

Keeping Children Engaged in Distance Learning in the Philippines: Key Findings from the RECOVR Survey



RECOVR Policy Analysis Series

Introduction

To support government partners' initiatives in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, IPA launched the Research for Effective COVID-19 Responses (RECOVR) Survey, a rapid response panel survey it has conducted in nine countries including the Philippines. The RECOVR survey aims to directly inform key government partners on the health, economic, educational, and social ramifications of the pandemic.

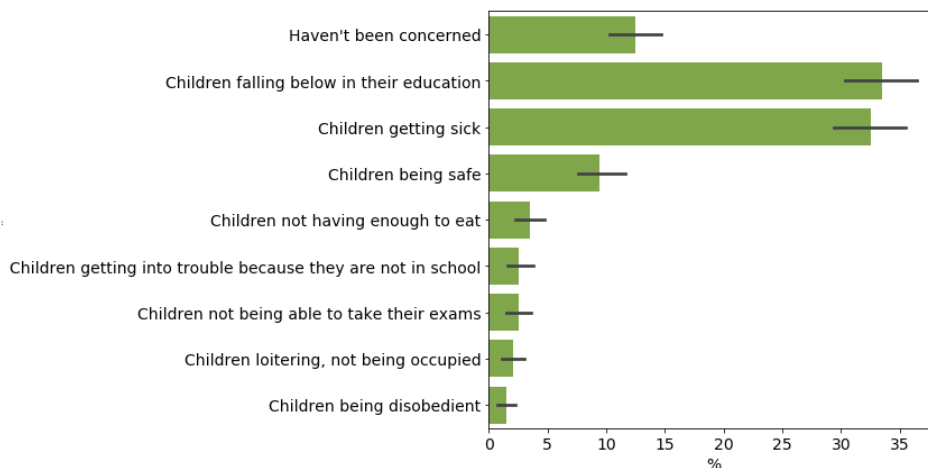
This brief summarizes and presents key education results from the RECOVR Philippines Survey to provide decision-makers of the Department of Education (DepEd) with rigorous evidence in support of the implementation of the Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan (BE-LCP) and policy recommendations based on the results. Key policy questions to consider are: 1) how can policymakers ensure that children do not fall behind in their education, and 2) how can policymakers help students be engaged in distance learning?

The Research

IPA Philippines conducted the RECOVR survey from 18 June to 1 July. The sample consisted of 1,389 respondents reached through Random Digit Dialing (RDD) of a nationally representative sample of phone numbers in the TNT network. As such, the survey is not nationally representative, but rather is representative of numbers in the network. Compared to 2015 Census averages, respondents in the survey are younger (32 years old Vs. 52 years old.), more female (70 percent vs. 49 percent), more urban (from the National Capital Region; 19 percent vs. 13 percent), and more educated (52 percent vs. 25 percent completed secondary school). Respondents came from comparable average household sizes (4.8 persons vs. 4.6 persons).

Findings

Respondents were most concerned about children falling behind in their education and children getting sick: When asked about their main concerns about school-age children (those in Grade 12 or below) at home, respondents said that they were mostly worried about children falling behind in their education (34 percent) and children getting sick (33 percent). Poorer and wealthier respondents were similarly likely to report these concerns.



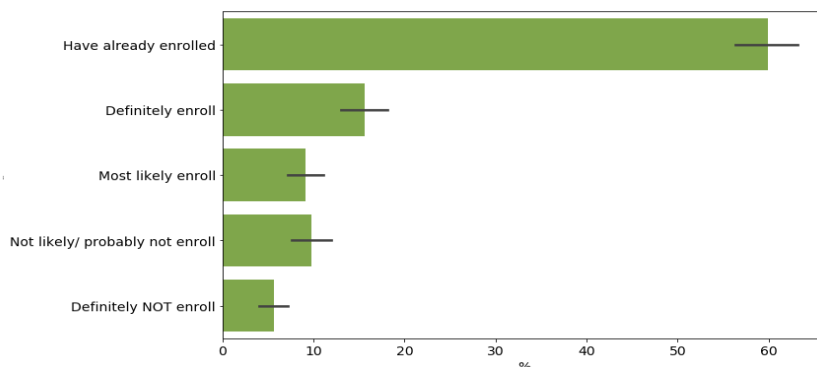
Concerns about school-age children

Concerns about school-age children: The problem of children falling behind education is not new. Prior to the pandemic, vulnerable children were already at risk of falling further behind learning. With new modes of education delivery, the challenge now is how to ensure learners are participating and engaged in distance learning for a prolonged period. A key policy implication to consider is setting up support structures for parents and caregivers to help them manage children’s learning at home and ensure that engagement in distance learning is sustained.

Existing evidence shows that direct communications with parents via SMS or other channels help increase and sustain parental involvement at home and at school, resulting in learning gains.¹ These interventions include informing parents of their children’s learning levels,² progress,³ and teacher attendance⁴. Furthermore, personalized messages may be more effective in strengthening parental engagement than generic messages.⁵

Sixty percent of respondents indicated that children in their household had already enrolled in school: The majority (60 percent) of respondents reported that they had enrolled their children in basic education, while another 20 percent indicated that they definitely or most likely would enroll their children. The results reflect DepEd’s target enrollment of 80 percent based on last year’s enrollment figures. Our survey was conducted within the period of enrollment in basic education (1 June to 15 July).

Among those who said they would not enroll their children in school, 88 percent cited concerns over school safety. DepEd has stated that there will be no face-to-face classes this year to protect student’s health and safety.

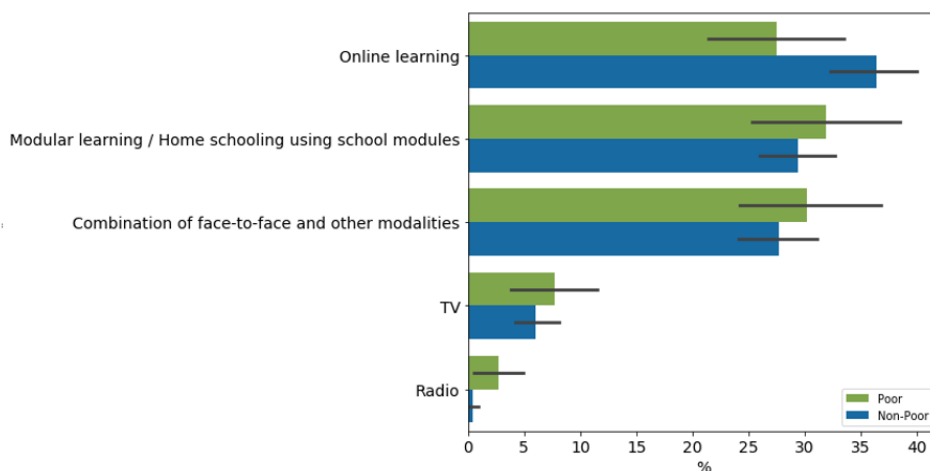


Likelihood of parents to enroll children in school

Online and modular learning were the preferred distance learning modalities: When we asked about respondents' preferred mode of distance learning, online learning (34 percent) and homeschooling using offline school modules (30 percent) emerged as respondents' top choices. We found that wealthier respondents were more likely to cite online learning as their preference. This is slightly different from the results of DepEd's [Learner Enrollment and Survey Form](#), where modular learning emerged as parents' preferred distance learning modality, followed by blended and online learning.

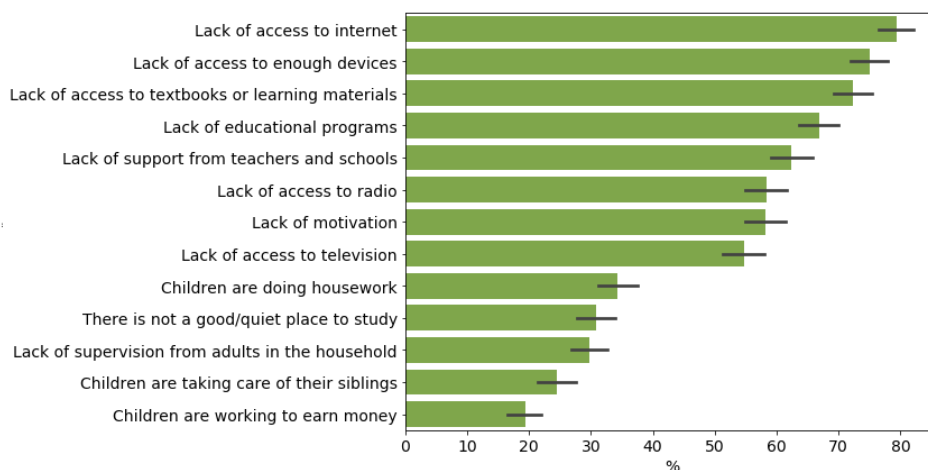
Past studies evaluating the impacts of online educational platforms have shown improvements in learning outcomes in high-income countries such as the United States⁶, Taiwan⁷, and Saudi Arabia⁸, where there are fewer barriers in accessing technology. If learners do not have the tools to engage in online learning, they will be at risk of falling further behind in their education.

In cases where online learning and other educational media are not accessible to the learners, low technology interventions such as providing printed learning materials and text messaging can support home learning. A recent study found that providing books and training parents in dialogic reading resulted in positive outcomes for early children's literacy skills.⁹ Another study found that sending weekly text messages containing basic math problems increased basic numeracy skills among children in grades 3 to 5.¹⁰



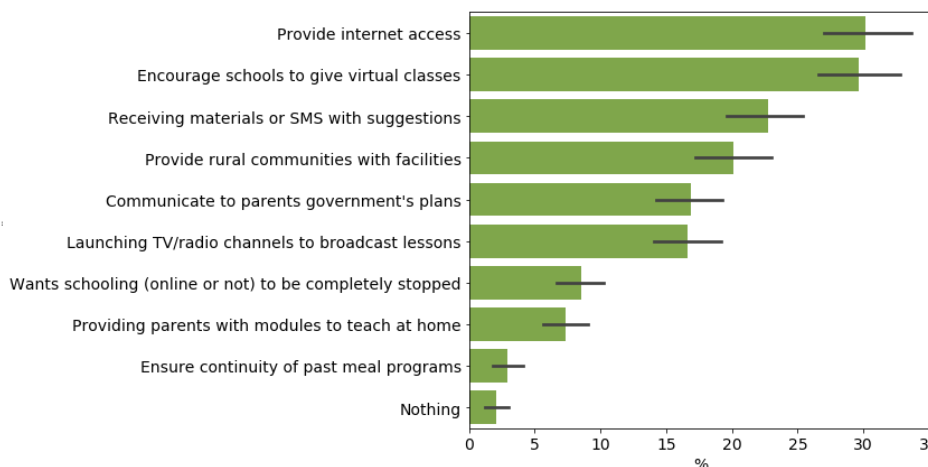
Preferred Distance Modalities

Lack of access to internet, devices, and learning materials were cited as major barriers to distance learning: While respondents preferred online learning, they cited lack of access to the internet (76 percent), devices (75 percent), and learning materials (71 percent) as major challenges to distance learning. Poorer respondents were more likely to cite these concerns. Recent findings from the 2019 National ICT Household Survey¹¹ show that only 18 percent of households across the country have their own internet connection, and only 24 percent have computers. Given that schools are authorized to choose from among the distance learning options, DepEd should ensure that the chosen modalities are accessible to the learners. To address accessibility challenges especially in areas with weak or no internet connection, one possible mode of remote instruction is using low technology solutions such as sending text messages and calling parents. In Botswana, sending messages with basic math “problems of the week” and supplementing them with phone calls from instructors as additional learning support showed improvements in learning and increased parental engagement.¹²



Challenges to distance learning

Most respondents indicated that DepEd could help with internet access and virtual classes to support children: When asked what DepEd could do to support children if schools could not be opened in August as planned, respondents mostly cited providing internet access (31 percent) and encouraging schools to conduct virtual classes (31 percent). This is consistent with our findings that respondents prefer online learning for the children at home.



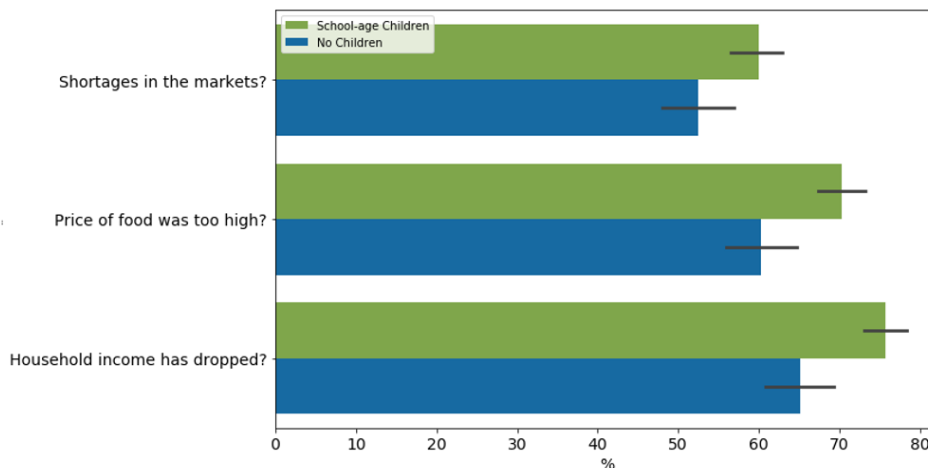
What can the Department of Education do to support children?

Given that respondents were most worried about children falling behind education, they may have perceived online classes as an effective distance learning method since it involves real-time interaction between teacher and student as opposed to other modalities. Respondents, especially those who are parents, would naturally prefer the best option available for the education of their children.

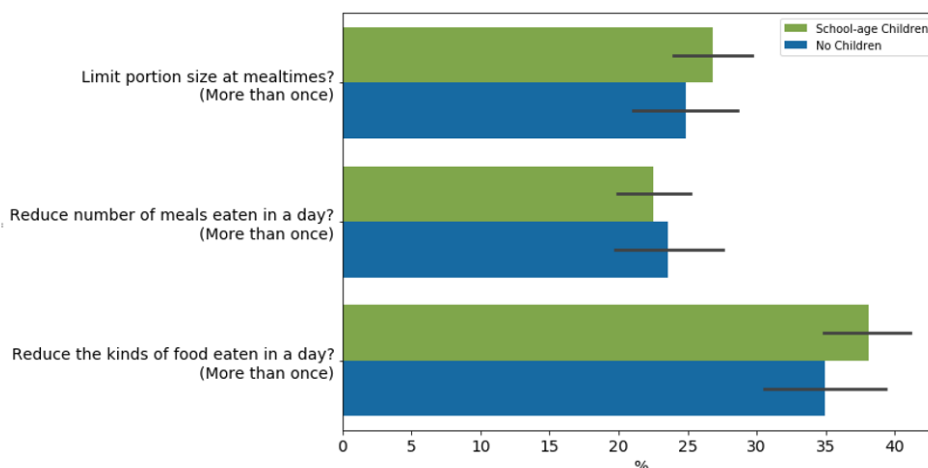
The risk of having students in the same class or grade level groupings with differing learning levels. Targeted instruction—grouping children according to learning level and teaching to that level—may help address this problem. Rigorous research has shown that targeted instruction improved learning in Ghana, Kenya, India, and elsewhere.¹³ Improvements in learning outcomes were more pronounced when targeted instruction focuses on foundational literacy and numeracy.

Households with school-age children experienced difficulties in accessing food and paying for food, healthcare, and other expenses: Respondents with school-age children were more likely than those without to say they had difficulty buying the amount of food they usually buy because household

income had dropped. Respondents with and without school-age children were similarly likely to say they had to limit portion sizes at mealtimes, reduce the number of meals eaten in a day, or reduce the kinds of food eaten in a day more than once in the past week.

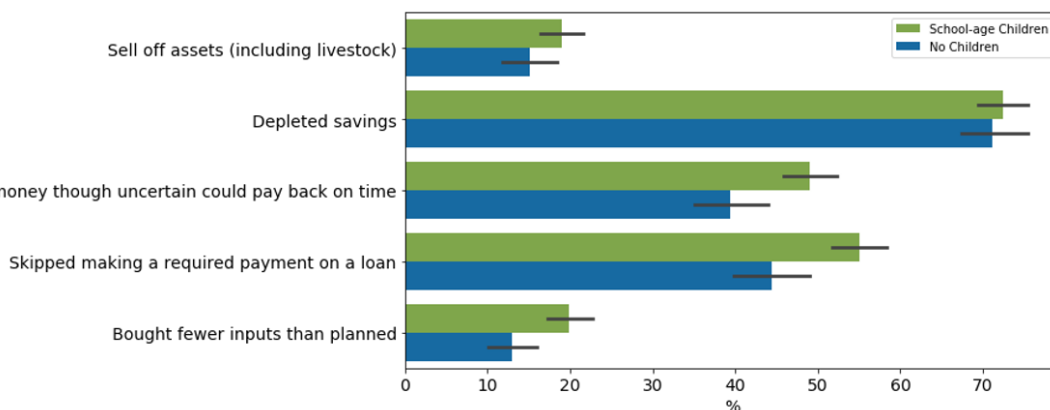


Respondents cite difficulties in buying usual amount of food due to...



Aspects of reduced food consumption

Respondents with school-age children were more likely to say they borrowed money they were not certain they could pay back on time, skipped making a required payment on a loan, or bought fewer inputs than planned to pay for food, healthcare, or other expenses since February 2020.



Measures taken by households to pay for food, healthcare, and other expenses

We found that households with children in basic education tended to experience more difficulties in terms of accessing food and paying for expenses. Government partners should find ways to provide adequate support to address other financial constraints experienced by families with school-age children. To help ease the burden of these families with school-age children, continuing school feeding programs this school year may help improve children's health and nutritional status.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on lessons from other contexts and times of crisis, the following recommendations can be incorporated into policies to support the vulnerable groups outlined by this brief.

Summary of Policy Recommendations

- Set up support structures for parents and caregivers and help them manage children's learning at home and ensure that engagement in distance learning is sustained. Consider SMS interventions and reminders to keep parents engaged.
- In cases where online learning and other educational media are not accessible to the learners, promote low technology interventions such as providing printed learning materials and text messaging to support home learning.
- Promote targeted instruction—grouping children according to learning level and teaching to that level—to help address learning losses. Rigorous research has shown that targeted instruction improved learning in Ghana, Kenya, India, and elsewhere.¹²³ Improvements in learning outcomes were more pronounced when targeted instruction focuses on foundational literacy and numeracy.
- Find ways to provide adequate support to address other financial constraints experienced by families with school-age children. To help ease the burden of these families with school-age children, continuing school feeding programs this school year can help improve children's health and nutritional status.

Notes and References

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