Comments on Senate Bill No. 150, entitled, "*ACADEMIC RECOVERY AND ACCESSIBLE LEARNING (ARAL) PROGRAM ACT*".

Prepared by Ma. Christina F. Epetia[1]

5 September 2022

Describing the Necessity of and the Potential Challenges in Implementing Learning Recovery Programs

Introduction

This note summarizes existing studies and uses various data sources to describe the learning situation in the Philippines and identify some of the challenges in implementing learning recovery programs. Nonetheless, it is to be noted that more disaggregated data, preferably at the school level, may show more variation in schooling inputs and outcomes and will thus be needed for better targeting.

Schools in many parts of the world closed to in-person learning amid the COVID-19 pandemic and shifted to remote learning modalities to mitigate the learning disruptions faced by students. Remote learning, however, is an emergency response that the education system is largely unprepared for. Hence, the longer the school closures to in-person learning are and the less effective remote learning is, the larger the projected learning and earning losses are (Azevedo et al. 2021).

The Philippines recorded one of the longest school closures to in-person learning in the world, so learning and earning losses of current students are expected to be substantial. This is on top of the poor educational outcomes in the Philippines in which learning poverty has been high even before the COVID-19 crisis (WB, UIS, UNICEF, FCDO, USAID, & Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2022, June 23). Without appropriate remedial measures, learning losses may grow even when children return to school (Andrabi et al., 2021). The UNICEF, UNESCO, and World Bank formulated the RAPID framework for learning recovery and acceleration, which can be adaptable to local contexts and can be complemented with longer-term reforms (WB, UIS, UNICEF, FCDO, USAID, & Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2022, June 23). The RAPID framework has five elements:

---

[1] Dr. Ma. Christina F. Epetia, Research Fellow, Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS)

- Reach every child and keep them in school.

- Assess learning levels regularly.

- Prioritize teaching the fundamentals.

- Increase the efficiency of instruction, including through catch-up learning.

- Develop psychosocial health and well-being.

Differences in learning status

The levels of student learning appear to vary as more affluent students perform better than less affluent students in international assessments (Besa, 2019; Mullis et al. 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the disparities in educational outcomes between socioeconomic groups, because students from low-income households have no or limited access to the internet, effective learning resources such as gadgets, and quality support for remote learning (Orbeta, 2022; Cho et al. 2021). The job and income losses during the pandemic could also lead households, especially the low-income ones, to pull their children out of school, with many of these children not returning to school (Azevedo et al., 2021). These socioeconomic differences create a wide gap in learning and earning losses between the poor and the rich (Gayares and Thomas, 2022). Private-school students also achieved higher scores than public-school students in international assessments (King, 2020).

This means that a one-size-fits-all learning recovery program is not suitable in addressing the extent of learning poverty and curbing the potential learning losses. Upon the students' return to in-person learning in the current academic year, their learning levels should be assessed not to just identify the students who need remedial measures but also to design targeted instruction which considers each child's learning needs. Periodic assessments can be done to monitor the progress of students and evaluate the effectivity of remedial measures.

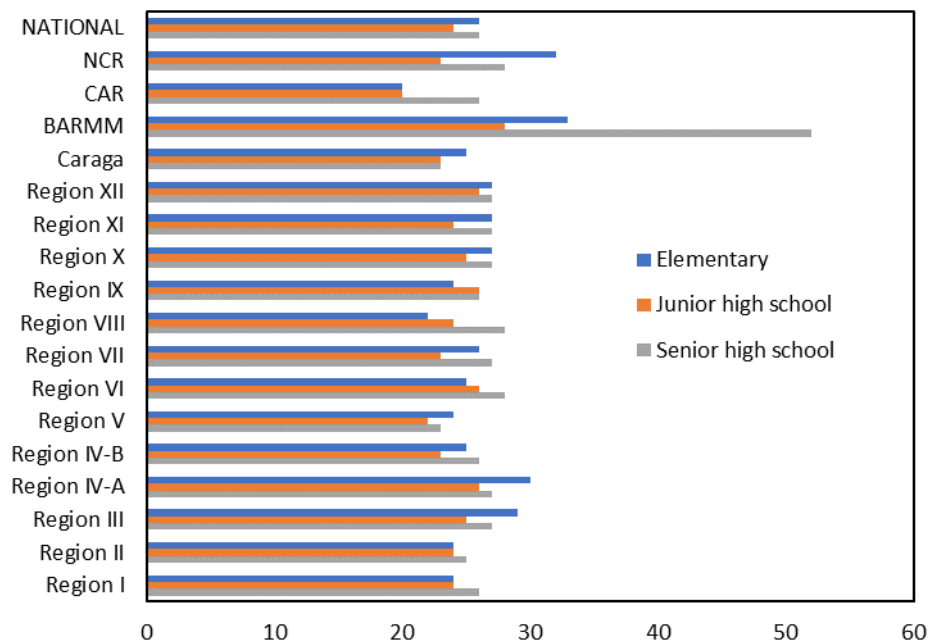## Learner-to-teacher ratio in public schools

In AY 2020-2021, the learner-to-teacher ratio in public school across educational levels and regions are within the acceptable levels set by the DepEd[2], except in the senior high school level in BARMM. Given the varying learning needs of children, remedial interventions are better conducted in small groups (if not one-on-one). Also, amid the high learning poverty in the country, majority of the students would likely participate in these interventions.

---

[2] This is based on DepEd Order No. 77, s. 2010 (https://www.deped.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/DO-No.-77-s.-2010.pdf).

Therefore, more teachers and instructors are needed to ensure that the learning needs of students are met.

National and regional learner-to-teacher ratio in public schools (AY 2020-2021)

Source: Department of Education
(https://www.deped.gov.ph/alternative-learning-system/resources/facts-and-figures/datasets/)

Teacher workload

Teachers in public schools carry a heavy non-teaching workload as they are assigned with student support roles and are expected to participate in various government programs and activities (David et al., 2019). While private schools employ support and administrative staff, the same staffing is not sufficient in public schools, so teachers in public schools are doing administrative work as well (David et al., 2019). If teachers are not offloaded of non-teaching tasks, conducting remedial classes outside of their regular classes would burn out the already overworked teachers. This could further reduce the quality of instruction, thus undermining the point of implementing remedial classes.
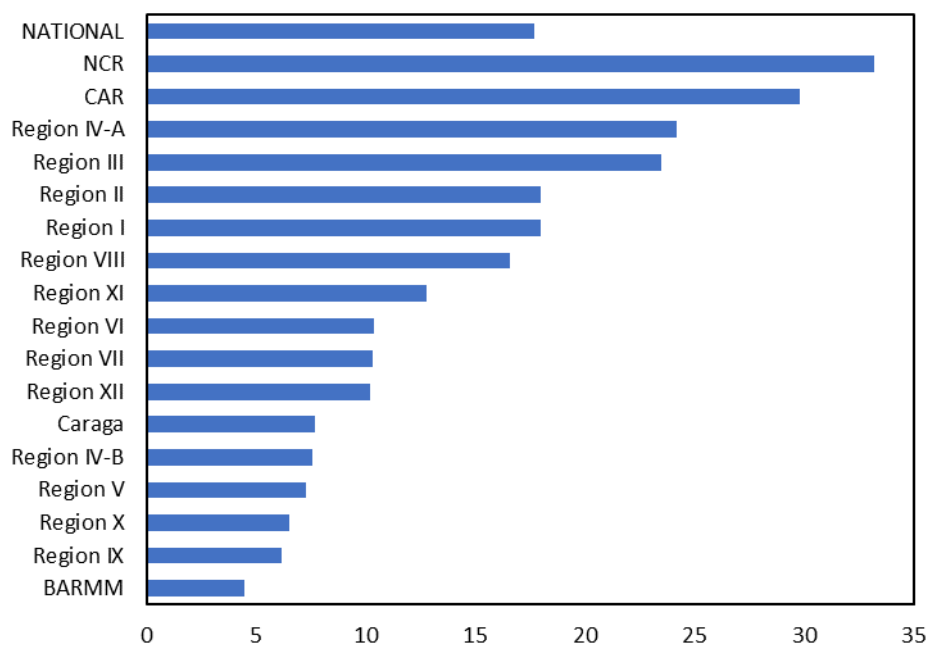
Learning time

The Philippines had one of the longest learning times among the participating countries in the PISA 2018, but this did not translate to higher scores, suggesting the need to review how learning time is utilized (Orbeta & Paqueo, 2022).

Internet access

Since online learning is identified as one of the modes of remedial instruction, the capacity of students to participate in online learning should be considered. As of 2019, only 17.7 percent of households have internet access. Regional variation in the proportion of households with internet access can be observed which ranges from only 4.5 percent in BARMM to as much as 33.2 percent in NCR. Costs of internet subscription and equipment are the major reasons for not having internet access, implying that internet access is still not affordable to many Filipino households. Another top reason is the absence of internet service in the area which indicates the limited digital infrastructure, such as in BARMM, CAR, and Region V. Socioeconomic status also seems to be associated with having internet access, as households with higher income and better-educated parents are more likely to have internet access (Orbeta, 2022). In-person remedial classes thus remain the primary option for many students, especially those residing in less developed regions and those from households with low socioeconomic status.

Share of households with internet access (%, 2019)

Source: Department of Information and Communications Technology.
(https://dict.gov.ph/ictstatistics/nicths2019)

Share of households by reason for not having internet access (%, 2019)
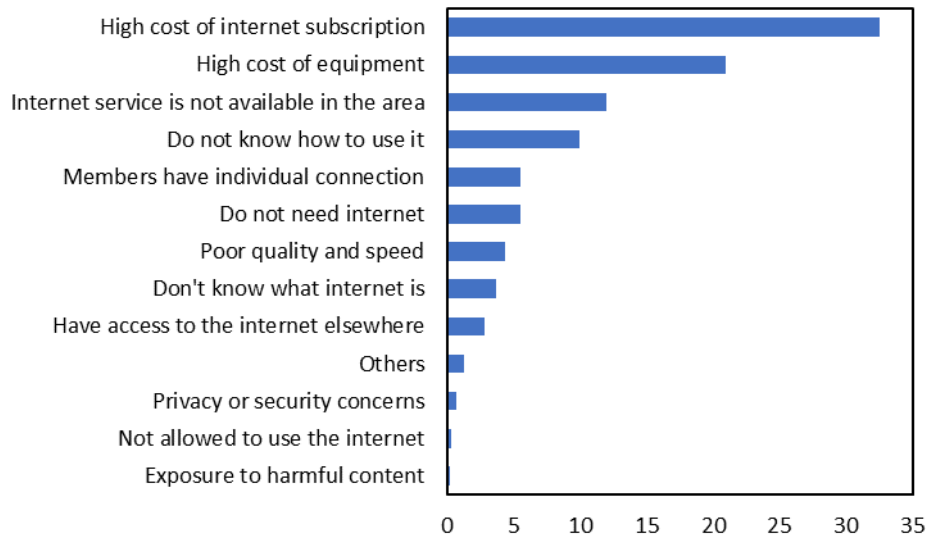
Source: Department of Information and Communications Technology.
(https://dict.gov.ph/ictstatistics/nicths2019)

Quality of home support

Since parents are expected to assist their children through home learning activities, the quality of home support should be evaluated. It is found that the quality of home support tends to be lower among low-income households for two reasons: the lower educational attainment of parents and the necessity of parents to be away from home to work (Orbeta, 2022). In such situations, parents could only provide limited contribution to the educational development of their children at home.

Incentives for school leavers to return to school

Dropout rates had been declining until 2018 but steeply increased during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Annual Poverty Indicators Survey 2020 shows that one of the major reasons for not attending school was the COVID-19 pandemic community quarantine. For elementary-aged children, the second top reason was illness or disability. The design of remote learning materials does not tend to account for the needs of children with disabilities (Azevedo et al., 2021; WB, UNESCO, and UNICEF, 2021), which could explain this finding. According to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, only 7.7 percent of elementary schools had access to adapted infrastructure and materials for students with disabilities as of 2020. For high-school-aged children, lack of personal interest and high costs of education were among the other prominent reasons for not attending school. This implies that it would be more difficult to motivate older children to go back to school once they dropped out.
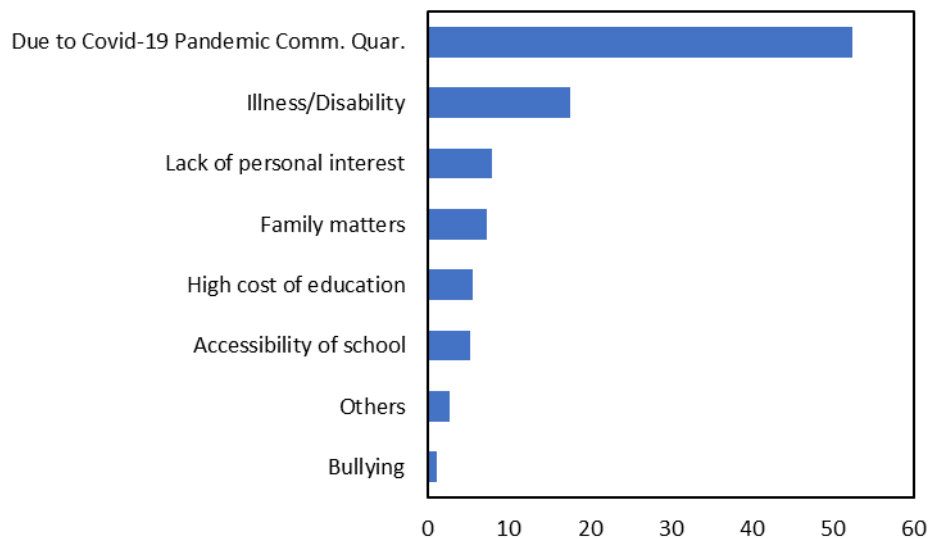
Dropout rate by educational level (%)
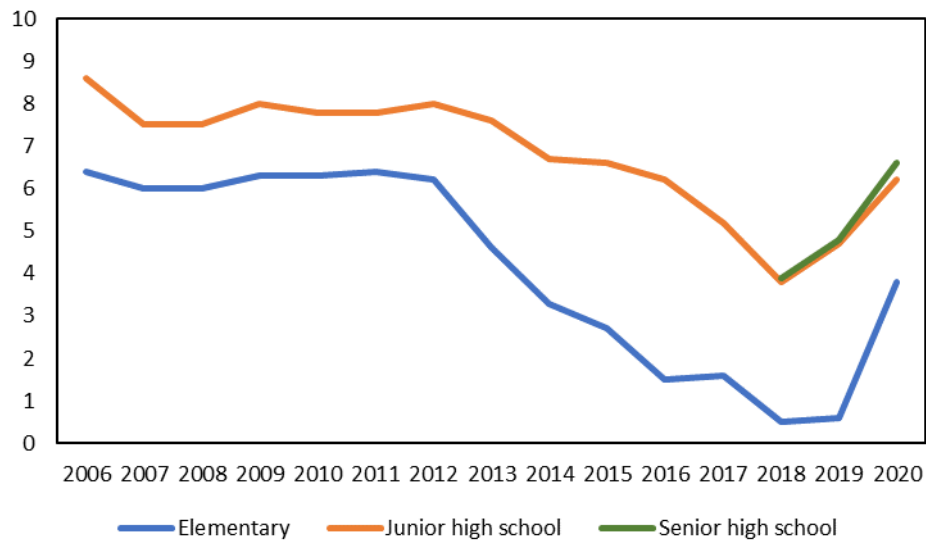
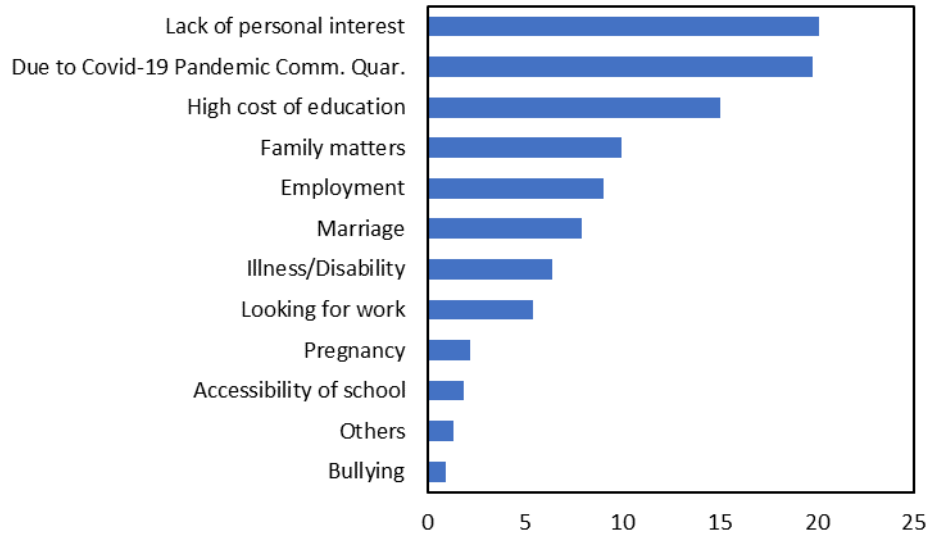
Source: Philippine Statistics Authority OpenSTAT database.

Reasons for not attending school

(% of elementary-aged children not attending school)

Source: Calculations based on APIS 2020.

Reasons for not attending school

(% of high-school-aged children not attending school)

Reason	Value
Lack of personal interest	20
Due to Covid-19 Pandemic Comm. Quar.	19.8
High cost of education	15
Family matters	10
Employment	9
Marriage	8
Illness/Disability	6.5
Looking for work	5.5
Pregnancy	2
Accessibility of school	1.8
Others	1.3
Bullying	1

Source: Calculations based on APIS 2020.

Discussion

Learning recovery programs are strongly recommended by various studies to address learning losses and ensure that such losses will not leave permanent scars that will lead to lower future productivity and earnings of the current generation of students. Given the different learning status of students, remedial instruction should be designed to correspond with the current learning level of students. It is also better conducted in small groups to boost the catching up process of students to the expected competencies for their respective grade levels. Thus, remedial intermediation will demand more resources in terms of teacher and student time and effort, digital infrastructure, and financial resources.

Younger children (whose foundational skills are needed to be built) and learners in poorer regions, those belonging in low-income households, and those in public schools (who are likely to be learning poor and to experience greater learning losses) are the potential priority groups for remedial instruction. Assistance to children in low-income households can also be considered to encourage them to stay and/or return to school.

References

Andrabi, T., Daniels, B., & Das, J. (2021). Human capital accumulation and disasters: Evidence from Pakistan Earthquake of 2005. *Journal of Human Resources*. doi:10.3368/jhr.59.2.0520-10887R1.

Azevedo, J.P., Hasan, A., Goldemberg, D., Geven, K., & Igbal, S.A. (2021). Simulating the potential impacts of COVID-19 school closures on schooling and learning outcomes: A set of global estimates. *The World Bank Research Observer, 36*(1), 1–40.

Besa, F. (2019). Philippines - Country note - PISA 2018 results. Retrieved from https://www.oecd.org/pisa/publications/PISA2018_CN_PHL.pdf

Cho, Y., Avalos, J., Kawasoe, Y., Johnson, D., Rodriguez, R. (2021). The impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on low-income households in the Philippines: Impending human capital crisis. COVID-19 Low Income HOPE Survey. World Bank, Washington, DC. Retrieved from https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/35260.

David, C.C., Albert, J.R.G., & Vizmanos, J.F.V. (2019, February). Pressures on public school teachers and implications on quality. PIDS Policy Notes No. 2019-01.

Gayares, R.M., & Thomas, M. (2022). Falling further behind: The cost of COVID-19 school closures by gender and wealth: Special topic of the Asian Development Outlook 2022. Mandaluyong City: Asian Development Bank. Retrieved from https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/784041/ado2022-learning-losses.pdf.

King, E. (2020). Building human capital: Lessons from country experiences - Philippines. Washington D.C.: World Bank. Retrieved from https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/34207.

Mullis, I.V.S., Martin, M.O., Foy, P., Kelly, D.L., & Fishbein, B. (2019). International results in mathematics and science. TIMMS & PIRLS International Study Center & International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement.

Orbeta, A.C. Jr. (2022). Basic education during the COVID-19 pandemic: What do enrollment by learning modality and household characteristics tell us? In *The Philippines' response to the COVID-19 pandemic: Learning from experience and emerging stronger to future shocks*, edited by C.M. Reyes. Quezon City: Philippine Institute for Development Studies.

Orbeta, A.C. Jr, & Paqueo, V.B. (2022). Philippine education: Situationer, challenges, and ways forward. PIDS Discussion Paper Series No. 2022-23.

World Bank (WB), UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), UNICEF, Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO), USAID, & Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. (2022, June 23). *The State of Global Learning Poverty: 2022 Update*. Retrieved from https://www.unicef.org/media/122921/file/State%20of%20Learning%20Poverty%202022.pdf.

WB, UNESCO, and UNICEF. (2021). *The state of the global education crisis: a path to recovery*. Washington D.C., Paris, New York: World Bank, UNESCO, and UNICEF.