

UP CIDS POLICY BRIEF 2022-04

Understanding learners' home contexts and recommendations for future school scenarios

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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic changed the way basic education classes were conducted around the world. The Department of Health (DOH) and the Inter-Agency Task Force for the Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases (IATF-EID) identified risk severity grading and alert levels based on the spread of COVID-19 cases, and declared the closure of schools, especially in areas with high to moderate risk severity (DOH 2021).

To avoid a prolonged disruption to learning, the Department of Education (DepEd) produced a strategy document for education during the COVID-19 pandemic (DepEd 2020). DepEd Order 12 (Series 2020), or the Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan (BE-LCP), guides schools and other stakeholders on how to shift to a remote learning scenario. Seven months after school closures, public schools began classes for School Year (S.Y.) 2020-2021 in October. Lessons were delivered through alternative platforms such as radios and television, computers and mobile phones, or a combination of these.

The BE-LCP identified four modalities of teaching and learning. The first is face-to-face learning, where teacher and student are simultaneously present in the same space. Second is distance learning, where there is a considerable physical distance between the teacher and learner. Under this modality, several types of delivery approaches and platforms are identified, namely, “modular distance learning” using printed Self-Learning Modules (SLMs), online distance learning, and TV/radio-based instruction. Third, blended learning combines these modalities or platforms. Finally, homeschooling was listed as a learning modality where a qualified member of the family at home provides primary instruction, but its guidelines for those who are not enrolled in an existing homeschool provider are yet to be clarified (DepEd 2020).

For S.Y. 2020-2021, face-to-face classes were not allowed all over the country. Almost 20 million learners in public schools were enrolled in all types of distance learning. Of this number, the majority, or about 18 million, enlisted the use of print modules or SLMs (DepEd Planning Service 2020).

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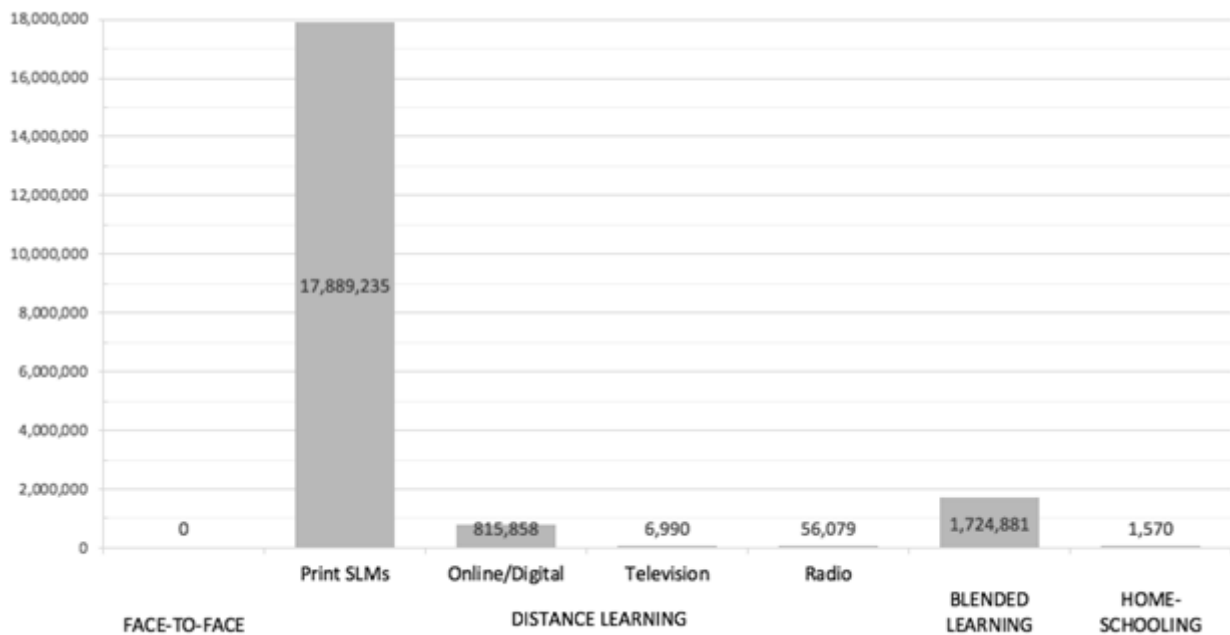
FIGURE 1: Learner Information System (LIS) Enrollment in Public Schools by Modality³

Figure 1 shows the number of learners in public schools who use each learning modality. Fewer than two million learners are enrolled in homeschooling and blended learning combined (DepEd Planning Service 2020). These data show that more than 85 percent of the entire learner population in public schools chose the use of print SLMs. They likely have limited access to devices such as televisions, radios, and digital devices, including computers and smartphones.

The challenges imposed by distance or remote learning are daunting, to say the least. Moreover, teachers and students alike lack experience, skills, and resources for this kind of learning. To address these challenges, government agencies prepared for the gradual reopening of schools. Limited face-to-face classes were implemented in select schools for S.Y. 2021-2022 (DepEd Memorandum 71, Series 2021) in preparation for the transition to full in-person classes in all schools for S.Y. 2022-2023 (DepEd Order 34, Series 2022).

This paper proposes a way to bring learner-centeredness and engagement to future emergency remote learning situations in order to prioritize learners who will undertake blended learning with face-to-face classes. As schools understand the home situation of learners better, the more they will be able to make better decisions and find solutions to the prevailing challenges. These may also help minimize the difficulties experienced by learners and their families, avoid loss of learning, and prevent students from dropping out.

Understanding learners' home contexts

In any teaching-learning process, there is a need for engagement among students and their teachers (Lim, Murdoch, and Cho 2022; Zhang et al. 2016; Noddings 2012). By interacting with learners, teachers may adjust their instruction and provide a more learner-centered environment (Daniels and Perry 2003). It has been identified that engagement with teachers and peers brings academic success and

³ Adapted from the Enrollment Data of the DepEd Planning Service as of November 24, 2020. In Figure 1, blended learning refers to the combination of distance learning approaches and platforms, without physical or face-to-face classes.

learning. However, because of the health protocols which specify school closures, learners are forced to study at home without the physical presence of a teacher. To ensure that engagement is present in the teaching-learning process, two factors may be considered. The first factor is the availability of learning resources and technologies at home. The second is the extent of learning support from parents and family members (UP College of Education 2020).

Availability of Learning Resources and Technologies in the Home

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) or digital technologies provide opportunities for engagement and interaction necessary for learning (Lim, Murdoch, and Cho 2021; Bond, Buntins, Bedenlier, Zawacki-Richter, and Kerres 2020). Any digital device with an internet connection provides users with the means to communicate and collaborate, as well as the tools to access an array of materials (Lee and McLoughlin 2010). Without the internet, interaction and sharing of information can still be supported through nondigital communication devices. Other ICTs, such as radios and televisions, can broadcast lessons developed by teachers and schools, but must be combined with other devices to allow dialogue with learners. In remote learning during emergencies, the more there are ways to engage and provide learners with access to materials, the better it is for them (United Nations 2020).

The use of ICTs has served as an important factor to facilitate teaching and learning in a remote set-up. Learners with high access to resources have one or more devices, which allow them to access lessons and communicate regularly with their teachers. They may have an internet connection and use their computers, or watch lessons on television and then connect with their teachers using the telephone.

However, a low-resourced learner may have limited or no means to access learning materials and communicate with their teachers. For example, they may own a mobile phone, but it has no load (credits), or it is being used by other family members. Others may have a radio at home, but have no means to contact the teacher for clarifications. This

can result in low engagement with their teacher, who in turn, cannot ensure and monitor learning.

Availability of Learning Support from Family Members

The extent of support that parents give learners is important to achieve learning outcomes at any given time. Numerous studies in a prepandemic context show that family or parental support and availability of resources can be significantly associated with assessment scores and school performance (Orbeta et al. 2020; Mullis et al. 2020; OECD 2020). Moreover, education research during emergencies identifies parental support and involvement as an important way to facilitate learning at home (Flack et al. 2020; Doyle 2020; Beattie, Wilson, and Hendry 2021). During the pandemic, teachers seek the help of parents as partners of their children to ensure that learning happens at home.

Learning support at home includes the capability, time, and willingness of family members to guide learners in understanding their lessons. Learners with high family support have one or several family members who have the time and capacity to explain concepts and assess learning. They can be an older sibling or a grandparent.

On the other hand, learners with low family support may have parents who are not present or unable to provide time to assist them in their studies. Other family members may be too young or cannot teach concepts. Without such support from family members at home, learners may find it difficult to study and understand their lessons.

Matrix of Possible Home Contexts of Learners

By plotting the two factors on a matrix, it would be possible to analyze the relationship between learning support and resources/technologies at home. Four unique quadrants may be used to describe the home context of learners. Figure 2 (next page) shows the Matrix of Possible Home Contexts of Learners. This matrix provides a priority system that may be used to easily identify learners who need to be given attention. It allows quick visualization of economic,

social, and cultural factors that may affect learning, especially on home-based contexts (OECD 2020). Learners may be classified in these quadrants, which would help determine their unique circumstances and identify the kinds of support they need.

Cluster A learners have low resources and low family support. It is highly probable they are only using print materials for remote learning. If they encounter difficulties in the texts, no one at home can explain the concepts to them, and they have no means to contact the teacher for help. Learners may feel frustrated and may not be able to learn.

Schools should find ways to engage with Cluster A learners as soon as possible. In high-risk areas, it is important to provide access to gadgets and devices for communication. Teachers should consider conducting regular home visits (following health and safety protocols) to provide support. For the possible gradual opening of classes in low-risk areas, these learners should be given priority, and meetings with their teachers in small groups must be scheduled immediately. Cluster A learners should be able to participate in face-to-face classes more frequently. In effect, teachers can ensure their learning since no one at home can teach them and monitor their progress.

Learners in Cluster B have low resources but high family support. Like Cluster A learners, they are likely to use printed modules in their studies. However, these learners are fortunate to have family members who can supervise their study time and guide them in understanding the materials. Whenever they encounter a difficult concept, a parent or a sibling can explain it better.

Schools may arrange home visits or face-to-face interaction with family members to develop their capacities as learning partners at home. They can be instructed on how to help monitor a learner's progress. It is still vital to supply resources and communicate to parents and learners in high-risk areas to prevent the spread of COVID-19. In low-risk areas, learners may have scheduled face-to-face classes, which provide regular updates and help assess learning.

Cluster C learners have high access to resources and low family support. They could have working parents who are not present at home, but can provide a phone or tablet with regular access to the internet. Through this, Cluster C learners can download materials, chat with teachers, create output, and ask the teacher for feedback.

FIGURE 2: Matrix of Possible Home Contexts of Learners

		Extent of family and home support	
		<i>Low</i>	<i>High</i>
Availability of resources and technologies at home	<i>Low</i>	A <i>Low resource-Low family support</i>	B <i>Low resource-High family support</i>
	<i>High</i>	C <i>High resource-Low family support</i>	D <i>High resource-High family support</i>

Learners in this cluster should be able to use their resources to ensure constant engagement with teachers, especially in high-risk areas. It would also be helpful if teachers conducted home visits to check if the learner is doing well at home. In low-risk areas, schools may also schedule face-to-face classes with them and facilitate constant communication through available technologies

Finally, Cluster D learners are identified with high resources and high family support. Their family is present and capable to guide them in their lessons and monitor their progress. Through their devices, they can attend online classes, watch educational shows, play online games, and engage their teachers and peers.

Teachers need to harness the ability of family members to teach and monitor learning. Their skills in using available technologies and other resources may also be strengthened. In areas with high-risk severity, there might be no need for home visits, as long as constant communication with learners and parents is ensured. In low-risk areas, blended learning is still recommended with limited face-to-face classes.

Conclusion

The various problems and vulnerabilities of learners should be recognized and addressed to lessen their negative effects, such as being disconnected from teachers and classmates, dropping out, and loss of learning. Learners' home contexts should be analyzed so that appropriate strategies to increase engagement with them can be designed. Schools should find ways to broaden and diversify access to multiple learning resources to broker and strengthen communication between and among family members, learners, and their teachers. Finally, schools planning to physically reopen during the pandemic and implement a blended modality should prioritize and support the most vulnerable learners. This can ensure that the lack of resources and engagement can be addressed.

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Center for Integrative and Development Studies (UP CIDS).

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