

ARNEC CONNECTIONS

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Photo by: Diane Rosario/Save the Children.

**Project ARAL: Ensuring safe,
loving, playful and responsive homes
in the Philippines**



ARNEC
Asia-Pacific Regional Network
for Early Childhood

Project ARAL: Ensuring safe, loving, playful and responsive homes in the Philippines

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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic caused massive disruption to children's lives concerning their education, well-being, and access to basic needs and services such as food, protection, and health care. In the Philippines, child development centres and schools were abruptly closed without prior preparation in March 2020; distance learning modalities were put in place for the school year 2020-2021.

The sudden closure has affected the right to learn of more than 27 million Filipino students. For the school year 2021-2022, face-to-face classes have yet to resume, especially in urban areas due to the still-rising cases of COVID-19. Education experts are concerned that the pandemic has created a “lost generation of students, stricken by limitations of remote learning and parents struggling to serve as surrogate teachers” (Gutierrez & Bilefsky, 2021).

To support distance learning modalities during class suspensions and other similar circumstances, the Department of Education (DepEd) promoted the use of DepEd Commons, an online platform designed as a direct solution, where children can access learning materials and Open Educational Resources (OER); however, only 48% of public schools have an internet connection (Llego, 2020), which means that many children are left without any access to learning opportunities, and children who are already at a disadvantage would be further left behind. The effects and challenges posed by prolonged school closures will have a greater impact on children already marginalised and coming from underserved communities.

For instance, ECCD-aged children (children below five years old) are not included in those that can use DepEd Commons and learning continuity for these children will depend greatly on their parents. Children who have been out of school even before the closure of schools belong to the most vulnerable and poorest families; they do not have access to online platforms (Human Rights Watch, 2021). This means that they can be left out further of the efforts to provide learning opportunities to children.

Save the Children Philippines responded to these drastic changes and emerging needs of children through Project ARAL (Access to Resources for Alternative Learning) with COVID-adapted materials for 0- to 17-year-old children. Aral is a Filipino word meaning “study” or “learn” in English.

This paper focuses on the results at baseline, which informs Project ARAL's content and delivery for families with young children divided into three phases. Phase 1 (May-October 2020) helped families to transition to home-based learning. Specifically for 3- to 5-year-old children, the Early Literacy and Math (ELM) at Home Plus is a package of COVID-19-sensitive, adapted activities integrated with Social Emotional Learning Foundations, Resilience Building, and Enhanced Health and Nutrition components.

The activities aim to support the development of children aged 3-5 years across all domains and promote positive parenting and resilience. Phase 2 is from October 2020 to June 2022 and is aimed at supporting the implementation of distance learning modality, with COVID-adapted Family Education Sessions titled *Mapagkalingang Tahanan* that runs parallel to the 35 weeks of school. There are eight foundational episodes for parents of all ages, six for 0- to 3-year-old children and 27 for 3- to 5-year-old children. Phase 3 aims to facilitate the children's safe return to school.

Statement of the Problem

There is learning loss at different education levels, especially in low-income settings (Azevedo et al., 2020; López Bóo et al., 2020). Save the Children's global study highlights that 80% of the surveyed children reported learning little or nothing since the COVID-19 outbreak (Edwards, n.d.). Even though the government has rushed to put in place online learning programs, few students have access, and among those, only very few choose to use them (Kumar et al., 2021; Finn & Zadel, 2020). There is also difficulty measuring learning outcomes remotely during the pandemic (Angrist et al., 2020).

With these modular and online distance learning delivery modes, the home has been transformed into the children's place for learning; parents have assumed the role of the teacher, whether they like it or are prepared for it or not. The questions that this study addresses are:

1. At the baseline level, what are the parents'/caregivers' well-being and behaviours in supporting home learning, knowledge, attitudes, and practices?
2. At the baseline level, what are the children's learning outcomes concerning literacy, numeracy, and social-emotional skills?
3. How were the baseline survey results utilised in designing and implementing Project ARAL's ECCD component?

Method

The research collected home learning environments, parental attitudes on positive parenting, and their stress level and children's development outcomes at baseline. This study used a mixed-method approach utilising three tools, each with methods adapted to the restrictions of COVID-19 in three cities in the National Capital Region namely: Caloocan City, Malabon City, and Navotas City. These cities had Save the Children education programs before the pandemic and adapted their delivery in response to COVID-19. Instead of face-to-face interviews and assessments, video calls were set up with the respondents to administer questionnaires, one for children and another for their parents/caregivers. Video calls were preferred over regular phone calls so that enumerators could observe the child in the performance-based questions.

Save the Children's Holistic Assessment of Learning and Development Outcomes (HALDO) tool measured the development outcomes, especially literacy, numeracy, social and emotional learning, including the executive function of children aged 3-12 years, who were affected by the crisis. It has 12 items or tasks that cover four domains and two more tasks on executive function items and observed approaches to learning. Its administration lasted for 30 to 40 minutes for each child. Together with the tool is a caregiver questionnaire with sections on background characteristics, home learning environment, knowledge, attitudes, and practices on home-based learning and caregiver well-being. The caregiver questionnaire was administered to the parent or primary caregiver, which took another 30 minutes.

An SMS-based survey was also used to monitor parents and other caregivers and their children's access to the intervention materials and to gather insights on how these materials were utilised to improve their parenting practices. Below are the four open-ended questions which were sent to 4,818 beneficiaries of the program through the engaged SPARK platform. A total of 384 parents participated in the survey.

1. Were the Project ARAL videos helpful to you as a parent?
2. How long have you watched the Project ARAL videos?
3. What are the new things you have learned from the sessions?
4. Are there any changes in your daily activities based on the new things that you have learned?

Photo by: Diane Rosario/Save the Children.



The study design was submitted to Save the Children's Ethical Review Committee and was granted certification on August 19, 2020. Consent to participate in the study was collected from all respondents before the baseline survey was conducted. The survey data were analysed using statistical methods such as descriptive analysis and inferential analysis. A regression model was also built around the data to determine the effect of different variables on the overall HALDO score as well as the domain score.

While the original target sample was 259 child-parent pairs using stratified random sampling with a 90% confidence level and 5% margin of error, time restrictions, refusal of participation, and access to gadgets with video capability only allowed for baseline data collection of 169 pairs using the HALDO tool. This paper focuses on the findings from families with children aged 3 to 5 years.

Limitations

The data collected for this baseline assessment covers the implementation of Project ARAL in selected sites of Caloocan, Malabon, and Navotas Cities in Metro Manila, Philippines. As part of COVID-19 and remote data collection adaptation, only families with access to phones or gadgets capable of video calls were included in the sample. Intermediate data gathered through informal surveys were collected by the team as part of its transition monitoring while standardised child and parent/caregiver outcomes were being designed and contextualised. As such, intermediate analysis results were limited to perceived gains and learnings.

The results are mainly applicable only to the urban setting, particularly in the three cities mentioned, as internet connection and the availability of smartphones may be more limited to rural and/or remote areas.

Results

DEMOGRAPHICS

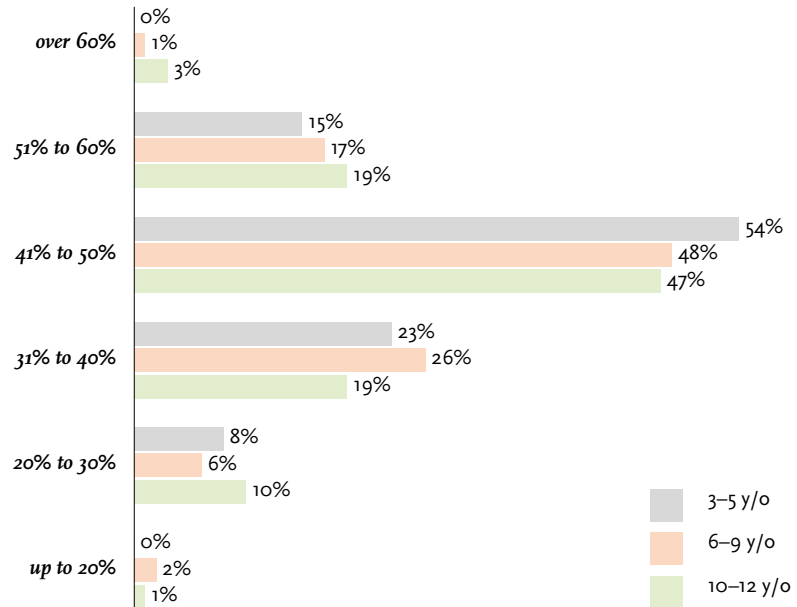
All caregiver respondents with children aged 3-5 years interviewed were mothers who are 21 to 30 years old (46%) and secondary graduates (61.5%). One-third of the fathers belong to the 21 to 30 age group and another third to the 31 to 40 age group. Almost half of the total number of fathers were also secondary graduates (46%).

PARENTAL WELL-BEING

Several studies have documented adverse parental mental health and well-being outcomes associated with the strain of the pandemic (Brown et al., 2020). Figure 1 shows the baseline survey on Project ARAL (2021) which reported parent/caregiver stress at the midlevel of the Stress Scale with 47% to 54% of parents/caregivers of children aged 3-12 years. Since parents and other caregivers are more prone to stress, anxiety, and depression due to COVID-19-related economic hardships, young children cannot reach their full potential when they experience adversity in the absence of a responsive caregiver (Center on the Developing Child, 2015a). Anxieties reduce their ability to engage with their children (Yoshikawa et al., 2020). The single most common factor for children who develop resilience is at least one responsive parent, caregiver, or another adult. (Center on the Developing Child, 2015b).

In response to the stress felt by many parents and caregivers, Save the Children prioritises the caregivers' well-being first so they can then engage

Figure 1. Parental stress scale scores of Parents/Caregivers of 3–12 y/o children (PSS 14).



in play-based learning activities at home. The Project ARAL's Early Literacy and Math (ELM) at Home Plus include messages about caregiver well-being to support parents and other caregivers with young children to identify and manage stress. Since Facebook is the most used social media platform in the Philippines (Inquirer Research, 2020), a Facebook Group Chat was also created as a platform for parents to support each other. A feedback mechanism via SMS line was also set up to allow parents to express their views to Save the Children. As part of Save the Children's intervention, local reporting hotlines and referrals to relevant agencies and group-based telehealth interventions were included to increase awareness and access to reporting hotlines and affordable mental health and psychosocial support.

HUWEBES

Ang Mukha ng...

- Paano ang mukha ng batang masaya (galit / nagulat / malungkot / pagod / takot)?
- Tingnan mo ang mukha ko at hulaan mo kung ano ang nararamdaman ko.

Ipakita sa mukha ang emosyon at ipagaya sa bata. Hayaan naman siyang magpakita ng emosyon sa mukha.

BIYERNES

Talagang stressful ang panahong ito. Ingatan ang sarili upang makapagbigay ng suporta sa anak.

Hindi ka nag-iisa

Milyun-milyong tao ang nakararamdam ng pangamba ngayon. Humanap ng makakausap tungkol sa iyong nararamdaman. Makinig sa isa't isa. Iwasan ang social media na nakadaragdag ng pangamba o takot.

Magpahinga

Kailangan nating lahat magpahinga. Habang tulog ang anak, gumawa ng bagay para sa sarili na nagdudulot ng saya o ginhawa. Ilista ang mga bagay na nais mong gawin.

Pakinggan ang anak

Maging bukas at pakinggan ang mga anak. Naghahanap sila ng suporta at kapanatagan. Pakinggan sila kapag nagbahagi sila ng kanilang nararamdaman. Tanggapin ang kanilang nararamdaman, kahit na negatibo, at bigyan sila ng ginhawa.

jobs, with the unemployment rate at 10.4 percent - the highest in 15 years (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2021). The loss of household income led to increased violence in the home; thus, increasing the vulnerability of children. Families with young children were affected as most child development centres and schools have remained closed, which puts an additional burden, particularly on mothers and women caregivers, who are associated with childcare and housework.

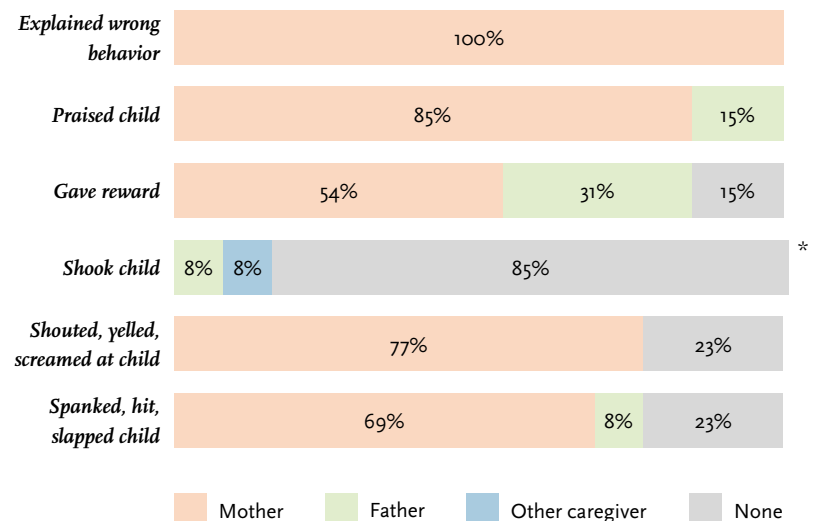
The baseline survey results found that the majority of the parents implement positive parenting practices in their homes. Over 80% of parents were able to explain to their children if a wrong behaviour was manifested or able to praise the child. The same was true for families with young children where 100% of mothers reported that they discuss or explain wrong behaviour to their children; 85% of mothers praised their children. However, the majority of the mothers also reported yelling at (77%) and hitting their children (69%). On the other hand, fathers reported using rewards (31%) and praises (15%) than discussing with their children like mothers do. A few fathers also reported hitting and shaking their children. Refer to Figure 2.

Even though mothers do harsh punishments, experiencing harsh punishment at the hands of fathers is strongly linked to negative outcomes across the lifespan, such as child aggression, particularly in boys (Chang et al., 2003; McKee et al., 2007). Conversely, fathers who use less harsh discipline have been linked to the improvement of child early learning, cognitive, and socioemotional development (Palm & Fagan, 2008; Sarkadi et al., 2008).

The baseline results also showed 91% of parent interactions with children were by mothers; 9% were done by fathers, across age groups. As for the families with young children, all activities were still done with mothers and a few with other caregivers. These were labelling, counting, and drawing objects with 92%, followed by reading or looking at books with 85%, and playing and singing songs, both at 77%. Less than a quarter had not told stories to their children and sang songs. As expected, one-third of parents reported that they do not bring out their children. This was linked to lockdown guidelines of the government; wherein young children are not allowed outside their homes. Interestingly, not a single activity was done with fathers. Such a lack of exposure to caregiving and the absence of male caregiver models at an early age can bring lasting barriers to the father's involvement (Alemann et al., 2020). Refer to Figure 3.

To address issues of harsh discipline to children at home and gender-imposed

Figure 2. Discipline practices among parents/caregivers of 3-5 y/o children.

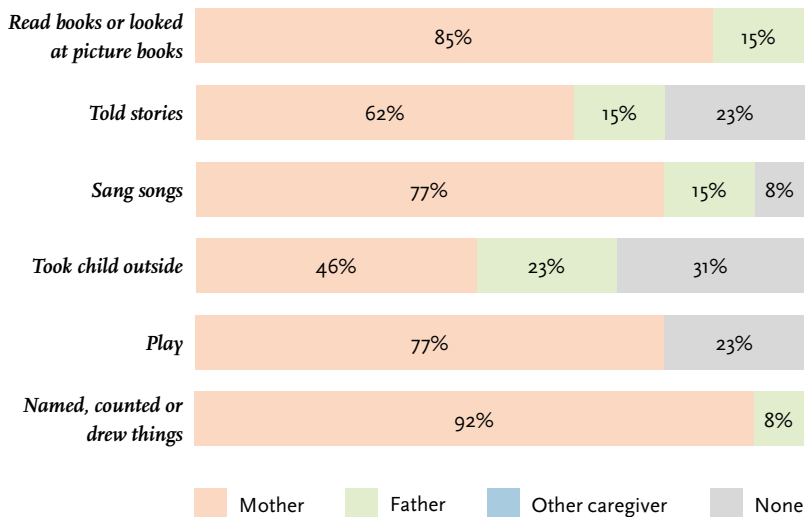


* Figures were rounded off and do not add up to 100%.

responsibilities of parents to their children’s learning, Project ARAL included messages on practising positive parenting and how they can foster positive and meaningful interactions at home. Violence is never a solution; all children have the right to live free from violence. Project ARAL also promotes messages on gender equality, encouraging both mothers and fathers in all aspects of parenting, which can have a significant life-long impact on children’s development.

Studies have demonstrated positive outcomes in early learning and cognition as well as socio-emotional development when fathers are actively involved (Alemann et al., 2020). Thus, Project ARAL seeks to engage fathers explicitly in the early years and addresses parent-child and family relationships and well-being by leveraging fathers as active agents in the education and development of their children, alongside their female partners. It is also emphasised that asking for help, especially from one’s partner or the child’s father, is not a sign of weakness, and shared parenting is essential to lessen the burden and stress experienced by mothers. These messages were crafted based on the results of gender analysis in the implementation area to break negative gendered beliefs about child rearing and education.

Figure 3. Household interactions between 3–5 y/o children and their parents/caregivers.



Apart from the messages, the Project ARAL materials have mother and father representations, and their roles are not gender stereotypical. The materials challenged notions that only mothers do the caregiving or household chores and fathers work to reinforce the accompanying messages.

Still image from Save the Children Philippines video.

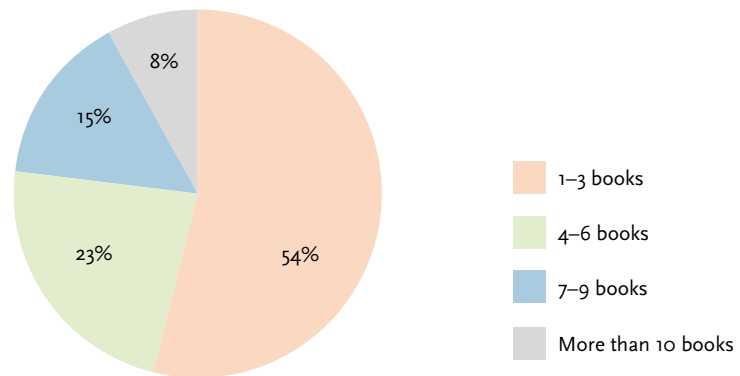


HOME LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

The child development centres and schools have remained closed and pivoted to distance learning since 2020. The Philippines is one of only five countries that have yet to re-open schools (Deiparine, 2021). Child development teachers have expressed their needs on ways to go about home-based learning, taking cues from the Department of Education that has utilised online or modular distance learning. However, play-based early learning programs require interaction with peers and concrete materials, which cannot be done in modular or online learning delivery. Moreover, the parents and caregivers, particularly those with less education, did not have the knowledge to teach their children (Dangle & Sumaoang, 2020).

The baseline survey found that 54% of the families with young children have one to three books/picture books at home. Reading materials available were reported to be limited to textbooks (92%), religious books (85%), and colouring books (69%). The data collection of the baseline survey happened before the start of distance learning in the child development program and kindergarten program.

Figure 4. Number of books/picture books available at home.



All families with young children reported having commercially bought toys. Only 69% of the parents stated they made toys. Six out of ten parents considered objects found at home as learning materials.

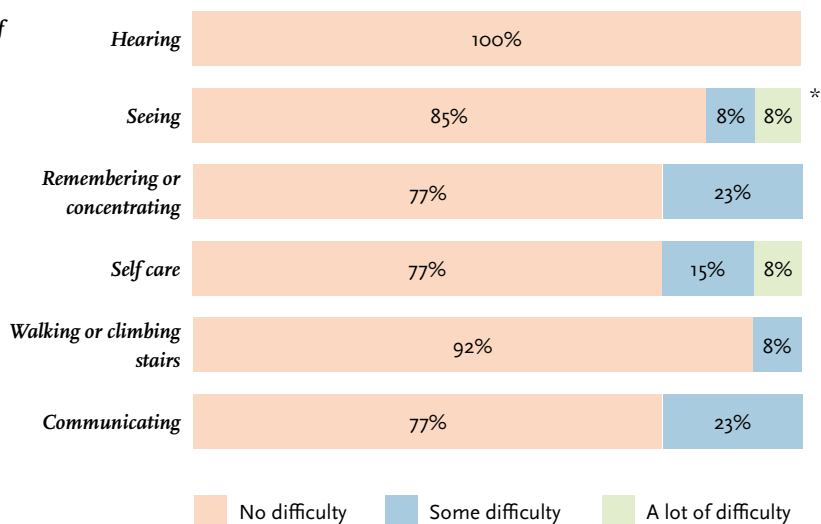
Save the Children distributed home learning kits following safety protocols to the most disadvantaged families and communities. Each home learning kit contains story books, toys, paper, and drawing materials where young children engage with the learning experience directly, and the caregiver plays a supportive role. Open-ended play materials allow children to make choices, express their creativity and support their independence. Local books

Figure 5. Types of learning materials available at home.



developed in partnership with major publishers highlighting inclusive play are included. Parents must be supported with a parent education program that includes gender sensitivity. This way, parents would know how toys develop specific skills and understand the implications of limiting toy and book selection for girls and boys.

Figure 6. Caregiver-reported level of difficulty among 3–5 y/o children (Washington Group of Questions).



* Figures were rounded off and do not add up to 100%.

CHILD DISABILITY USING THE WASHINGTON GROUP OF QUESTIONS

There were four disability identifiers created using the Washington Group (WG) on Disability Statistics guidelines. These identifiers differed in terms of the threshold used for defining disability prevalence and coded as “no difficulty,” “some difficulty,” “a lot of difficulties” or “cannot do at all”. The graph below shows the percentage of children in the sample that may have a disability according to these four thresholds and may be due to their age.

While the data does not mean a diagnosis, the results provide potential red flags for a disability. It is also a reminder for program teams to collect data on children experiencing difficulties and to ensure that interventions are inclusive for all children. Modifications for children with disabilities, particularly those with visual, hearing, and cognitive impairments are also included in the materials and discussed further during home visits for families with children with disabilities.

Modifications for activities are included in the materials.

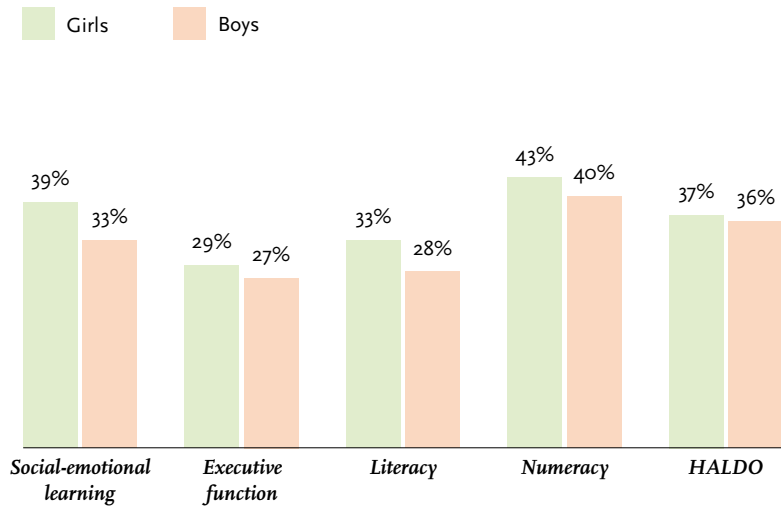
“If your child has difficulty in seeing, use their hands to feel the gestures.”



EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought parental stress due to the loss of family income and disruptions of programs and services that support early childhood development compromising the capabilities and enabling environments for nurturing care to young children, therefore, likely impacting their development. Using the HALDO tool, the average total score was 37% for female children and 36% for male children at baseline. Among the developmental domains, numeracy appeared to be the highest, followed by socio-emotional learning, and third literacy. Scores of young female children were higher across domains than their male counterparts. The data also showed the scores in executive function at baseline.

Figure 7. Average scores per domain of young children per sex

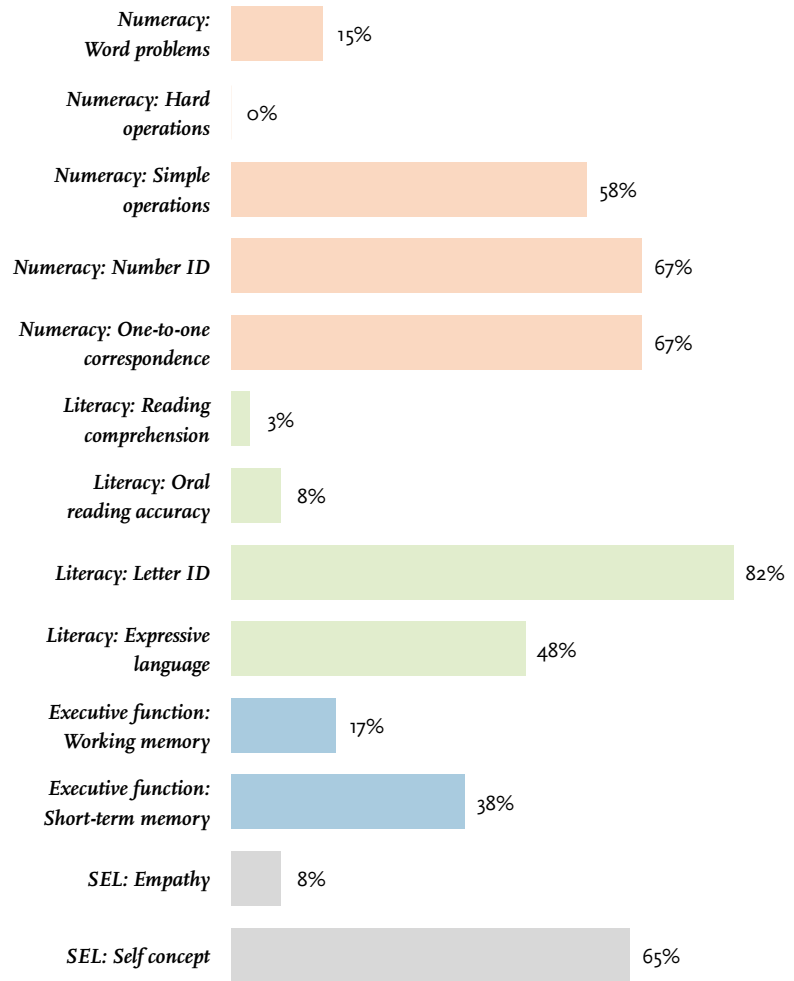


On average, at baseline, children 3-5 years old answered both 67% of the number identification items and one-to-one correspondence correctly. They correctly answered 58% of simple operations, such as addition and subtraction items. On literacy, young children answered 82% of the letter identification items correctly, while only 48% of the expressive language tasks. On socio-emotional, young children answered 65% of the self-concept tasks correctly, while only 8% on empathy items.

Save the Children believes parents and caregivers must be at the centre of home learning. Engaging them is the key to addressing learning loss and the inequity in early learning. In the Early Literacy and Math (ELM) at Home Plus, both mothers and fathers are empowered to engage in play-based learning activities at home to stimulate all developmental domains, including executive function and self-regulation skills. It promotes play as a vehicle for learning among young children. The games utilise parts of the body and objects found at home, which shifts the thinking from buying store-bought materials for education to making homemade toys. It also lessens the burden on families who have lost income.

The design of the sessions to be done by caregivers and their child follows their daily routine for 12 weeks. These games and activities are quick, simple, and easy to incorporate into daily activities. Recognizing that parents do not have the same capacity as the child development teachers, the messages are easy, attractive, social, and timely, with each day of the week targeting a specific domain or theme namely: motor/executive function on Monday, language and literacy on Tuesday, cognitive and maths on Wednesday, social and emotional on Thursday, and positive parenting on Friday. The repertoire of suggested games can increase parents' and caregivers' confidence as

Figure 8. HALDO score per domain items.

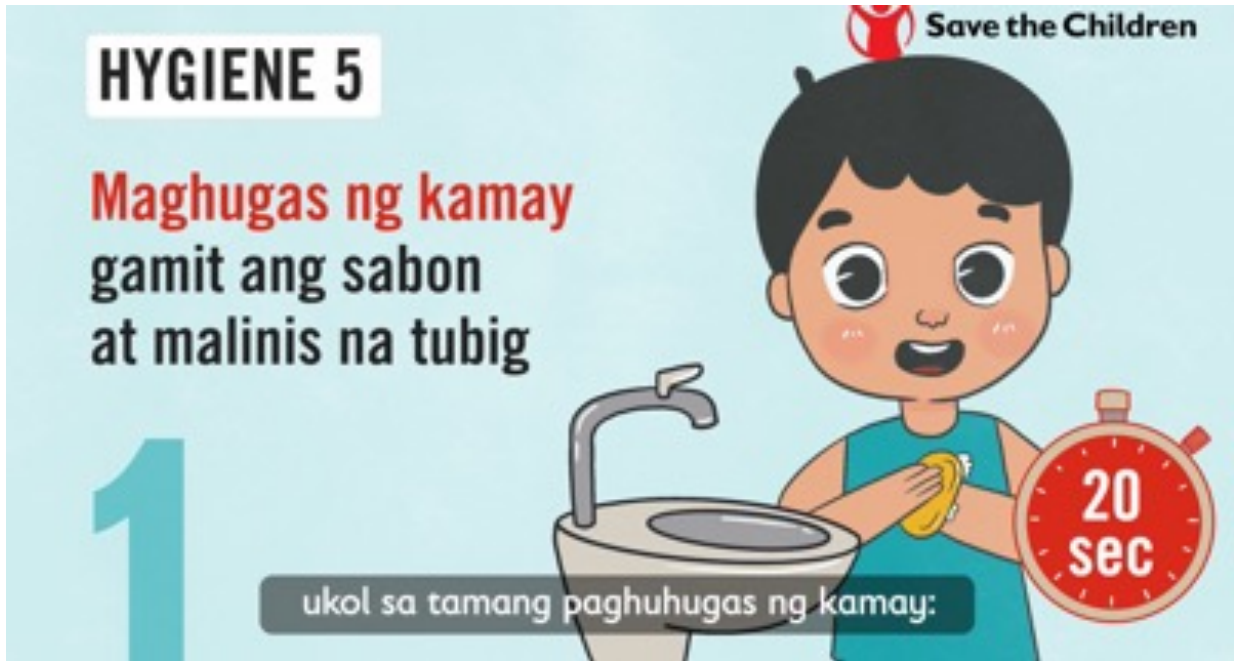


their child's most important teacher, even when they cannot read. It can also increase parent engagement in learning in the long term.

Save the Children prioritises raising the quality of remote ECCD programming to foster adaptability, ensure the continuity of early learning programs, and explore innovative ways to reach those without internet access. As the education system had long used a face-to-face group approach, programs had been adapted to utilise multi-delivery remote platforms such as videos, audio, and printed parent cards/posters, depending on the area of implementation and risks of COVID-19. In the National Capital Region where COVID-19 cases have always been high, the ELM at Home Plus has been adapted to be delivered remotely, either individually or in groups. Its 12-week daily video episodes were uploaded to the Save the Children Facebook page and then later on scaled through the partnership with the Department of Education, National Capital Region and integrated with its TV channel. Printed parent cards were distributed to families, particularly those without connectivity, as part of the home learning kits. It was adopted by the Local Government of Malabon and shouldered the cost of printing and distribution as part of its home-based child development program.

HYGIENE PRACTICES OF 3-5-YEAR-OLD CHILDREN

The baseline results showed that across age groups, only 20% of children wash their hands after playing, only 17% wash their hands after using the toilet, and 62% wash their hands before eating based on caregiver reporting. This result implied that they do not practise proper hand washing, especially



Sample photos of Hygiene-5 in materials.

“Wash your hands using soap and clean water.”

“Wash your hands after going to the toilet.”

in crucial times when they should be washing their hands. Such practice is crucial to prevent transmission and acquiring the infection during the pandemic. Older children also could serve as models and reminders to younger ones to adopt the proper handwashing practices.

To be able to address this, health and nutrition messages, such as the Hygiene-5⁵, were included. The Hygiene-5 messages were incorporated into the materials. Stand-alone materials for information campaigns were also developed to emphasise the importance of hygiene practices, which are crucial in protecting oneself against the virus.



5. Hygiene 5: Proper washing of hands, cough, and sneeze etiquette, keeping oneself clean by taking a bath and brushing their teeth, keeping our environment clean, and eating a well-balanced diet.

SUPPORTING FINDINGS FROM THE SMS-BASED SURVEY

Results from the SMS survey provided insights on the perceived usefulness and gains of the materials, and how parents have used the Project ARAL materials to increase their capacities in supporting their children's learning at home. Sixty-four percent of the respondents reported that they were able to watch the videos of Project ARAL. Those who were unable to watch the videos cited the following reasons: 1. They do not have a smartphone; 2. They were busy with work; and 3. They do not have mobile internet load. While the videos were intended to be viewed following a schedule, the parents usually did so based on their availability and convenience. The families may also repeat watching the videos to refresh them on the key messages. In encouraging behaviour change among parents and caregivers to consistently practise the suggested play-based activities at home, the videos and print materials sit within the broader compendium of programs, such as including this in the cash transfer program for enrolled families and establishing parent circles for peer learning, partnering with general parent-teacher associations to encourage viewership and complement the materials in parenting education sessions and family strengthening sessions.

Out of the 245 respondents that stated they were able to watch the materials, 119 (48%) parents provided narratives on what they have learned from the Project ARAL Materials. Their answers were categorised into nine main categories described in the table below.

Table 1. Content themes of parents' responses

Category	General description
Children's Rights	Parents discussed knowing the rights of their children.
Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)/ Resiliency	Parents discussed understanding their children's emotions and helping them cope with the current situation.
Values	Parents generally described their children learning the "mabuting asal" (good behaviour/values).
COVID-19	Parents discussed learning information about COVID-19 and about measures to protect themselves such as staying inside.
Numeracy	Parents discussed how they learned to teach their children numeracy skills such as counting and sorting.
Literacy	Parents discussed how they learned how to teach their children reading stories and writing.
Positive Parenting	Parents discussed how the materials helped them in their relationship with their children, especially in creating a more positive relationship with them.
Health Messages	Parents discussed learning about health-promoting behaviours, such as handwashing and eating healthy to take care of oneself.
Teaching Children	Parents discussed how the materials gave them tips and ideas on how to teach their children, and how to conduct simple activities at home that can help their children learn.

While the majority of the parents were able to watch the materials of Project ARAL, its remote delivery has posed limitations to families without access to the internet, especially since videos on Facebook require more mobile load to view them. Printed copies of parent cards were limited to one local

government that funded and distributed them to 150 families, who had positive feedback on the learning experiences in the materials, stating that they appreciate the short activities that are integrated with their daily household tasks and from which their children learn essential literacy and math skills. Among parents who were able to watch the videos, the majority of them recalled key messages related to supporting the development of their children, particularly on socio-emotional learning, early numeracy, and literacy. The results suggested a good indication that the materials resonated with many parents who are all adjusting to distance learning.

Adoption by local and regional offices allowed the scaling up of Project ARAL in urban areas, which increased its reach and impact on children's development. Its final assessments are expected by the end of 2021 as evidence is needed on scalable remote ECCD interventions that are appropriate for the conditions of physical distancing and lockdowns.

Conclusions and recommendations

Results of the HALDO tool revealed an inequity in early learning, focusing on a particular aspect rather than all developmental domains being given equal importance and attention. There is a need to strengthen a holistic approach in programs for children, especially in integrating social and emotional learning as well as executive function and self-regulation skills in the early learning and education systems. This is crucial in the time of the pandemic. The holistic view of the child used in ECCD programs should be continued in later years. There is also a need to revisit current teaching-learning processes, contents, and systems and if these support children's holistic development and the integration of all domains.

The baseline study revealed high levels of stress among parents/caregivers, prompting the prioritisation of caregivers' well-being in Project ARAL through the inclusion of Caregiver Well-being messages to support parents/caregivers in identifying and managing stress. The intervention also included reporting hotlines, mental health, and psychosocial support, referral to relevant agencies, and group-based telehealth interventions. Accessible information and support to the parents and caregivers are crucial as they support their child's mental and physical health and well-being.

The majority of parents across age groups implemented positive parenting practices in homes, although the majority of mothers also reported shouting and hitting their children. Mothers, more than fathers, interacted much more with their children. Project ARAL included messages on positive parenting and fostering positive and meaningful interactions at home, with an emphasis that violence is not tolerated. Gender equality and shared parenting were also promoted in Project ARAL messages and materials.

More than half of the families have one to three books/picture books at home, but these are limited to materials that may not be developmentally appropriate for young children. All families also have commercially bought toys while some have parent-made toys; they also use objects found at home as learning materials. Part of Project ARAL was the distribution of home learning kits to the most disadvantaged families. The kit contains developmentally appropriate and gender-sensitive story books, toys, paper, and drawing materials.

It is crucial to look at the school-family partnerships, and how these systems can be used to strengthen support to parents/caregivers as they take on a more active role in facilitating playful learning at home and in implementing

the distance learning modalities. Outside the family, the whole community needs to support children's learning and development. Fathers play a significant role in the children's lives but the findings show that they are less involved or not involved at all in doing activities and playing with their children. Getting male role models, especially fathers, and engaging them in parenting will help promote and sustain improved behaviours.

A review of alternative delivery modalities, such as distance learning, how to support or capacitate teachers to be able to use these modalities, and how these can be operationalized in other areas, need to be undertaken. All sectors working for children must invest or adopt systematic remote forms of supporting the increasing capacities of families to effectively operationalize distance/home-based learning. In this review, it is important to emphasise teacher or school and parent partnerships, especially since learning happens at home, and even before the pandemic, parents are co-facilitators of learning but more so now. The education sector should also look at how to integrate distance-learning modalities and partnership/networking with parents in capacity building for teachers.

There is a need to invest in measuring child outcomes to measure long-term benefits to identify further children who are most at risk of falling behind. Based on data, the delivery of remote forms of learning implemented to address the needs of marginalised and deprived children, particularly those without an internet connection or the means to access the videos, must be strengthened. The Department of Education, National Capital Region, also aired the videos on television. This partnership at the community level strove to bridge the digital divide and gave targeted support for equitable access.

Finally, Project ARAL promotes play as a means to learning as well as coping with stress, especially in difficult times such as these. In the Philippines, play is not a popular means of learning, even if the Early Childhood Care and Development Council advocates a play-based approach for 0-4-year-old children. The Early Literacy and Math (ELM) at Home Plus promotes play-based learning home activities to stimulate all developmental domains, including executive function and self-regulation skills. Because child development centres are closed, and children are not allowed to go out to play with other children, mothers, and fathers were empowered to engage in play with their children. All Project ARAL materials had modifications for children with disabilities.

Project ARAL believes in the Heckman Equation that investing in early childhood development has greater returns in education, health, and productivity. Investing in early childhood education is a cost-effective strategy for promoting economic growth, even and especially during a crisis such as what we are experiencing today. Developmental resources need to be provided to children and their families. Professor James Heckman said that "direct investment in the child's early development is complemented by investment in parents and family environments" (Heckman, n.d.). Project ARAL initially covered the age groups 3-5 and 6-12; it will now include the 0-3 age group. Project ARAL is an investment in the early learning and development of children by supporting their parents/caregivers and families' capacities, resources, and well-being.

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