

Comments on Senate Resolution No. 391, entitled, “*BASIC EDUCATION SYSTEM (COVID-19)*”, Senate Resolution No 392, entitled, “*FREE INTERNET ACCESS IN PUBLIC PLACES ACT*”, and The Department of Education’s Learning Continuity Plan (LCP) for Basic Education in Time of COVID-19.

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Describing the Challenge of Providing Students with Learning Materials during the Pandemic

Introduction

As DepEd implements the Learning Continuity Plan (LCP) in times of the pandemic, the challenge is reaching Philippine households with learning materials. The LCP has identified several learning delivery modes including (1) face-to-face; (2) distance learning consisting of three types (a) modular distance learning (MDL), (b) online distance learning (ODL), and (c) TV/Radio-Based instructions; (3) blended learning, and (4) homeschooling.

This note uses the latest available Annual Poverty Indicators Survey (APIS), a nationally representative household survey regularly administered by the Philippine Statistics Authority, to characterize the challenge implementing the LCP is facing because of the inequity in access to devices that enables distance learning options. It does this by characterizing the availability of devices needed to access learning materials in Philippine households such computers, TV, CDV/DVD players, radio and audio components by income classes. This will provide a picture of the extent of inequity. It also describes the inequity of support for home learning using the education background of parents.

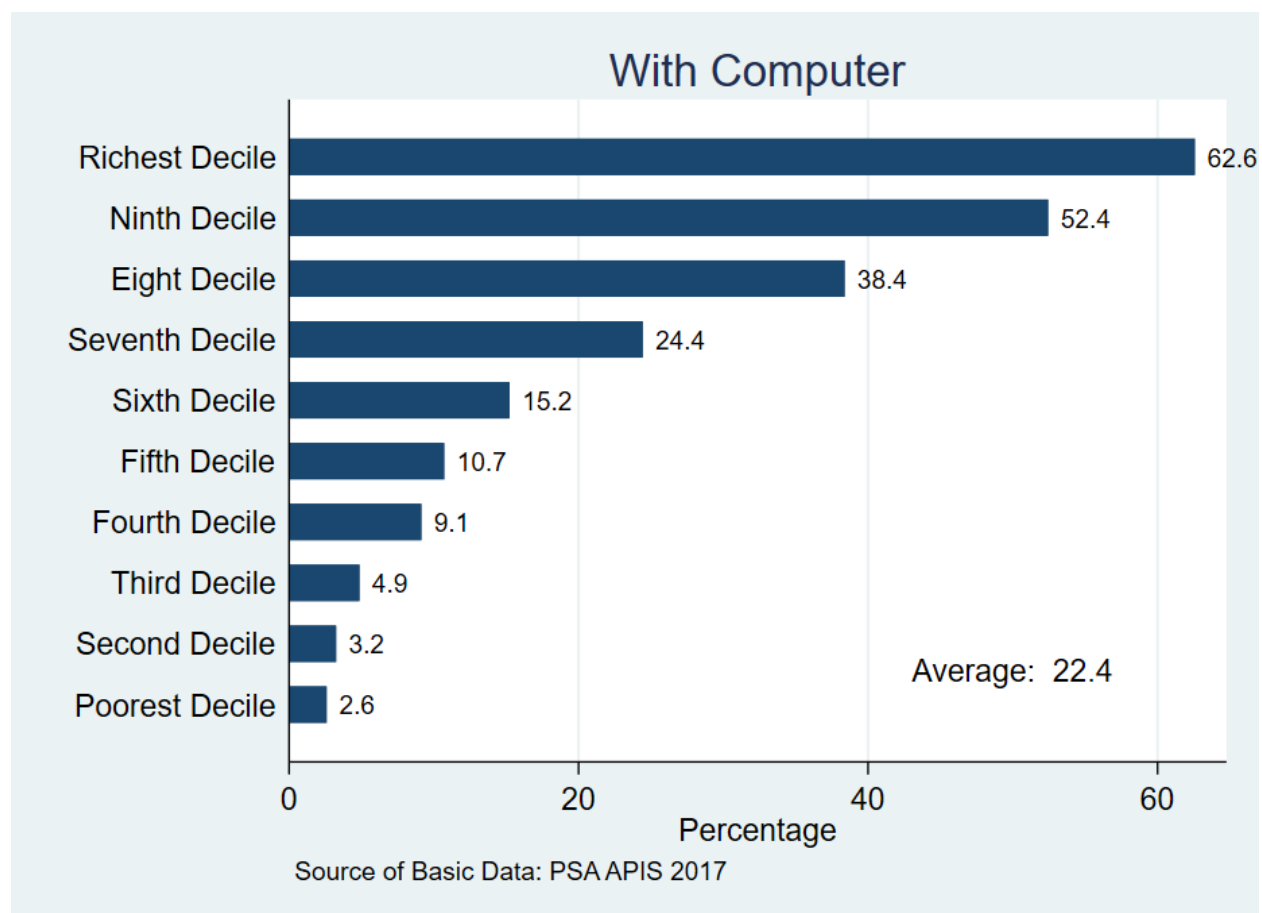
It should be noted that national surveys can be augmented by much more granular information from the Community Based Monitoring System (CMBS). CBMS provides data on availability of access devices at the municipal and even barangay level. As of the recent count, CBMS has been conducted in about 1000 cities/municipalities of the country. RA 11351, enacted in July 2018, also provides for the establishment of the CBMS in every city and municipality and the conduct of the survey every three years. The analysis in this note can be duplicated using city/municipality level CBMS data to provide more granular information.

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Computers at home

Computers at home can be used for online learning, particularly, if it is connected to the internet. Unfortunately, APIS does not have data on the connectivity to the internet. But learning materials in electronic form can be accessed through these computers at home. The LCP also emphasize that teachers can also monitor the progress of learners through e-mails.

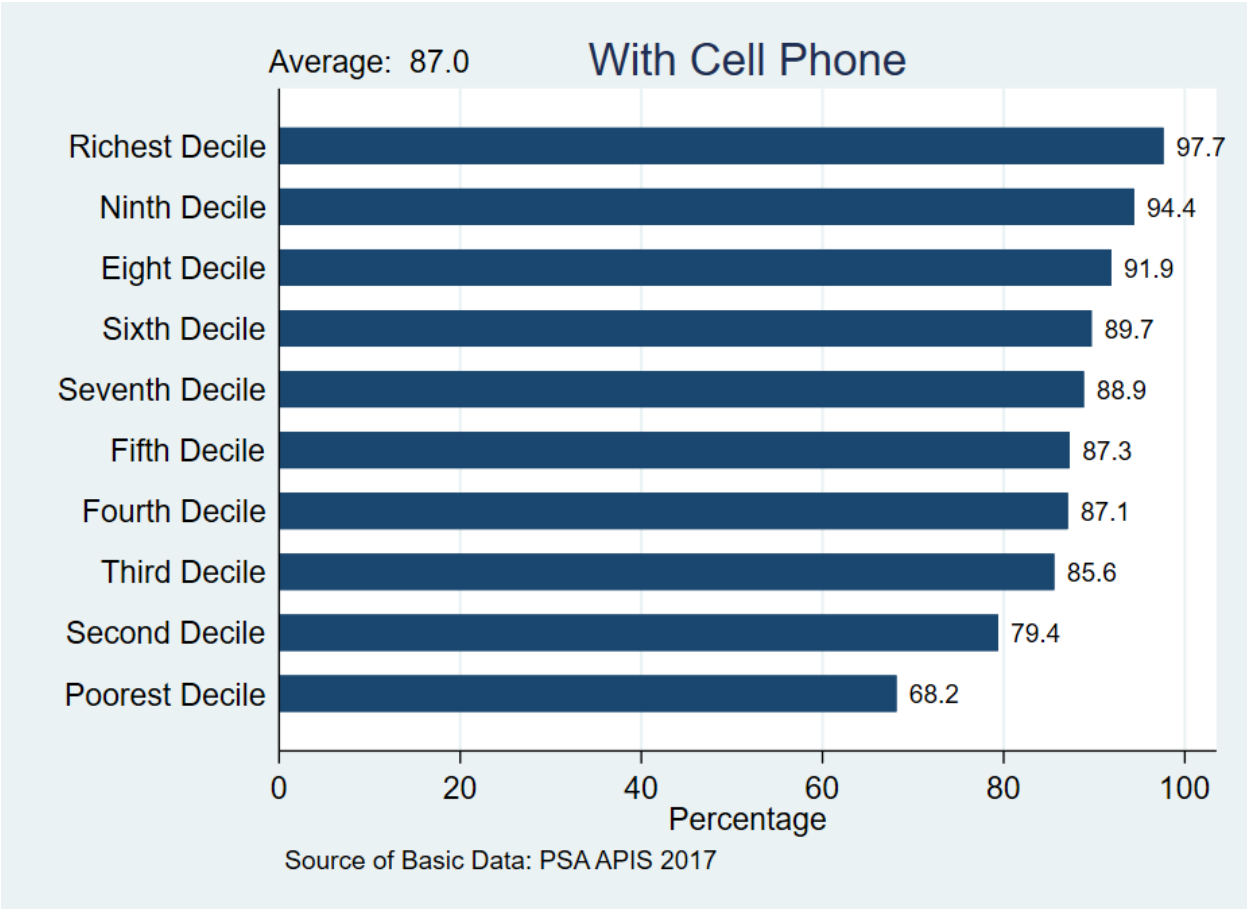
The figure below shows that 22% of Philippine households have computers on average. This is as high as 63% for the richest households and as low as 3% for the poorest households.



Cellular phones

Cellular phones, particularly smart phones, can also be used to access e-learning materials if it is connected to the internet. Unfortunately, there is no disaggregation on the types of cellular phones available. The LCP also mentions that teachers can use cellphones to monitor the progress of learners using cell phones.

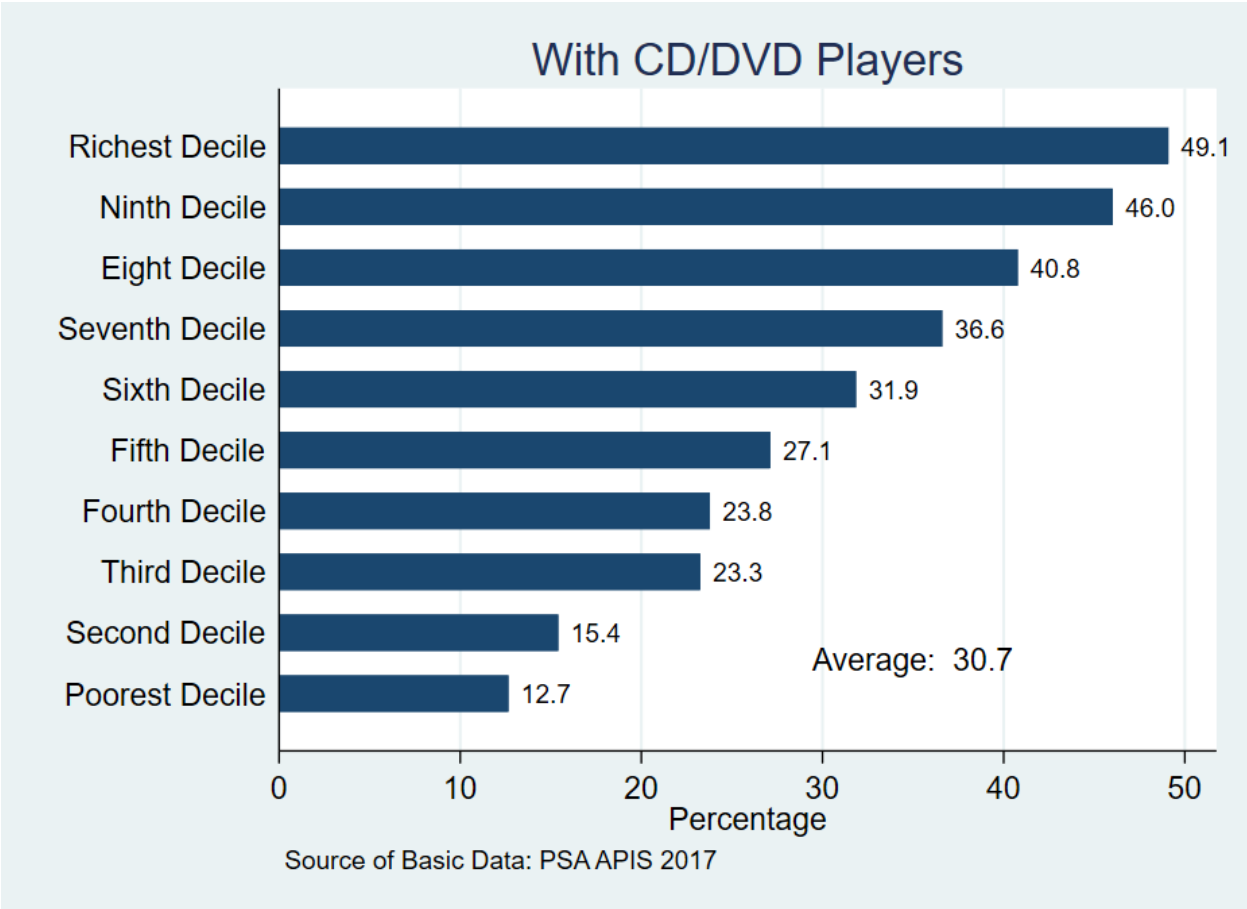
On average there 87% of households who own at least one cellphone. The data says this can be as high as 14 cellphones in a household. This is highest at 98% for the richest decile and lowest at 68% for the poorest households.



With CD/DVD

The LCP identified CDs and DVD players as devices that can be used to deliver e-learning materials, including e-books.

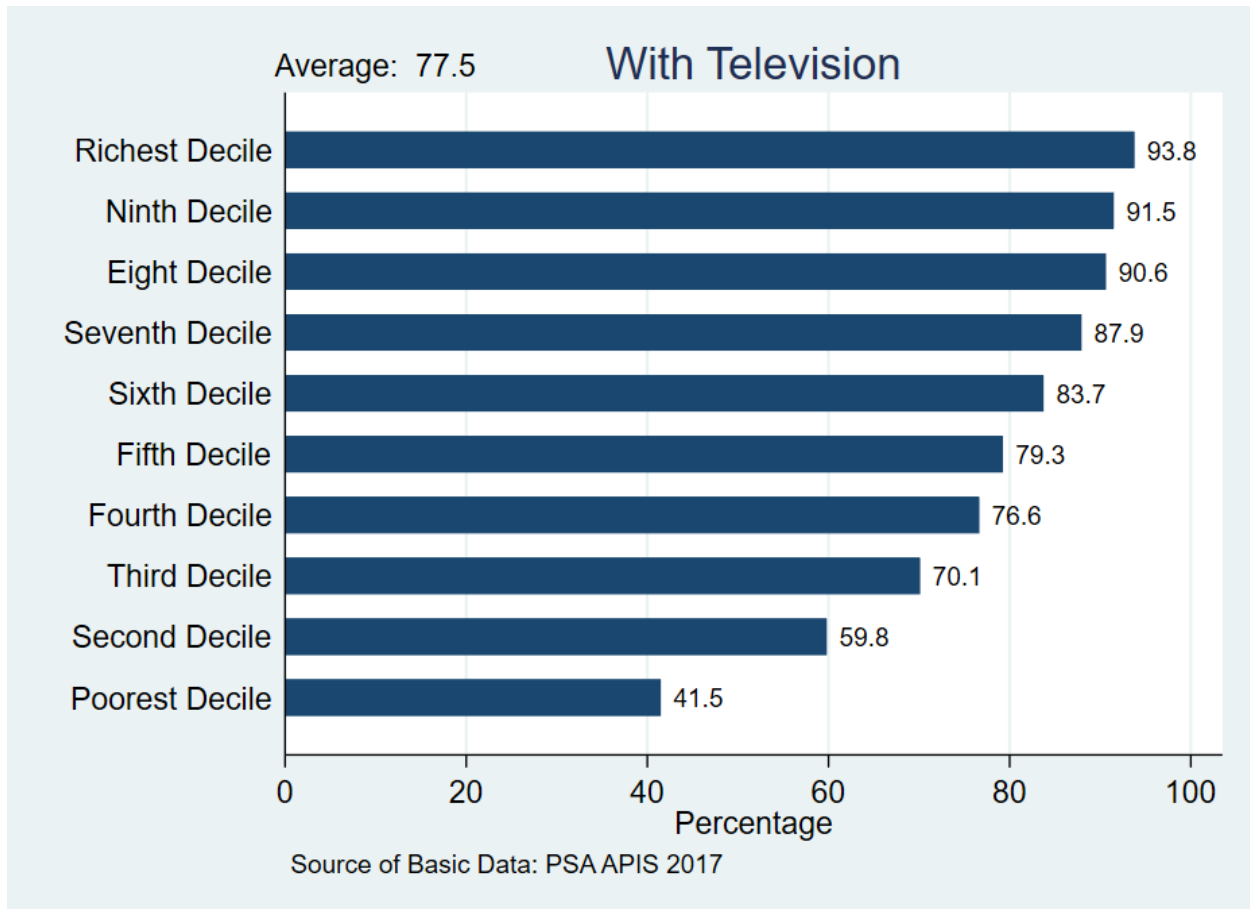
The following graph shows that 31% of Philippine households have a CD/DVD player. This is as high as 49% for the richest household and as low as 13% for the poorest households.



Television

Television has been used for education purposes, e.g. Knowledge Channel. This has also been identified in the LCP as a means of reaching students.

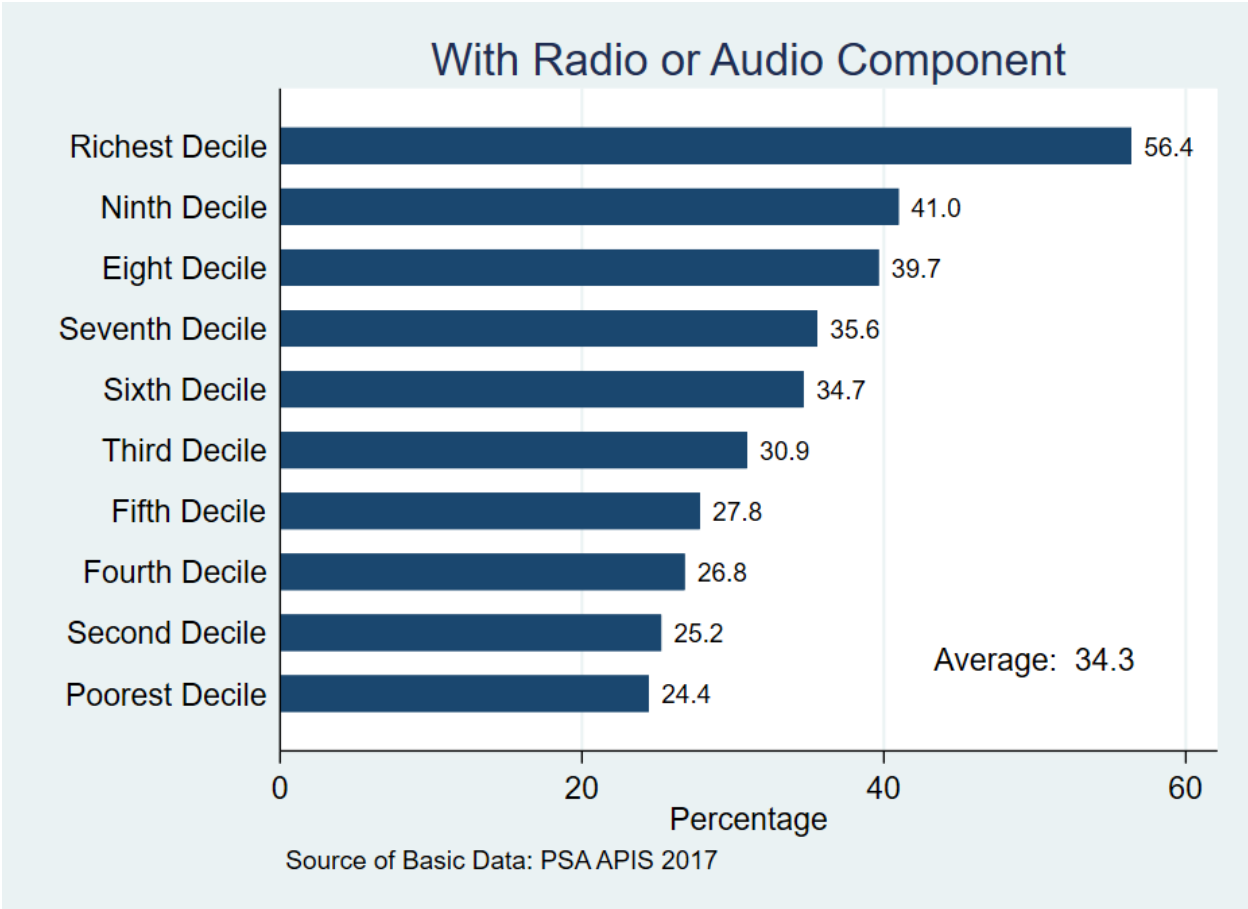
The figure below shows that 77% of Philippine households have a TV set. This is highest at 94% for the richest households and lowest at 42% for the poorest households.



Radio or Audio Component

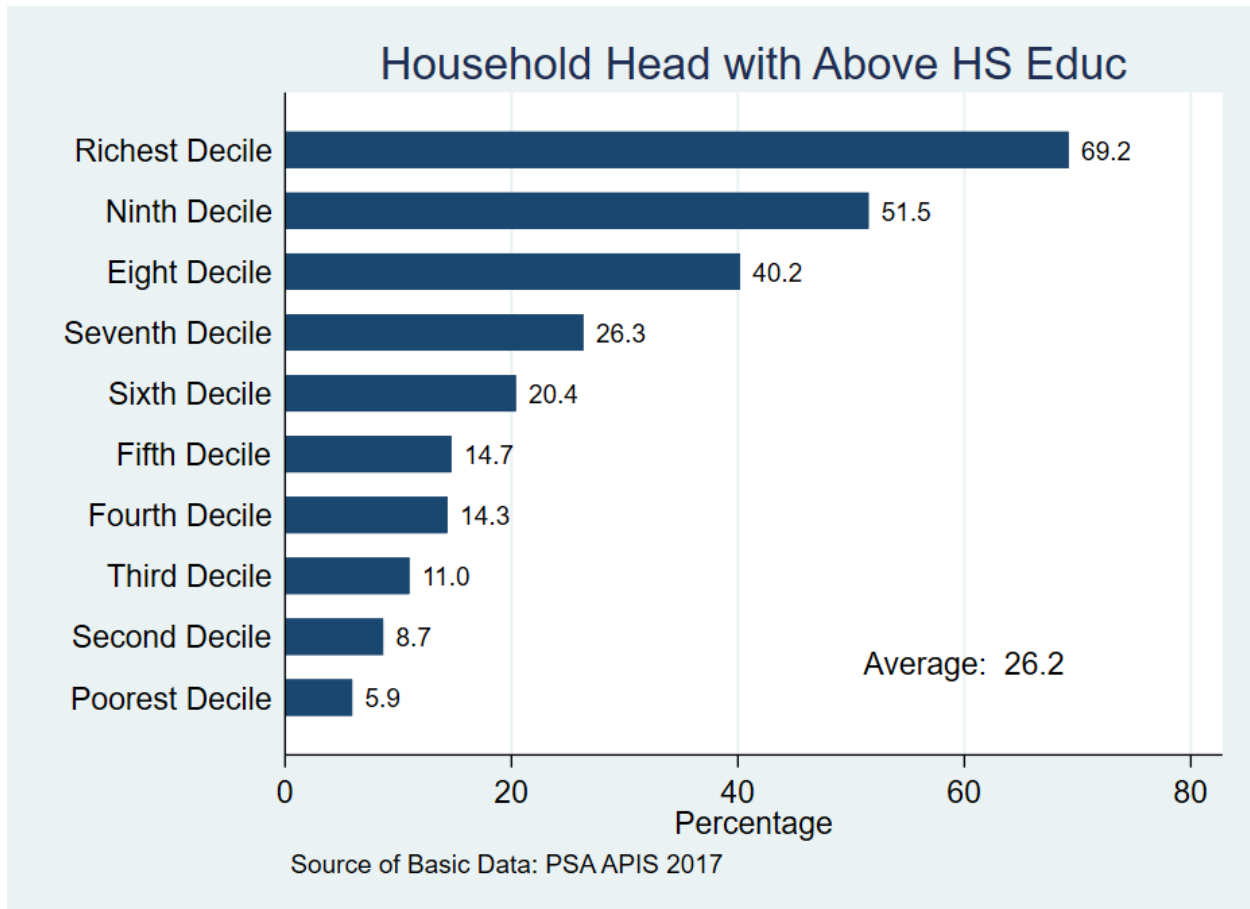
Radio is a known way of reaching households with information. This has been identified in the LCP as an alternative for delivering lessons.

The following graph shows the proportion of households having either a radio or an audio component which almost always also has a radio function. It should also be mentioned that most cellphones have radio function although most are on FM rather than AM band. It shows that on average there are 34% of Philippine households that have a radio or audio component. This is highest at 56% for the richest household and lowest at 24% for the poorest households.



Education of parents

Students would need the help of parents in learning at home. The question is whether parents are able to help them with their lessons. The parent’s ability to assist students with their learning is indicated by their level of education. This following graph shows the distribution of households by level of education of household head, particularly, whether they have education better than high school or not. It shows that on the average 26% of Philippine households have heads that have higher than high school education. This is highest at 69% for the richest household and lowest at 6% for the poorest households



Discussion

The note describes the kind of challenge implementing the LCP is facing in reaching students with learning materials. It is well known that there is great disparity in access to learning materials even if it can deliver learning materials via internet or broadcast through TV or radio. This note describes the extent of disparity. It shows that a substantial number of students belonging to poor households will be left out. It is notable that there is promise of reaching more students using cellphones both for accessing learning materials and as monitoring tool for teachers if only the cost of online access can be lowered particularly for poorer students. Implementation of the free internet access law (RA 19929) will help ease the problem of access for those who have devices but will not be helpful for poor students who do not have these devices. Over and above delivering learning materials online or through broadcast, there is also a clear case for delivering learning materials via other means such as printed learning modules particularly for students in poorer households. In addition, it should be realized that even if learning modules can reach households, there is the additional challenge that parents in poor households may not be able to effectively help their children learn the materials because of lack of education. There must be proactive a way of helping students from poorer households. Perhaps the face-to-face meetings must prioritize students from poor households so that social distancing can be maintained in schools. There

are at least three reasons behind this priority. One, they are the ones who are likely to drop out of school. Two, the likelihood that their parents can help with their learning will be lower. Three, there is also a high likelihood that they are also recipients of feeding programs in schools.

References

DepEd (2020) Learning Opportunities Shall be Available: The Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan in the Time of COVID-19.