting and submitting the modules and supporting their children's home learning despite the challenges they experienced.

Learner Monitoring, Assessment, and Remediation. The school head indicated that by mid-year, the school had established clear performance targets for learner reading achievement.

Teachers conducted oral reading verification in the beginning of the school year and then again in the end to determine any change in learning over the school year. Throughout the year, teachers monitored and assessed children's learning and development through the submitted modules, home visits, regular and video phone calls, and through summative tests, which were given quarterly.

Survey results suggested that teachers reviewed their learners' work and provided feedback to learners weekly. Still, teachers found this level of monitoring and assessment inadequate, reporting that they could not assess the true level and skills of the learners in the remote learning context. Even when there were video recordings of learners reading, weekly phone calls or home visits whereby teachers could listen to learners read, teachers believed that more contact time was needed to truly teach and assess literacy skills of their learners.

Learner Motivation and Engagement. HLPs in this school reported that their children spent 1–4 hours per day in home learning, with an average of 2.5 hours per day. HLPs reported that home learning was not always easy for their learners and that they often lost interest in the activities.

To address this, HLPs reported that they made an extra effort to extend patience and not force the children to do the activities. When learners were not in the mood to answer the modules, some HLPs reported that they made a point not to push or hit the children so as not to make them feel bad or further lose interest in school and the modules.

They also set learning spaces where the children could comfortably study.

HLPs who had television sets also reported that their children watched DepEd TV, and those who access to the Internet watched video lessons in DepEd's YouTube channel. These helped their children cope with remote learning, as the lessons in the module were discussed in those episodes.

HLP Facilitation of Learning. Prior to the start of the school year, guidelines were cascaded to HLPs in socially distant face to face orientations per grade level. The school head and teachers took special care to encourage HLPs to communicate with the teachers openly about the modules or home learning so that concerns could be addressed on time and effectively. They also encouraged parents who were able to, to support working parents who could not get to school during module distribution or who found it difficult to be available or to otherwise assist their learners.

Most HLPs surveyed in this study reported that they felt "somewhat comfortable" supporting their child's literacy learning in mother tongue and Filipino. However, all four HLPs reported that they felt "somewhat uncomfortable" supporting their child's literacy learning in English. HLPs reported that they spent from 1 to 5 hours per day directly supporting their children's learning, averaging 2 hours per day.

Some HLPs took special initiative to provide additional literacy materials to support their child's learning. For example, one parent explained that she printed out pictures and lyrics to children's songs and poems to provide opportunities to practice reading and to identify rhymes. This same parent encouraged her child to watch English cartoons to improve familiarization with the language. Two other parents shared that they encouraged their children to watch DepEd TV and other video lessons in DepEd's YouTube Channel to learn more about their lessons.

What motivated these HLPs to persevere was seeing that, as the school year progressed, their children were reading better and were answering the modules more independently. Some HLPs in this school expressed some unexpected positive outcomes in the home learning experience, such as the following:

"It is challenging for working parents who have 9–5 jobs like me, but I have to say that I have never been this involved in my child's education, and I think it is good. I get to guide her in studies, and I see her grow and develop."

Well-Being

Apart from providing instructional support, the school head created an alternative work arrangement that allowed faculty members to work from home while maintaining a maximum of 50 percent workforce in school to prevent teachers from contracting COVID-19. The school head reminded teachers to be patient with parents who were particularly anxious and upset about the remote learning pivot or were struggling to assist their learners. She also provided teachers with strategies on how to work with the HLPs who were finding the home learning situation stressful.

Both the school head and the teachers surveyed in this school self-reported well-being as being relatively high, with only slight changes from the beginning to the end of the school year. The school head improved from a self-rating of 8 early in the year to a self-rating of 10 toward the end of the year. Among teachers, there was a 1-point drop from 9 to 8, though they maintained that they were fine and adjusted well to remote learning. The school head supported teachers' well-being by providing encouragement, giving them advice like not engaging when some parents post negative comments about the modules in social media. The school head reminded teachers to instead be positive and help the parents adjust to the new modality. She also organized weekly "bonding sessions" for teachers at the school.

Interview findings highlighted that teachers' well-being was heavily influenced by concern for student learning. Regular connections with and support to learners through video calls, home visits, providing additional learning materials, and close coordination with HLPs helped teachers cope with remote learning, they said.

Among the four HLPs surveyed in this study, two maintained a self-rating of 8 from the middle of the school year to the end, while one parent had a self-rating of 1 in the beginning of the school year and improved to 8 toward the end. During the interviews, HLPs shared that though they found the pivot to remote learning challenging, they managed

to adjust well because of the support from teachers. For example, they explained that when they were distressed, teachers provided guidance to stay calm and persevere so that their children would not lose interest in learning.

Some HLPs reported that they also supported their children's physical well-being by reminding them of the health protocols and ensuring that their learners ate healthy food. They also set aside time for play and socialization to relieve the children of stress. One parent shared that she would sing karaoke with her child for their bonding time and to de-stress. One teacher noted,

"The parents of my students know that I'm one chat or one text away if they need any questions regarding the module."

Still one HLP reported not being able to adjust well to the situation because of the compounded demands of earning a living and supporting her child's studies. Being employed full-time, she was only able to study with her child for 2 hours at night and this to her was not enough. She added that the modules did not have enough explanations of lessons so she had to study them before she could teach her child. Nonetheless, she found spending time with her child rewarding because they were able to bond and learn together.

Resilience: Adapting to Distance Learning

This school made deliberate adjustments over the course of the year to better support learners' success in the remote learning context. The school created back-up materials to support learners to mitigate the late delivery of modules early in the year, modified the length and language of modules and activities as needed, and provided supplementary materials to support reading practice. By the end of the school year, the school established a school monitoring evaluation, so that teachers could provide support specifically targeted to learners' needs and abilities.

HLPs were supported not only in terms of material needs but also in guiding children during home learning. Resources such as DepEd TV and links to DepEd Commons and other open education resources were made available as well. These were much appreciated by the HLPs as they saw toward the end of the school year that their children were becoming more independent in answering their modules and improving in reading and writing skills. HLPs also improved in supporting their

children as seen in their reports about setting space and routines for studying at home, searching for materials online, printing reading materials for children, and spending time to read with the children even outside of their study time.

Summary and Discussion

From the beginning through the end of the first year of remote learning, the school head worked together with teachers and community to take specific initiatives to build upon and improve remote learning. The most significant of these were tapping the roles of master teachers to provide targeted mentoring and support to teachers, partnering with the local government unit and private citizens to augment resources and support struggling families, responsively adjusting materials to learner needs and abilities, and developing systems for assessing learner reading performance to provide targeted support. These initiatives allowed the school to mitigate a number of barriers to effective teaching and learning and better support continuity of learning by going over and beyond to support both HLPs and learners. One teacher summarized the change that took place in the parents of her learners,

"I like seeing parents who are so involved with their children's education. Unlike before that they leave everything to the teacher, now they ask a lot of questions about the module and how to answer the activities in the module."

These responsive and systematic initiatives of the school head, teachers, local government officials, and HLPs in this school community were underpinning factors in the strong capability of this school to maximize the support to their learners and the continuity of learning during the pivot to remote learning. The importance of the approachability of the school head and the care that teachers felt by the school head cannot be overstated.



ALL CHILDREN READING—PHILIPPINES

Remote Learning Study: School 19 Case Study Description



School and Community Context

This school can be found on one of the six islands that make up the municipality of San Vicente in the Northern Samar Province. This school is in a remote area with little electricity and Internet access. There is no hospital on the island, only a health center. At the time of the first interview there were zero cases of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) in the municipality. The primary source of income generation was copra, but this has shifted to farming and fishing because of the

frequency of typhoons. The community is relatively small, so although there are some houses that seem to be on the outskirts of the town, or far away, many are in the town, and the school head and teachers know the families of the learners they teach and would often bump into each other in the town. A home learning partner (HLP) described this kind of interaction in the community in the following manner, "When we see each other outside by chance, she tells me what is needed and asks how we are since we are near the school." The dominant mother tongues of the learners are Waray and Binisaya.

School's Remote Learning Model

The school had no choice in selecting a learning delivery modality. It used the Department of Education (DepEd) self-learning modules, which teachers, supervised by the school head, printed and distributed weekly to parents who picked up the modules at school. The school head set up a system for collecting the modules. Module retrieval was every Friday from 1–5 pm. At the beginning of the school year there was little face-to-face teaching, but by the middle of the year, teachers were making one-on-one home and/or group visits because infection rates were low. These visits were to the homes of learners who were struggling to read and had little parental help. Toward the end of the academic year, teachers and HLPs became more collaborative and accustomed to the routines and protocols for distributing and retrieving the self-learning modules.

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Leadership

The section below uses three indicators of the DepEd professional standards for school heads to describe the school head's administrative and instructional roles and responsibilities during school closures. These are instructional leadership, teachers support and development, and resource management and outreach.

Instructional Leadership. The school head had received training (face to face, online, and follow-up training) to help manage the school and ensure continuity of learning in the new normal. The school head demonstrated instructional leadership in various ways. She provided technical assistance in the form of guiding, supervising, and collaborating with teachers. The school head checked teacher daily lesson logs and weekly home learning plans; she oversaw teacher in-service training and scheduled 1–2-hour learning action cell sessions every quarter to discuss assessments and student challenges, and to share and resolve any pending issues with teachers and HLPs. Because of her increased responsibilities, the school head said she did not always have the time to check teacher lesson plans. During the learning action cell meetings teachers also developed learning activity sheets, aligned to the DepEd's most essential learning outcomes, because there were not enough national self-learning modules.

Teacher Development and Support. The teachers stated that the school head was always available to support them regarding their overall needs. Grade 1 and Grade 3 teachers answered "strongly agree" and "agree," respectively, to the statement "I feel comfortable approaching my school head with any issues I have with implementation" across the three occasions of interviews. The first-grade teacher made this statement about the school head,

"[The school head] updates us and teaches us how to handle the modular set up, and how to teach effectively using this modality of distance learning."

The school head was in charge of printer maintenance as well as the printing and sorting of self-learning modules. She supported teachers in the development of teaching and learning materials

to "lessen their workload." Of this support, one of the teachers said,

"She is always there, doing everything to guide us if we have problems with printing and whatever we need for distance learning."

Resource Management and Outreach. The school head described efforts made to mobilize resources for the school. The school maintenance and other operating expenses (MOOE) funds were released late and were not sufficient for taking care of tasks such as generator, printer and computer maintenance, transportation, and buying resources. Accessing the Internet was difficult because the signals on the island were weak, the "cell mast was broken," and electricity was intermittent. This made it challenging to access DepEd Commons and print the materials in a timely manner. Consequently, teaching and learning materials were resourced from group chats. The school head stated also that it was costly to download data. Transportation was also an issue because school administrators and teachers had to leave the island to buy needed materials and resources and attend trainings. Additionally, teachers had to translate many of the modules into Binisaya and/or English. The school head and teachers contacted community officials and organizations for material support. A community organization donated a printer and paper, and some parents donated cash, ink, and bond paper.

Continuity of Learning

Applying dimensions of UNICEF's continuity of learning during the COVID-19 pandemic,¹ the following sections describe how the school community collaborated to ensure the continued education of learners at home.

Curriculum and Content. The school head and teachers highlighted issues with the mother-tongue-based multilingual education and languages of instruction. To the question "How confident do you feel this year teaching mother tongue language and literacy during remote learning?," Grade 1 and Grade 3 teachers who participated in the survey both responded "neutral" in the beginning of the school year and "somewhat not confident" towards the end of the year. The two main challenges were that teachers who were not local were unfamiliar

¹ Putting the 'learning' back in remote learning: Policies to uphold effective continuity of learning through COVID-

19. Office of Global Insight and Policy, Issue Brief. UNICEF. In *Education and COVID-19 Pandemic*, 1-6.

with the language of instruction, found it hard to teach in this language, and preferred to teach in English and Filipino. Materials received by the school did not match the mother-tongue language spoken by the students. There were limited materials in the mother-tongue language, in Filipino and English. Teachers created their own learning activity sheets because they would have had to translate many of the materials from the modules to the mother tongue. This also solved the problem of difficulties with downloading the modules. During learning action cell meetings together the school head and teachers collaborated to contextualize lesson plans and worksheets. They also provided learners with differentiated learning activity sheets “we give ... activities they can understand and is [sic] appropriate for their ability,” the first-grade teacher stated. Teachers also decreased the content of the modules in the beginning of the academic year, but gradually increased the content over the year. In addition to the modules, by the fourth quarter of the academic year, learners were provided with short stories to read. Learners in Grade 3 had two short stories to read per week in English, Filipino, and their mother tongue. Grade 1 learners had one story per week.

Pedagogy and Contact Time. The school head and teachers gave most of their attention to struggling students. In the first quarter they realized many Grade 1 children were not learning to read, so when COVID-19 infections were low, they conducted home visits to give one-on-one lessons to these children or had parents and teachers meet at teacher houses. The Grade 1 teacher was very concerned about how the Grade 1 learners would learn to read when she was not present to guide them and assess their progress, stating during the first round of interviews,

“I cannot guide them. I cannot see how they read. I can only do monitoring twice a week. So now, ‘Are there going to be readers?’”

During home visits the Grade 1 teacher encouraged parents to read to their children. Some learners read to her when she visited. By the third quarter of the academic year, teachers were meeting with struggling learners for an hour a day at least three times a week.

According to the school head and teachers, because many learners were left unsupervised when their parents were at work, teachers gathered these unsupervised learners together and taught them in clusters. One parent volunteered to teach eight of these children.

Learner Monitoring, Assessment, and Remediation. Monitoring the progress of learners was challenging especially in the beginning of the school year. It was only midway through the year that the school was able to establish clear performance targets for student reading achievement. Learners were assessed weekly or fortnightly through the self-learning modules. The school head and teachers met to examine learners’ work to see where they were struggling and needed support and commented,

“In the weekly assessment, we take note of the problems encountered so we can solve the root cause of the problem.”

The school head and teachers noted the learning loss that had occurred over the academic year, stating that learners who did well normally during face to face instruction were performing poorly. Additionally, the school head stated that when school was held in classroom settings, by the third quarter of the academic year, 75 percent of the children in Grade 1 could read. In the 2020–2021 academic year, however, fewer students were able to read. “Before, by the third quarter, 75 percent of the class [could] read already, but now there are less readers,” the school head said. Teachers and HLPs of Grade 1 and Grade 3 learners said they saw small improvements in learning. However, teachers were unsure how accurate these improvements were because parents tended to complete their children’s answers for them. The school head and teachers encouraged parents not to do this. Teachers met with learners who were not progressing three times a week for remedial work. “We go to those who need remediation and we discuss the topic again with them”, the first grade teacher said.

Learner Engagement and Motivation. Both the school head and teachers perceived that learners struggled with learning at home. They noticed that because there were no face to face classes, learners spent less time studying. Teachers and the school head described seeing school children playing and roaming the streets, with little HLP supervision. By the third round of interviews the

school head stated that the barangay officials were “roving” around the island to ensure learners were at home during school hours. The school head and teachers felt that there was minimal or basically no learning going on for most of the learners. Learners who were motivated did turn in their work, but most did not. HLPs stated that it was challenging to keep the children focused on learning. Only fast learners and those who were taught by their parents were keeping up with their studies, the Grade 3 teacher remarked.

HLP Facilitation. According to the school head, although HLPs were encouraged to read to their children, many did not because they did not have the prerequisite education, were busy with work, and/or were too tired when they came home from work. An HLP of a third grade child stated that she asked her neighbor for help with her child’s math lesson and described her situation in the following manner,

“It is somewhat hard to support my child because there are subjects that I don’t know, especially science, math, and English.”

“I struggle with the lessons,” a first grade HLP commented. However, of the HLPs who were interviewed, only one parent stated that she did not have time to teach her child. All the HLPs set up schedules and routines for their children and juggled work and household chores to help their children. HLPs in this school reported allotting an average of 3 hours daily to support their learners. Most learners studied in the living room. “We start in the morning at 8:30 ... we do two modules and end at 12:00,” one of the HLPs stated. Toward the end of the academic year, the HLPs who were interviewed noted that their children had settled into their routines and modular learning and knew what to do every day. “In the morning she cleans first and knows what to do. After she eats in the morning, she does the modules,” an HLP stated. HLPs bought supplementary materials like story books for their children. One HLP downloaded materials from DepEd Commons, a website with teaching and learning resources.

Well-Being

The teachers stated that the school head was very supportive and answered all the questions they had. Grade 1 and Grade 3 teachers surveyed in the study answered, “strongly agree” and “agree,” respectively, to the statement, “My school head cares about my emotional and psycho-social well-being.” She encouraged them to cope and adapt to the new normal, telling them “we can get through this, too.” They tried to get together occasionally to relax. Mostly the teachers and school head saw each other on Fridays during module retrieval. The school head also stated that there were webinars offered to cater to teachers’ welfare. HLPs said they turned to prayer, socializing, having discussions about the pandemic, and healthy eating to cope with the pandemic.

Resilience: Adapting to Distance Learning

This school exhibited adaptive resilience in the areas of curriculum and content, and support for struggling students. The school head and teachers adapted and contextualized curriculum content to support learning at home. Noting that the self-learning modules were challenging for their learners, teachers pivoted to developing learning activity sheets in the learners’ mother tongue to fit the needs of learners and providing supplementary readers to improve learner reading skills. Teachers also quickly realized that to stem learning loss they would have to meet with learners, especially those whose HLPs were unable to support them at home. They also communicated with parents through chat groups and home visits to teach them how to support learners at home. Although the teachers and school head tried to encourage and motivate parents, they did not seem to involve them in decision-making.

Summary and Discussion

This is a school in a remote area with an indigent population. The school head, teachers, and school community had three major barriers to surmount to ensure some continuity of learning during school closures because of the COVID-19 pandemic. They used various approaches to solve these problems. The first major challenge was technology. Teachers had to download and print self-learning modules provided by DepEd. This was challenging in that electricity was irregular and the Internet signal was weak, making it difficult to access these materials as well as communicate with the school community.

Second, the teaching and learning materials sent to them were insufficient and very often sent in the wrong mother-tongue language. Teachers overcame this barrier by translating these materials into the mother tongue of learners and developing their own resources. Transportation, maintaining generators and printers, and ensuring the availability of ink and paper were all challenges that the school head and teachers faced.

“Every quarter we conduct [learning action cells]. We have discussed the results of the assessment and problems of the students. We think of what interventions we can do and what ways we can find. We have sharing of ideas.”

The school head reached out to the community for support regarding materials like ink and paper. The third major challenge was ensuring learning occurred at home. The school head remarked that parents grew less enthusiastic about supporting their children to learn, and children's' motivation to learn decreased during the school year. The school head and teachers also observed that Grade 1 learners in particular were finding it challenging to learn how to read. So, although at first they did not visit children's homes, they soon started to arrange teacher one-on-one or group visits with struggling readers. Key strengths of this school community also stand out. Over the academic year this school community supported and encouraged each other and gradually adapted to the situation. Interview data revealed that the school head and teachers were collaborating and doing the best that they could to ensure learning was occurring, even if minimally. Teachers meet in learning action cells for 1–2 hours a week to develop learning activity sheets, translate materials, align textbooks to the Most Essential Learning Competencies, and come up with solutions to support struggling learners. Although home visits were not allowed, since it is a small community, and community infection was negligible, teachers visited children to assess and monitor learning. They made themselves available to meet with parents on Fridays when the modules were distributed and communicated with and were available to support HLPs and answer questions through Group Chats. The Grade 3 teacher stated that she felt the home visits, and clustering of learners without home learning support, helped with continuity of learning. Since this school is situated

in a remote area, the school community already faced difficulties that were exacerbated by the pandemic. However, as this case study demonstrates, teachers and the school head made efforts to problem-solve and adapt teaching and learning. The adaptations and modifications made to the implementation of distance learning evolved and improved over the academic year. These factors, in addition to collaboration with HLPs, ensured there was some continuity of learning during the 2020–2021 academic year.