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# ADVANCING BASIC EDUCATION IN THE PHILIPPINES (ABC+)

## MID-TERM PERFORMANCE EVALUATION REPORT

DISCLAIMER: This evaluation inception report was produced at the request of the United States Agency for International Development. It was prepared independently by Ivy Meja, PhD., (Evaluation Team Leader), Romylyn Metila, PhD., Arlyne Marasigan, PhD., and the USAID/Philippines Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting for Improved Development (CLAimDev) activity. The author's views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Agency for International Development of the United States Government.

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## ABSTRACT

This mid-term performance evaluation examined the relevance, effectiveness, and sustainability of the Advancing Basic Education in the Philippines (ABC+) program. The evaluation used a theory-based, mixed-methods design to understand ABC+'s performance. To describe other outcomes brought by COVID-19, which emerged during the first year of the program, outcome harvesting (OH) and the most significant change technique were used. The evaluation focused on ABC+ activities in Regions V (Bicol), VI (Western Visayas), and a small portion of Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) (Maguindanao Division in BARMM). The evaluation conducted four activities in collecting data: 1) electronic surveys for individuals such as teachers and school heads (intermediate result (IR)1 and IR2), 2) key informant interviews (KIIs) for system capacity-related topics with implementing partners and the Philippines Department of Education's (DepEd) central, regional, and division offices (IR3), 3) focus group discussions and OH workshops on early-grade instruction and delivery (IR1) and access to materials (IR2), and 4) case studies for in-depth analysis of home learning partners and private sector engagements.

The evaluation team found that ABC+ activities are relevant and aligned with DepEd policies and programs, particularly those related to learning recovery and continuity for literacy development. During the pandemic, ABC+ worked strategically by streamlining activities on teacher training, materials development, and system capacitation. Beneficiaries appreciated the close, consistent monitoring and intensive, flexible teacher support. As a result, ABC+ is a reliable and strong partner of schools.

The evaluation also found that the teacher training and supplemental reading materials developed by ABC+ are effective in helping learners to read in their mother tongue and the Filipino language. The learning recovery plan, one of the policies enhanced with ABC+ support, was crucial in improving teachers' instruction to help K-3 learners catch up with their reading delays. The DepEd system's capacity to analyze and make decisions based on the data from comprehensive literacy assessment is very helpful in monitoring children's reading outcomes. There is evidence that although the logic model of ABC+ was affected by the pandemic, the results are still promising because the program model is agile, i.e., with the return to face-to-face classes, ABC+ can pivot to achieve the intended outputs and outcomes.

An unintended outcome brought by COVID-19 is the learning recovery plan co-developed by Region V and ABC+. This has contributed to IR1 and IR2. The evaluation also found that ABC+ contributed to enhancing policies related to curriculum development and assessment at the K-3 levels. Finally, the review found promising elements towards sustainability, as the project strengthened local ownership and leadership through diverse strategies and activities. Further collaboration with the private sector is imperative.

Recommendations and implications for stakeholders are discussed in this report.

# ADVANCING BASIC EDUCATION IN THE PHILIPPINES (ABC+)

## Mid-Term Performance Evaluation Report

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## ACRONYMS

ABC+	Advancing Basic Education in the Philippines
BARMM	Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao
CRLA	Comprehensive Rapid Learning Assessment
DepEd	Department of Education
EGR	early-grade reading
F2F	face-to-face
GESI	gender equality and social inclusion
HLP	home learning partner
IP	implementing partner
IR	Intermediate Result
KII	key informant interview
KPI	key performance indicator
LGU	local government unit
MSCT	Most Significant Change Technique
MTB-MLE	Mother Tongue-Based-Multilingual Education
NEAP	National Educators' Academy of the Philippines
NGO	non-government organization
OH	Outcome Harvesting
PY	Program Year
RTI	Research Triangle Institute International
SEL	socio-emotional learning
SRM	supplemental reading materials
TEI	teacher education institution
UP-NISMED	University of the Philippines National Institute for Science and Mathematics Education Development
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development





## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the performance evaluation results of Advancing Basic Education in the Philippines (ABC+) using the three evaluation criteria of relevance, effectiveness, and sustainability. Specifically, the topline evaluation questions were:

To what extent does the innovation introduced by ABC+ on improved early-grade instruction and delivery, improved access to quality materials, and improved education capacity and commitment to manage and implement interventions supporting early-grade instruction correspond with the objectives of the Department of Education (DepEd) of the Philippines (priorities, policies, the needs, and the practical requirements)?

To what extent has ABC+ contributed to improving early-grade literacy, the better transition of reading ability to Filipino and English, more solid acquisition of foundational math concepts and skills, and improved social and emotional learning for children in the early-grades (kindergarten to Grade 3) in the Philippines?

To what extent did ABC+ achieve its outputs and outcomes in the three intermediate results (IRs) on improved early-grade instruction and delivery, improved access to quality materials, and improved education capacity and commitment to manage and implement interventions supporting effective early-grade instruction?

Will the achievements in improved early-grade reading, math, and social and emotional skills for children in the early-grades persist after the project's conclusion?

The evaluation also assessed ABC+'s performance in achieving its three intermediate results (IRs):

IR 1: Improved early-grade instruction and delivery.

IR 2: Improved access to quality materials

IR 3: Improved education capacity and commitment to manage and implement intervention support in early-grade instruction.

The evaluation team used a theory-based, mixed-methods design to assess ABC+'s performance. Specifically, a concurrent mixed methods evaluation approach using quantitative and qualitative methods was selected.

In response to the challenges of early literacy development in mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE), USAID/Philippines (USAID/PH), the Philippine DepEd, and Research Triangle Institute International (RTI) and its subcontractors co-developed the Advancing Basic Education in the Philippines project or ABC+. This five-year USAID-funded project aims to improve early-grade reading and emphasize using mother tongue languages to transition learning in Filipino and English for children in kindergarten to grade 3. It also supports a more solid acquisition of foundational mathematical concepts

and skills and improves social and emotional learning. ABC+ integrates gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) in its design and programming.

Although ABC+'s objectives and design remain the same, the context within which it was implemented was significantly changed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Community restrictions necessitated by the pandemic, particularly school closures, affected ABC+'s intended inputs and activities. As a result, unexpected outcomes other than those reflected in the results framework are possible, mainly as the project was implemented within the unprecedented contextual changes in education due to COVID-19 and school closures. In addition to using theory-based mixed methods to answer the evaluation questions, the evaluation also used Outcome Harvesting (OH) to uncover unexpected outcomes not envisioned in the theory of change.

The evaluation design has three levels of analysis:

- Individuals supported by ABC+, such as teachers, school heads, faculty, and students.
- Institutions focusing on system capacity, including the DepEd Central Office, Regional and Division levels, schools; and
- Community organizations and private sector affiliates involved in ABC+ implementation.

The evaluation focused on school divisions supported by ABC+ in Regions V (Bicol), VI (Western Visayas), and a small portion of Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) (Maguindanao Division in BARMM). The selection criteria used two filters, geographic location with the associated linguistic focus and participant profile. Participants were teachers and officials from DepEd Regional and Division levels. For the first filter, Bicol, Western Visayas, and Maguindanao Schools Division in BARMM were automatically selected as part of ABC+. The following filter was the school divisions that received ABC+ assistance.

For the selection criteria of respondents, there were three filters. The first filter was the geographic location (Regions V, VI, and a small portion of BARMM). The second filter was a proportional sampling from selected divisions. Selected divisions were based on the scale used by ABC+, where the most used languages were the basis for site selections. Additional selection criteria included literacy rate, type of schools, proximity to the city, mode of transportation to reach the site, and availability of electricity and internet connectivity for remote data collection. Finally, using these criteria, ABC+ schools were randomly selected.

The evaluation used four activities to collect data: 1) electronic surveys for individuals such as teachers and school heads (IR1 and IR2), 2) key informant interviews (KIIs) with implementing partners and the DepEd's central, regional, and division offices to probe system capacity (IR3), 3) focus group discussions (FGDs) and OH workshops on early-grade instruction and delivery (IR1) and access to materials (IR2), and 4) a case study for in-depth analysis of home learning partners (HLPs) and private sector engagement.

The evaluation team found that ABC+ activities are relevant and highly aligned with DepEd policies and programs. They were instrumental in implementing learning continuity and learning recovery programs, especially literacy instruction, which received the most significant level of ABC+ support. For example, ABC+ has already conducted several activities demonstrating the availability of resources to strengthen DepEd's literacy and numeracy programs and improve English proficiency while recognizing linguistic diversity long before the recent Basic Education Report 20,23,<sup>1</sup> delivered by Vice President Sara Duterte.<sup>2</sup>

Since the ABC+ activities for developing numeracy have just started, improvement in learners' numeracy skills is expected to manifest in the coming years. Survey data show that ABC+'s contribution to socio-emotional learning (SEL) integration was achieved to a large extent. Due to the absence of face-to-face instruction, ABC+ support for SEL integration was primarily undertaken through supplementary reading materials (SRMs).

Findings revealed that ABC+'s locally developed age and developmentally-appropriate reading materials for the K-3 levels help learners read in their mother tongue and Filipino language. The unintended outcome brought about by COVID-19 is the learning recovery plan, which contributed to IR1 and IR2. ABC+'s contribution to enhancing policies was most observed in curriculum development and assessment at the K-3 levels.

ABC+'s potential for sustainability was observed in Regions V and VI based on identified mechanisms such as training given by ABC+ and DepEd in partnership with the National Educators' Academy of the Philippines (NEAP), the commitment of teacher trainers during the training of trainers (TOT) to continuously adapt ABC+ instructional strategies, license attribution of the SRMs and creative commons. The creative commons or distribution of copyrighted SRMs were given for free and was effective in that everyone may have a copy or reproduce without worrying about copyright issues. School heads and teachers recognized the effectiveness and efficiency of Comprehensive Rapid Learning Assessment (CRLA) when it comes to communicating and monitoring learners' progress. Updating CRLA and possible innovations could make this CRLA more relevant to teachers and learners.

Through the Mandanas-Garcia Ruling implementation, the LGU has the prerogative to allocate additional funds to deliver basic education services. The LGU also participates in the local school board meeting to assist DepEd with other financial resources allocation. These mechanisms mitigate the limited budget allocation of DepEd, which is vital to sustaining the ABC+ program after its conclusion.

Based on the ABC+ sustainability milestones, the private sector contributes to the program's sustainability by providing financial and other support systems to schools and communities. However, they have limited involvement, so further collaboration is imperative. Private sector organizations, such as the Rotary Club International and Coca-Cola Foundations, donated school supplies, photocopying

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<sup>1</sup> Duterte, S.Z. (2023). Basic Education Report 2023 [PowerPoint slides]. Department of Education. Office of the Secretary, Philippines.

<sup>2</sup> Note, however, that this is only true for Regions V and VI as the host institutions of the ABC+ intervention.

machines, and cash. Their presence in the school and community projects and programs sustains DepEd's direction to achieve early-grade literacy. To a large extent, these sustainability mechanisms contribute to improving the ABC+ program leading to its potential to last long-term.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS ON RELEVANCE**

For ABC+ and DepEd, the team recommends that processes for initiating local policy enhancements be shared through fora or meetings so that other regions can also identify local policies that can be enhanced. ABC+ can assist schools in disseminating best practices, especially in implementing recovery programs that concentrate on literacy development. ABC+ can likewise support schools to create platforms for giving or sharing good practices, such as school visits for benchmarking or an online/face-to-face (F2F) forum or presentation.

Since numeracy instruction is designed to be a pilot model for developing a National Framework on Numeracy, ABC+ could explicitly create and develop a supplementary framework that targets numeracy instruction in the key stages. This framework may emerge from the set and implemented lesson plans from its ongoing project with the University of the Philippines National Institute for Science and Mathematics Education Development (UP-NISMED).

ABC+ and the DepEd regional offices should bolster efforts for SEL integration, especially in Regions V and VI. F2F class observations can help determine the training support that can be provided to help teachers increase their level of SEL integration.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS ON EFFECTIVENESS**

For ABC+, the evaluation team recommends gathering real-time data, via classroom observations in the three regions, on teachers' abilities to implement the science of teaching beginning reading, which was a focus of ABC+'s training. A research write-shop for K-3 teachers may increase teaching reading efficacy or belief in teachers' capacity to develop reading skills among learners. Classroom-based research outputs of teachers may serve as additional evidence of the effectiveness of ABC+ interventions. Efforts should be made to institutionalize improved literacy training for teachers and simultaneously encourage host institutions to commit to the continuity of production of quality SRMs.

The DepEd regional and division offices may assist teachers in applying what they learned from the teacher training through mentoring and monitoring activities. This will serve as a refresher approach since most of the training was done during the height of the pandemic. Locally trained ABC+ facilitators may include this in their monitoring and evaluation activities in their regions and divisions.

The NEAP may continue to explore a training design and schedule that will support and cater to teachers' needs, situations, and well-being. For instance, teachers expressed the need to moderate the number of training tasks/assignments, especially considering that some teachers hold other jobs.

SRMs were found to have the most significant contribution to improving learners' reading capacity in their mother tongue, Filipino, and English. Therefore, local government units (LGUs) should ensure that

SRM hard copies are protected by providing space to store them safely and maintain the production and replenishment of SRMs to different divisions by conducting an annual inventory of equipment that support the year-round availability of materials.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS ON SUSTAINABILITY**

The recommendations on sustainability are entrusted to three agencies/organizations: ABC+, DepEd's Central, Regional, and Division Offices, and LGUs.

The evaluation team recommends that ABC+:

- assists DepEd in scaling up collaboration with the private sector to outsource funds for Program Years (PY) 4 and 5.
- strengthens and formalizes collaboration with teacher education institutions in the region through Memorandums/Agreements of Understanding to prepare and train future in-service teachers to promote and support early-grade literacy for PY 4-5.
- encourages the active participation of volunteer parents, youth organizations, and other willing individuals in the community during the school learning action cell session for PY 4-5.
- collaborates with schoolteachers to conduct action research focusing on classroom and community-based reading literacy and numeracy for future reference and additional plan of action toward sustainability for PY 4-5.
- lays the groundwork for transitioning ownership of the program from implementing partner (IP) to host institutions and organizations, in particular continuing to improve literacy training for teachers and encouraging host institutions to commit to the production of quality SRMs;
- explicitly develops and designs a supplementary framework that targets numeracy instruction in the critical stages since numeracy instruction is intended to be a pilot model that will support the plan for creating a National Framework on Numeracy. This framework may emerge from lesson development and implementation with UP-NISMED as their partner institution; and
- assists regions in disseminating ideas to improve or contextualize national or regional policies that ABC+ already supports. Data revealed that due to partner schools' confidence in ABC+ support, DepEd regional offices expanded regional policies that involved only literacy to include numeracy. Some regional policies were also enhanced in terms of budget allocation. Processes for initiating these regional policy enhancements can be shared with other regions through fora or meetings so that other regions can also identify local policies that can be enhanced or further contextualized.

The DepEd Central Office may adopt enhanced policies on assessment and educational sector management at the national level. ABC+ provided technical support on early-grade-related policies to Regions V and VI. Policies were effective, and this may work in other regions. The regional and division

office may support teachers, students, community volunteers, and HLPs through well-being mechanisms such as counseling, open dialogue, psychosocial training, and distributing well-being flyers.

LGUs may also assist DepEd in sustaining the financial needs of schools and the ABC+ program by allocating additional funds to the following: teacher training, technology transfer capacity-building program of school personnel, implementation and monitoring of the program, and maintaining barangay reading centers and learning hubs through HLPs and SRMs production and distribution. LGUs and local stakeholders should collaborate to mobilize, support, and sustain the established program. Given the limited human and financial resources of numerous schools in Regions V and VI and selected schools in BARMM, especially in remote areas, educational public-private partnership is one possible means to ensure the program's sustainability.

## EVALUATION PURPOSE AND EVALUATION QUESTIONS

The United States Agency for International Development/Philippines (USAID/PH) commissioned an independent third-party performance evaluation of Advancing Basic Education in the Philippines (ABC+), which is implemented by Research Triangle Institute (RTI) International and its partners - The Asia Foundation, SIL LEAD, and Florida State University. This evaluation provides USAID/PH evidence to gauge the extent to which ABC+ is achieving its outputs and outcomes in the three intermediate results (IRs) on improved early-grade instruction and delivery (IR1), improved access to quality materials (IR2), and improved education capacity and commitment to manage and implement interventions supporting early-grade instruction (IR3).

The evaluation focused on the performance of ABC+ from 2019 to 2022, assessing its relevance, effectiveness, and sustainability. The following are the evaluation questions:

### RELEVANCE

- To what extent does the innovation introduced by ABC+ on improved early-grade instruction and delivery, improved access to quality materials, and improved education capacity and commitment to manage and implement interventions supporting early-grade instruction correspond with the objectives of the Department of Education of the Philippines (DepEd) (priorities, policies, the needs, and the practical requirements)?
- Did ABC+'s design and implementation consider the available capability and capacities of the recipients (human resources and organizations) and responses to any change in context (e.g., public health emergency such as COVID-19)?
- How did ABC+ incorporate gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) analysis? To what extent has ABC+ implementation supported GESI?
- To what extent has ABC+ contributed to improving early-grade literacy, the better transition of reading ability to Filipino and English, more solid acquisition of foundational math concepts and skills, and improved social and emotional learning for children in the early grades (kindergarten to Grade 3) in the Philippines?

### EFFECTIVENESS

1. To what extent did ABC+ achieve its outputs and outcomes in the three IRs on improved early-grade instruction and delivery, improved access to quality materials, and enhanced education capacity and commitment to manage and implement interventions supporting early-grade instruction?
2. Which of the three IRs contributed the most to improving early-grade reading, math, and social and emotional skills for children in the early-grades (kindergarten to Grade 3)? What were the



explanatory factors, if any, for achievement, overachievement, and underachievement or non-achievement?

3. Have there been any outcomes brought by COVID-19 in implementing ABC+ that would tell us whether the program improved early-grade instruction and delivery, improved access to quality materials, and improved education capacity and commitment to manage and implement interventions supporting early-grade instruction?
4. How has ABC+ contributed to enhancing policies on early-grade reading instruction and learning outcomes in kindergarten to Grade 3 (K–3)?

## **SUSTAINABILITY**

- Will the achievements in improved early-grade reading, math, and social and emotional skills for children in the early grades persist after the project's conclusion?
- How did ABC+ strengthen local ownership and leadership on the enhanced instruction and learning outcomes in kindergarten to Grade 3?

The evaluation results will inform the design of the Mission's next-generation basic education activities.

The intended audiences of this evaluation are USAID-Philippines education and program officers and USAID staff worldwide interested in basic education programs, specifically at K-3 levels; Philippine and U.S. stakeholders, including those in other U.S. government agencies and organizations; the DepEd in the Philippines; and other researchers and organizations interested in the use of mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) to strengthen literacy and numeracy in primary education, especially within the context of the recent pandemic. Annex 16 shows the activity summary information of ABC+.

## **LEARNING QUESTIONS**

USAID requested a review of four learning questions during the evaluation inception meeting. While the evaluation team collected and analyzed data regarding these questions, the team conducted the analysis separately from the topline questions on relevance, effectiveness, and sustainability. Refer to Annex 19 for details.

## **BACKGROUND**

### DESCRIPTION OF THE PROBLEM AND CONTEXT

ABC+ is a five-year USAID-funded program aimed at improving the early-grade reading, math, and social and emotional skills of children in the early grades (kindergarten to Grade 3) in the Philippines. The prominent feature of early-grade instructions in the K-12 curriculum in the Philippines is the MTB-MLE policy. From kindergarten through Grade 3, learners progressively acquire literacy skills in their native language (MT), Filipino, and English, transitioning to instruction in Filipino and English starting in Grade 4. In a country with 180-plus native languages, the delivery of MTB-MLE throughout the country can be daunting. The baseline study by ABC+ reflects that many children are left behind in school. Grade 2 learners' decoding skills are underdeveloped, and their reading and comprehension abilities are weaker than their oral language skills. Although supplemental materials are available at the DepEd, teachers do not use these as often as intended.

In response to the challenges of early literacy development in the context of MTB-MLE, USAID/Philippines, DepEd, and RTI and its subcontractors co-developed a project to improve early-grade basic language skills, with an emphasis on enhancing early-grade reading (EGR) in the mother tongue and preparing to transition to Filipino and English.

ABC+ supports improved early-grade literacy, a better transition of reading ability to Filipino and English, more solid acquisition of foundational math concepts and skills, and improved social and emotional learning. ABC+ works with the Philippine DepEd in Manila, as well as with its regional- and division-level offices in Regions V (Bicol) and VI (Western Visayas) and selected districts of Maguindanao in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM). The estimated beneficiaries are two million students, 36,000 teachers, 6,600 school heads, and 644 supervisors.

In March 2020, schools closed due to COVID-19, disrupting ABC+'s implementation, which started four weeks earlier. Most activities became remote, including teacher training. In December 2021, selected DepEd schools piloted face-to-face (F2F) classes. Beginning in January 2022, DepEd progressively expanded F2F classes in 6,000 schools as part of its learning recovery plan. ABC+ partnered with DepEd Region V to contribute to this effort in preparing the Recovering for Academic Achievement by Improving Instruction through Sustainable Evidence-Based Learning Programs (RAISE). This three-year learning recovery plan aims to ensure that the COVID-19 generation of learners does not suffer a disadvantage compared with past and future generations.

### **THEORY OF CHANGE (TOC)**

ABC+'s design assumes that:

“IF quality of instruction is improved (IR1), quality and availability of materials are enhanced (IR2), and education system capacity to support early-grade learning (IR3) is improved, THEN it will lead to positive and sustained gains in students' basic skills.”

ABC+ seeks to achieve its overall objective through the following IRs:

IR 1: Improved early-grade instruction and delivery systems

IR 2: Improved access to quality materials

IR 3: Improved education system capacity and commitment to manage and implement interventions supporting effective early-grade instruction.

Detailed background descriptions are in the Statement of Work (Annex 17).

## EVALUATION METHODS AND LIMITATIONS

### LOCATION AND GEOGRAPHIC SCOPE

The evaluation covered Regions V (Bicol), VI (Western Visayas), and a small portion of BARMM (Cotabato, Maguindanao Division I in BARMM), in which ABC+ is being implemented. The evaluation used the division, district, and school levels in its sampling frame to purposively select informants using ABC+ participant lists.

### EVALUATION DESIGN

Anchored on the theory of change, the evaluation used a theory-based, mixed-methods design to assess ABC+'s performance. The evaluation methodology used concurrent mixed methods<sup>3</sup> to better understand the implementation of ABC+ through qualitative and quantitative assessment inquiries. The selection of key informant interviews (KIIs) and focus group discussion (FGD) participants was purposive, while the survey respondents were randomly sampled. The minimum acceptable response rate for the adapted survey was 50 percent (Babbie, 1990).<sup>4</sup>

Although the ABC+ activity's objectives and design did not change with the onset of COVID-19, the pandemic significantly altered the context within which it was implemented. To capture unintended outcomes, the evaluation used Outcome Harvesting (OH) to uncover unexpected results and contributions not envisioned in the theory of change.<sup>5</sup>

### DATA COLLECTION

In this evaluation, mixed methods were used to analyze the implementation of the ABC+ interventions. The quantitative method used an online survey, and qualitative methods included literature reviews, KIIs, FGDs, OH workshops, and the Most Significant Change Technique (MSCT). Using multiple data sources through mixed methods enabled the evaluation to cover a broad spectrum, conduct a more in-depth analysis, and achieve a more holistic understanding of data through triangulation (Yin, 2003)<sup>6</sup>. Methods were conducted both virtually and in person. The sequence of data collection was as follows: desk review, survey, KIIs, FGDs, OH workshops, MSCT, and evaluation of supplementary materials. The evaluation team also conducted a validation workshop on the accuracy of the evaluation information.

### QUANTITATIVE METHOD

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<sup>3</sup> Mertens, D. M. (2017). *Mixed methods design in evaluation*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

<sup>4</sup> Babbie E. *Survey Research Methods*. Belmont, Calif: Wadsworth; 1990.

<sup>5</sup> The World Bank. (2014). *Outcome-based Field Learning Guide*. Washington, D.C. (p.13)

<sup>6</sup> Yin, R.K. (2003). *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*. Sage. Thousand Oaks, California.

The evaluation used descriptive statistics and analytic data visualizations for the quantitative data and disaggregated data by sex and location to the extent possible. This approach is consistent with USAID's embedded monitoring and evaluation in the Program Cycle.<sup>7</sup> Data from the survey were analyzed through descriptive statistics. Analysis of progress of ABC+ toward indicators derived from ABC+ quarterly/annual reports. However, the absence of needed data during the scheduled time for analyses precluded: 1) comparison of division and school-level data at the start and midline; and 2) determination of the effect size of interventions by cohort, divisions, sex, and location. Classroom observation was also not done due to the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions imposed by DepEd. Other survey items are found in Annex 13.

#### QUALITATIVE METHOD

The qualitative data were recorded and transcribed in worksheets. They were subjected to content analysis using computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS). The evaluation team coded the responses and computed the estimated reliability index. A constant comparison method complemented the index where the crew checked the coherence of responses, codes, and themes to ensure that the results had no external threats to the audience of this performance evaluation. The team also used content analysis on the outcomes harvested. Qualitative data analysis was used for FGD, KII, MSCT, and OH data to find emerging themes.

Computer software, such as SPSS and NVivo, was used for data processing and analysis in quantitative and qualitative studies. The codes used and reliability results are found in Annex 14.

#### TRIANGULATION.

The evaluation team combined and compared the quantitative and qualitative analysis results for a holistic understanding of ABC+ concerning relevance, effectiveness, and sustainability.

#### EVALUATION DESIGN MATRIX.

The design matrix in Table I summarizes the evaluation design and methods. The details of the evaluation methodology, such as the data collection and its corresponding participants, data management, and ethical consideration, can be found in Annex 18.

#### VALIDATION

The validation workshop was conducted via Zoom. Representatives from Regions V, VI, and selected school districts in BARMM participated in the workshop held on February 24, 2023. The ABC+ evaluation findings, conclusions, and recommendations were presented, and participant feedback was collected.

The validation workshop used a tool that consists of 34 items that cover statements capturing the results and recommendations under relevance (with 11 words), effectiveness (with 11 statements), and

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<sup>7</sup> [USAID Learning Lab: Monitoring in the Program Cycle](#)

sustainability (with 12 comments). It was sent to the participants two weeks before the evaluation workshop together with the presentation of the findings, to give time for the participants to review and evaluate the results. Interviews and narratives from the participants supplemented this tool.

There were unexpected technical glitches (i.e., difficulty connecting to the internet) and overlapping activities by the attendees during the virtual validation (i.e., ABC+ workshop and last-minute DepEd seminar simultaneously happening with the validation workshop). As a result, some attendees were either unable to attend or were distracted during the process.

A validation survey was also conducted, which yielded 65 respondents, and this regional breakdown: Region V – 17, Region VI – 40, and BARMM – 8.

Overall, albeit using a small number of informants, the validation survey results generally confirm the midline evaluation findings and recommendations for ABC+. Across regions, respondents' answers confirm the veracity of the presented findings and support the given recommendations. While some responses were received for statements that disconfirm findings (i.e., not true in our locale), this is a very small number. It may be an indication though that program implementation has not covered the entirety of a target location. The validation survey results, combined with the data gathered from the conducted online validation workshop, confirm the midline evaluation findings for ABC+.

The documentation of the workshop and the survey can be found in Annex 20.

## **KNOWN LIMITATIONS TO THE EVALUATION DESIGN**

This performance evaluation has four potential limitations: reduced sample size, inaccessible sites, ability to recall information for self-reported data and limited access to documents.

First, some respondents selected for the KII and FGD could not participate due to prior commitments, health reasons/COVID-19, weak internet connectivity, and power outages. This resulted in a reduced number of actual versus expected participants. Second, some study sites were inaccessible due to the distance from the regional or district offices (i.e., limited areas were visited in BARMM compared to those in the city proper of Cotabato). Third, the self-reported data, the survey, KIIs, and FGDs depended on what people could remember. Lastly, accessing documents where ABC+ contact persons were no longer connected with their schools or transferred to other schools or offices took much work.

**TABLE 1. EVALUATION DESIGN MATRIX**

EVALUATION QUESTIONS	SPECIFIC QUESTIONS	DESIGN	SUGGESTED DATA SOURCES	SUGGESTED DATA COLLECTION METHODS
1. Relevance: To what extent does the innovation introduced by ABC+ on improved early-grade instruction and delivery, improved access to quality materials, and improved education capacity and commitment to manage and implement interventions supporting early-grade instruction correspond with the most recent objectives of the Department of Education of the Philippines (priorities, policies, the needs, and the practical requirements)?	1.1. Did ABC+'s design and implementation consider the available capability and capacities of the recipients (individual and organizational) and responses to any change in context (e.g., public health emergency such as COVID-19)?	Qualitative	Project documents and reports  IPs: RTI (the prime partner), The Asia Foundation, SIL LEAD, and Florida State University  Key stakeholders: DepEd, school boards, community, parent-teacher associations	Document review  KIIs (Central Office, regional offices, school divisions)
	1.2. How did ABC+ incorporate gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) analysis? To what extent has ABC+ implementation supported GESI?	Qualitative	Project documents and reports	Document review  FGD: trainers, trainees, curriculum developers (storytellers, illustrators), school administrators
To what extent has ABC+ contributed to improved early-grade literacy, the transition of reading ability to Filipino and English, the acquisition of foundational math concepts and skills, and social and emotional learning for children in the early grades (kindergarten to Grade 3) in the Philippines?		Quantitative	Survey	Online survey from
		Qualitative	Project documents and reports  IPs: The Asia Foundation and SIL LEAD	Document review
2. Effectiveness: To what extent did ABC+ achieve its outputs and outcomes in the three intermediate results (IRs) on improved early-grade instructions and delivery, improved access to quality materials, and improved education capacity and commitment to manage and implement interventions supporting early-grade instruction?	2.1. Which of the three IRs contributed the most to the achievement of improving early-grade reading, math, and social and emotional skills for children in the early-grades (kindergarten to grade 3)	Quantitative	Survey	Online survey form
		Qualitative	Project documents and quarterly reports  Assessment tools  Key stakeholders: DepEd, school boards, community, parent-teacher associations	Document review  KIIs (Central Office, Regional Offices, School Divisions)  FGD: trainers, trainees, curriculum developers (storytellers, illustrators), school administrators

**TABLE I. EVALUATION DESIGN MATRIX**

EVALUATION QUESTIONS	SPECIFIC QUESTIONS	DESIGN	SUGGESTED DATA SOURCES	SUGGESTED DATA COLLECTION METHODS
	2.2 Have there been any outcomes brought by COVID-19 in implementing ABC+ that would tell us whether the program improved early-grade instructions and delivery, improved access to quality materials, and improved education capacity and commitment to manage and implement interventions supporting early-grade instruction?	Qualitative	Project documents and reports	Outcome Harvesting workshop and Most Significant Change Technique Document review
	2.3. How has ABC+ contributed to enhancing policies on EGR instruction and learning outcomes in kindergarten to Grade 3?	Qualitative	Key stakeholders: DepEd, school boards, community, parent-teacher associations	KIIs (Central Office, regional offices, school divisions) FGD: trainers, trainees, curriculum developers (storytellers, illustrators), school administrators
3. Sustainability: Will the achievements in improved early-grade reading, math, and social and emotional skills for children in the early-grades persist after the project's conclusion?	How did ABC+ strengthen local ownership and leadership on the enhanced instruction and learning outcomes in kindergarten to Grade 3?	Quantitative Qualitative	Organization records Policies, personnel records, and student records Key stakeholders: DepEd, school boards	Online survey form Document review KIIs (Central Office, regional offices, school divisions) FGDs: trainers, trainees, curriculum developers (storytellers, illustrators), school administrators Site visit to check the institutional capacity



## FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Two questions guided the evaluation of ABC+’s relevance: the first asked about how the program innovations aligned with DepEd objectives and policies, and in contrast, the second asked about how ABC+ improved four learning aspects of children in the early-grades.

### RELEVANCE: EVALUATION QUESTION I

*To what extent does the innovation introduced by ABC+ on improved early-grade instruction and delivery, improved access to quality materials, and improved education capacity and commitment to manage and implement interventions supporting early-grade instruction correspond with the objectives of the Philippines DepEd (priorities, policies, needs, and the practical requirements)?*

FGD and survey data findings show that ABC+ innovations aligned highly with DepEd policies. Its activities were instrumental in partner schools’ implementation of learning continuity, especially for literacy instruction. Data show that at the institutional level, ABC+ activities have aligned much or somewhat with DepEd programs and policies. Annex 15 presents a list of national and regional DepEd policies that ABC+ activities align with, according to informants.

Figure I below unpacks policies and programs that align with ABC+ innovations. Informants explained that ABC+ is so aligned with their activities that it does not appear like a “separate program because all the initiatives support what we are already doing.” Another explained, “What ABC+ has been doing is that they made sure that all their undertakings are aligned with the BARMM’s Ministry of Basic, Higher, and Technical Education (MBHTE) and DepEd.” Results revealed that partners enhanced or contextualized existing policies due to their ABC+ experience or confidence in ABC+ support.

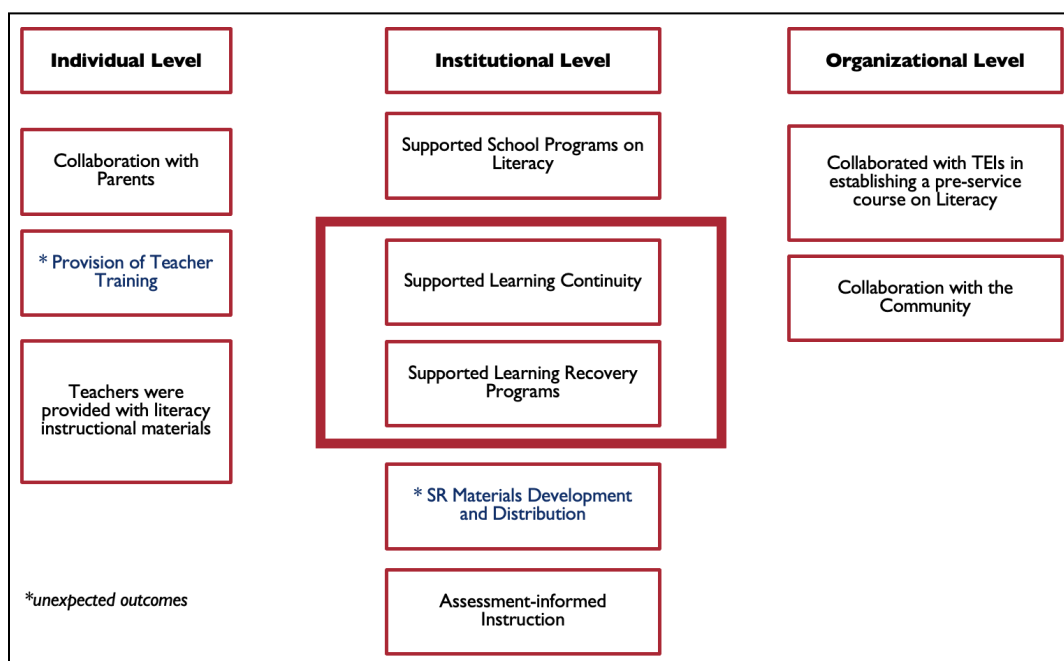


Figure 1. ABC+ Initiatives For Improved Literacy Instructions

Among DepEd policies and programs, ABC+ was particularly relevant in supporting DepEd's learning continuity and learning recovery programs. As schools grappled with remote learning and the new demands of education, ABC+ supported schools' learning continuity programs by providing supplemental reading materials (SRMs) to support reading practice. ABC+ teacher training also provided teachers with strategies they applied in preparing the modules for learners. ABC+ ensured that instructional materials were distributed on time with the help of stakeholders. Teacher training and materials development continued during the pandemic through online platforms and virtual communication.

The pandemic heightened the need for teacher training and materials development, and ABC+'s ability to supply these heightened its relevance, mainly because the regular training for teachers stopped and schools did not have adequate resources to support learners remotely to develop their reading skills.

According to one interviewed teacher, "ABC+ joined us at the height of the pandemic, so the experience was challenging, but at least, with their help, everything became easier." ABC+'s relevance extends to the present, as schools try to recover learning lost during the pandemic. The materials that ABC+ provided and the training knowledge and skills teachers gained are valuable in learning recovery programs. As explained by a teacher, "ABC+ is very relevant, and it is what we need right now [learning recovery]."

#### **RELEVANCE: EVALUATION QUESTION 2**

*To what extent has ABC+ contributed to improving early-grade literacy, the better transition of reading ability to Filipino and English, more solid acquisition of foundational math concepts and skills, and improved social and emotional learning for children in the early grades (kindergarten to Grade 3) in the Philippines?*

**Improving early-grade literacy and the better transition of reading ability to Filipino and English.** The data presented could be more nuanced for transitioning reading skills to Filipino and English. Due to the learning gap incurred during the pandemic, the data imply that much of the reading skills described by informants are only for the mother tongue and Filipino, and transitioning the reading skills from the mother tongue to the second language will be taken care of after establishing foundational reading skills.

Survey results show that 80 percent of teachers in all the target regions feel that ABC+ initiatives have been instrumental in improving early-grade literacy instruction. These findings are supported by qualitative data where informants described ABC+ as their "partner" in literacy teaching. Figure 1 above unpacks the extent of ABC+'s contribution to literacy improvement across individual, institutional, and organizational levels.

ABC+ initiated collaboration with parents by capacitating home learning partners (HLPs) for remote learning and using SRMs that targeted literacy development. For teacher training, informants identified the content on pedagogy and technology use as crucial topics that improved their reading instruction. Teachers reported that the provision of literacy instructional materials improved their literacy

instruction because materials were accessible via the Learning Resource Portal and were ready to print and easy to use. One informant shared that “learning became easier for children because of the materials provided by ABC+.”

At the institutional level, ABC+ contributed to school programs supporting literacy, learning continuity and recovery, materials development and distribution, and assessment-informed instruction. ABC+ contributed to school programs by providing teacher training and materials.

The most significant ABC+ contribution was its support of learning continuity and recovery. A teacher shared that ABC+ helped them design and implement an especially relevant intervention during learning recovery because there were so many non-readers. This effort to focus on fundamental skills such as literacy skills for learning recovery aligns with the World Bank’s Reach, Assess, Prioritize, Increase, Develop (RAPID) Framework for learning recovery<sup>8</sup>, and the National Learning Recovery Plan was presented in DepEd’s Basic Education Report 2023.<sup>9</sup>

On materials development and distribution, ABC+ assistance supported teachers’ skills development in materials writing and evaluation or quality assurance. Moreover, SRMs, which are leveled readers in the local language, help children practice their reading skills and develop an interest in reading. From a target of 576 titles, ABC+ produced 1,402 titles of EGR materials. These materials were made available to 750,479 learners (from a target of 523,201).

Schools implemented assessment-informed instruction through ABC+’s provision of the comprehensive rapid literacy assessment tool, which diagnosed learners’ reading skills and provided guidance for differentiated instruction tailored to learners’ diagnosed reading levels. Starting with an assessment to inform recovery learning intervention is consistent with the World Bank’s RAPID framework to regain learning lost during the pandemic.

ABC+’s collaboration with teacher education institutions (TEIs) resulted in the establishment of a pre-service course in literacy instruction. Through this partnership, ABC+ prepared pre-service teachers (including current and incoming teachers) early on for reading instruction.

Collaboration with the community involving the barangay, the police, private radio stations, and others provided the wraparound support needed to ensure learning continuity. The barangay and police helped ABC+ and partner schools deliver instructional materials to learners, while the partnership with radio stations enabled the broadcasting of lessons. ABC+ also initiated meetings to establish memorandums of agreement between schools and some stakeholder groups to ensure learning continuity. Meetings initiated by discussions paved the way for some stakeholder groups to express their commitment to supporting school programs.

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<sup>8</sup> World Bank, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, FCDO, UNESCO, UNICEF, and USAID. 2022. Guide for Learning Recovery and Acceleration: Using the RAPID Framework to Address COVID-19 Learning Losses and Build Forward Better. Washington, DC: World Bank.

<sup>9</sup> Duterte, S.Z. (2023). *Basic Education Report 2023* [PowerPoint slides]. Department of Education. Office of the Secretary, Philippines.

1. Some of the following unexpected outcomes emerged from ABC+ activities:
2. Teacher training and materials development produced a ripple effect. FGD informants from Regions V and VI said that trained teachers went on to train intermediate-grade teachers in their school and early-grade teachers in other schools. One teacher informant shared that the training has “enriched [me]...in so many ways,” She planned to cascade these skills with other teachers in the Division.
3. FGD informants reported that learners at home used the materials that ABC+ produced, unlike the pre-pandemic practice where children were not allowed to bring home instructional resources. An informant from Region V shared that “learning became easier for children through the materials provided by ABC+.” Informants explained that materials benefited not only the learners but also their siblings and parents, some of whom had been illiterate and learned to read along with their children through the materials. An informant from Region VI said that “parents learned together with their kids” and that “illiterate parents were able to learn through reading materials put up [made available through hubs] in sitios and haciendas.”
4. In Region V, informants shared that schools reproduced ABC+ materials. Any excess they received was shared with other schools, so schools beyond partner schools also benefited.

**Developing a more solid acquisition of foundational math concepts and skills.** Although literacy has traditionally been ABC+'s primary focus, numeracy development is also becoming an additional target since it has been identified as a skill for which children likewise need help. However, the project's numeracy focus has been initiated only recently.

In 2021, ABC+'s efforts to improve numeracy began with research in collaboration with the University of the Philippines National Institute for Science and Mathematics Education Development (UP-NISMED). The study looked into the state of early-grade math instruction, and results were shared with DepEd. Based on the research results, math instruction pivots based in the research results were designed, piloted, and evaluated. In 2022, ABC+ conducted teacher training on numeracy in Regions V and VI (Teacher Training 1). Consultations with the Early Numeracy Technical Working Group began, and Teacher Training 2, which trained participants to connect formal and informal mathematics for children, was conducted in Regions V and VI. Math instructional strategies in the two regions were piloted by distributing ABC+ home learning resource kits that included materials for numeracy and learning action cell modules on early-grade mathematics.

Survey findings show that five out of ten teachers in the regions reported moderate ABC+ contributions to developing math skills. These contributions were reported on training, materials, and program support. These findings are validated by a comment shared by a Region VI informant at the evaluation team's online Results Validation Workshop with DepEd. The informant explained that more activities on developing numeracy could be organized in the following stages of implementation.

Activities for developing mathematics skills were only recently implemented, and their impact will only be noticed after some time. Informants shared that numeracy materials developed are slated for

distribution to partner schools soon. Training support was scheduled for late 2022 at the time of this evaluation. This training involves integrating vital instructional strategies and collaborative lesson planning, which will be demonstrated to children or peers and revised based on trainer feedback. Class observations for developing numeracy skills are also scheduled for early 2023.

**Improving social and emotional learning.** ABC+ integrated efforts to strengthen socio-emotional learning (SEL) through instructional leadership training, believing that school leaders are critical in fostering learning environments that encourage SEL. The ABC+ Quarter 3 report states that the training taught DepEd leaders to foster conditions resulting in a positive learning environment. The training provided resources and toolkits that featured SEL in school management and showed supervisors and school heads how to integrate SEL and GESI into their school programs and interventions. The report also noted that ABC+ embedded SEL in SRM development by featuring an SEL orientation and workshop in materials and training. Moreover, SEL messaging was strongly encouraged in the themes of produced SRMs. Teacher Training 2 also taught teachers how to integrate SEL/GESI themes in book selection and other class exercises.

Based on the survey of teachers, ABC+ helped in improving learners' SEL to a large extent. Almost eight out of ten teachers in BARMM stated this was the case, while nearly six out of ten Regions V and VI teachers expressed the same. Qualitative data show that ABC+ helped improve SEL among learners through teacher training, which taught strategies for this.

However, teachers' explanations of SEL integration in surveys and FGDs were mainly about the values inculcated in learners through SRMs. They explained that SRMs helped in learners' value formation. According to teachers, "Children learned moral lessons and applied these to their life." Given the cessation of classroom face-to-face instruction during the pandemic, it appears that values in SRMs became the primary source for SEL integration. Future training on SEL can be used to check the depth and accuracy of teachers' understanding of SEL integration, and actual SEL integration can be monitored and confirmed in face-to-face classes.

#### **RELEVANCE: EVALUATION SUB-QUESTIONS**

Program evaluation on relevance has two sub-questions: one is about the inclusion and implementation of GESI, and the other is on whether ABC+ considered the capabilities and capacities of recipients in response to the changing context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

#### **Sub-Question 1.1**

*How did ABC+ incorporate GESI analysis? To what extent has ABC+ implementation supported GESI?*

Surveyed teachers claimed that ABC+ training helped them integrate GESI into their instruction. Annex 13 shows that almost eight out of ten teachers in BARMM stated that ABC+ contributions in their GESI integration were helpful to a large extent. In comparison, nearly six out of ten teachers in Region V and VI evaluated ABC+ initiatives as useful to a great extent. While these data are favorable, teachers from

Region V and VI could be further supported in the following years of program implementation so that more teachers in these areas could integrate GESI into their instruction.

At the individual level, ABC+ incorporated and promoted GESI through training that developed teachers' and HLPs' awareness of the concept. At the institutional level, the contribution of ABC+ GESI training was manifested in GESI integration in the SRMs that teachers and writers developed and in teachers incorporating GESI in their instruction. One informant explained that featuring different tribes, different colors, and skin "was a way of supporting GESI." Another informant said ABC+ training "made the teachers aware of gender stereotypes or potentially discriminating ideas in pictures and words in books given to learners." Informants also explained that the provision of materials and activities that benefited struggling and special learners provided a means of living up to the principles of social inclusion.

Another informant expressed that their improved awareness of gender stereotypes has also influenced how they assign tasks to learners. One informant said, "girls are not the only ones asked to sweep the floor. Even boys are asked to sweep the floor."

## **Sub-Question 1.2**

*Did ABC+'s design and implementation consider the available capability and capacities of the recipients (individuals and organizations) and responses to any change in context (e.g., public health emergency such as COVID-19)?*

The most significant change in context that the ABC+ program had to adapt to was the COVID-19 pandemic. Indeed, ABC+ made several adjustments in consideration of the capabilities and capacities of recipients in the face of COVID-19. All adjustments were due to the prohibited or restricted face-to-face interactions, which were most strict in early 2020. Though program activities had to be conducted remotely, ABC+ continued its activities by adapting to restrictions on physical interactions. The instructional and technological support provided by ABC+ aligns with World Bank's RAPID framework for learning recovery and DepEd's Basic Education Report 2023, particularly the advice to increase the efficiency of instruction by supporting teachers through upskilling in technology used for remote learning. Key project pivots included the following:

- Because there was no face-to-face training and physical contact at the onset of the pandemic, ABC+ provided pre-training orientation on the technology used to prepare partners for online training platforms.
- ABC+ also provided communication and Wi-Fi (internet) support or allowance to beneficiaries to ensure they could sustain online training participation.
- ABC+ reached out to recipients, monitored their progress, and sought to identify concerns through online means (virtual chat groups, emails).
- ABC+ utilized an adaptive training schedule that accounted for teachers' busier schedules and other pandemic-related concerns. Training activities were made more flexible because they could be completed online or offline.

- ABC+ provided modules and materials for the training to give teachers more time to prepare.
- ABC+ also provided a longer time to finish training outputs.
- Eventually, some areas accommodated limited face-to-face training, allowing ABC+ to conduct onsite training only with smaller groups of trainees and with adjustments to fit into the “new normal” setup. Health protocols were followed strictly during training, and onsite COVID-19 testing was conducted to protect the health of participants and staff.
- Because a limited number of people were available to help with materials distribution, and due to limited transportation resources, ABC+ collaborated with the community, like the barangay and the police, for systematic distribution of materials from schools to the houses of learners to ensure the continuity of learning activities.

#### KEY MESSAGE ON RELEVANCE

The emerging key message on relevance is that ABC+ teacher training, materials development, and community collaboration efforts played a crucial role in capacitating schools to ensure learning continuity during the pandemic. With ABC+ support, partner schools' learning continuity and recovery efforts would have been unrestricted and less than optimal in terms of timeliness, efficiency, and quality.

#### CONCLUSIONS ON RELEVANCE

1. ABC+ provided a complete and streamlined package of activities spanning teacher training, materials development, and system capacitation that was highly relevant to DepEd policies and programs, particularly on learning continuity and learning recovery. While other programs typically target only one goal, ABC+ recognized the value of the relationship among training, materials, and the overall system and worked on all three seamlessly and simultaneously. The efficient streamlining is seen in the complementary design and activities for teacher training, materials development, and system capacitation.
2. ABC+'s highest level of support went toward literacy instruction. This affirms the achievement of the program's primary goal, which is to improve children's literacy skills. Initiatives for the three IRs benefited the improvement of children's literacy skills.
3. ABC+ initiatives for developing numeracy skills have just started and have yet to mature. Learners' mathematics skills are expected to improve once initiatives are implemented more fully.
4. SEL integration was more evident in developed materials than in instruction, possibly due to the absence of face-to-face instruction. Now that learners and teachers are back in their physical classrooms, the effects of initiatives on SEL integration in teaching can be monitored and enhanced.

## RECOMMENDATIONS ON RELEVANCE

1. ABC+ and DepEd could help regions give ideas to enhance or contextualize national or regional policies that ABC+ already supports. Data revealed that due to partner schools' confidence in ABC+ support, some regional policies that involved only literacy had been expanded by partners to include numeracy. Some policies were also enhanced in terms of budget allocation. Processes for initiating these local policy enhancements can be shared with other regions through fora or meetings so that other regions can also identify local policies that can be enhanced or further contextualized.
2. ABC+ may assist schools in disseminating best practices, especially in implementing recovery programs concentrating on literacy development. Findings show that some partner schools in Region V have developed implementation efficiency and achieved targeted literacy outcomes for their learning recovery programs. Schools can be supported in creating platforms for disseminating or sharing good practices, such as school visits for benchmarking or an online or F2F forum or presentation.
3. Because numeracy instruction is designed to be a pilot model that will support the plan for developing a National Framework on Numeracy, ABC+ may strategically develop and design a supplementary framework that targets numeracy instruction in the key stages. This framework may emerge from the lesson development and implementation with UP-NISMED as their partner institution.
4. ABC+ and DepEd regional office could bolster efforts for SEL integration, especially in the instruction of Region V and VI teachers. Generally, findings showed teachers' explanation of SEL integration was limited to values development via SRMs. This may have been due to the absence of opportunities to implement SEL integration in F2F classes. With the resumption of F2F classes, teachers' accuracy of understanding SEL integration can be checked in their class instruction, and appropriate training can be offered based on class observation data. While Regions V and VI data show that the extent of the help of ABC+ training for SEL integration was achieved to a great extent, these results (57.8 percent for Region V and 59.5 percent for Region VI) are much lower compared to BARMM's (72.9 percent). F2F class observations can help determine the training support needed to help teachers in these regions increase their level of SEL integration.

## EFFECTIVENESS: EVALUATION QUESTION I

*To what extent did ABC+ achieve its outputs and outcomes in the three IRs on improved early-grade instruction and delivery, improved access to quality materials, and improved education capacity and commitment to manage and implement interventions supporting early-grade instruction?*

Answering this question required assessing whether ABC+ produced the intended outputs and outcomes. The main unit of analysis measures achievement, underachievement, or overachievement in the three IRs.



## IR 1: IMPROVED EARLY-GRADE INSTRUCTION AND DELIVERY SYSTEMS

Table 2, which depicts ABC+'s sub-IRs for IR1, shows that only six out of thirteen key performance indicators (KPIs) were completed under IR 1.1. These were mostly on capacity building of teachers, school heads, and faculty from teacher education institutions.

There is an overachievement for one KPI for IR1.2. The overachievements in some of the KPIs in IR.1.1 and one KPI in IR1.2 were connected to pivots to virtual training, which reached more than the expected number of teachers and school heads. Many teachers were reached and the training approach during the pandemic was effective, as reflected in Annex 13-Table 21, where 94.2 percent of the participant ratings indicated that ABC+ contributed to their instructional practices. However, the effectiveness of ABC+'s professional development programs cannot be measured because classroom observations to assess teachers' application of skills have not started yet. Thus, there is no data to confirm whether the intended outcome of teachers delivering quality instruction is consistent with the training and materials received. If classroom observations are not happening soon, teachers might forget what was taught to them. The time component of teaching, where learners and students interact, is essential to achieve the learning outcomes of improved early-grade instruction.

The outcomes for sub-IRs 1.3 and 1.4 (related to math instruction and differentiated instruction, respectively) will be needed until year three of the program to mature. However, preparatory activities such as pilot and evaluation of innovations in mathematics are already achieved but still need to be adapted for broader application. The numeracy support program was only recently implemented, and results to date are moderate. According to the course leader on numeracy, several teacher training courses have been conducted and, in Program Year 3 (PY3), there will be a collaborative development of numeracy lessons and implementation for students or teachers. Although it is a pilot model for numeracy instruction, it is hoped that their effort will gain traction as the program matures.

**TABLE 2. EXTENT OF ACHIEVEMENT IN IR1**

SUB-IRs	EXTENT OF ACHIEVEMENT
Sub-IR 1.1: Early-grade instructional practices for mother tongue, math, and SEL improved	Overachieved (six KPIs)
Sub-IR 1.2: School heads and district and division supervisors' capacity to support and monitor instruction improved	Overachieved
Sub-IR 1.3: Innovations in math instruction piloted, evaluated, and, as appropriate, adapted for broader application	Progressing
Sub-IR 1.4: Innovations to support differentiated instruction piloted, evaluated, and, as appropriate, adapted for broader application	Progressing

## IR 2: IMPROVED ACCESS TO QUALITY MATERIALS

There is overachievement in three out of the four sub-IRs of IR2. IR2 has 75 percent progress and the most significant number of outcomes achieved (Table 3).

**TABLE 3. EXTENT OF ACHIEVEMENT IN IR2**

SUB-IRs	EXTENT OF ACHIEVEMENT
Sub-IR 2.1: Capacity to develop leveled, mother tongue supplementary <sup>10</sup> reading materials improved	Overachieved (six KPIs)
Sub-IR 2.2: Capacity to develop and provide materials supportive of students' SEL improved	Overachieved
Sub-IR 2.3: Capacity to ensure the ongoing provision of learning resources for grades K–3 developed	Progressing
Sub-IR 2.4: Functionality and usability of the learning resources portal improved	Progressing

Sub-IR 2.1. refers to improved capacity to develop leveled materials (i.e., reading materials specially designed for different reading skills or grade levels), and sub-IR 2.3 refers to the ability to ensure that the provision of learning materials is continued. The data for sub-IR 2.1 from the program’s Qualitative Data Report on Achievements shows that the distribution of produced leveled readers for primary and pre-primary grade learners has exceeded targets. For primary learners, the report states that as of Quarter 4 of Year 3 of program implementation, 496.5 percent of the learners targeted have already received decodable, leveled SRMs against a target of 95 percent. The percentage of pre-primary grade learners that received leveled readers has also surpassed the mark of 95 percent as early as Year 2 of program implementation. The percentage of primary grade learners that received leveled readers continues to rise until Year 3 of implementation. Based on these data and the quick rate of materials production, sub-IR 2.3 has also been overachieved, as implementers have ensured the ongoing provision of materials and have exceeded targets.

Sub-IR 2.2 pertains to developing materials that support SEL integration. While reports indicate that leveled readers have been developed and distributed to children, no available data specifically refer to SEL integration in these materials. However, the implementing partner confirmed that materials development always considered SEL integration, which was part of the process. This means that each material they produce is designed to promote SEL integration. The increased availability of future data may enable a better evaluation of the project's performance in terms of SEL integration and effectiveness.

Finally, sub-IR 2.4 pertains to the improved functionality and usability of the learning resource portal. The program set a target of 20 percent of teachers meeting expectations for this result. By Quarter 4 of Year 3 implementation, this target has been over-achieved, with 27.5 percent of teachers being registered and meeting expectations.

**IR 3: IMPROVED EDUCATION SYSTEM CAPACITY AND COMMITMENT TO MANAGE AND IMPLEMENT INTERVENTIONS SUPPORTING EFFECTIVE EARLY-GRADE INSTRUCTION**

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

Table 4 shows that against a performance target of 36, ABC+ supported 38 parents-teachers associations or community-based governance structures exceeding the level of expected accomplishment in IR 3.5. Specifically, it shows significant progress (82 percent) in the number (294 out of 360) of parents or community members trained to support children’s education. While sub-IR 3.1 is progressing and 3.2 is overachieved, sub-IRs 3.3 and 3.4 are still underachieved, at 40 percent and 22 percent, respectively. These sub-IRs refer to the number of LGUs with targeted allocations to support learning in grades K-3 and the number of private sector partners supporting evidence-based EGR interventions. One possible explanation for the underperformance could be the diversion of funding and other resources to respond to community health crises brought about by COVID-19.

**TABLE 4. EXTENT OF ACHIEVEMENT IN IR3**

SUB-IRs	EXTENT OF ACHIEVEMENT
Sub-IR 3.1: Policies to support MT instruction and provision of learning resources are effectively implemented	Progressing
Sub-IR 3.2: DepEd capacity and commitment to using data to inform decision-making for budgeting, targeting resources, communicating and monitoring expectations, and implementing improvements in early-grade instruction reinforced	Overachieved
Sub-IR 3.3: LGUs and local stakeholders mobilized to support and sustain ABC+-introduced improvements in early-grade instruction	Underachieved
Sub-IR 3.4: Private sector engagement increased in support of ABC+-introduced improvements in early-grade instruction	Underachieved
Sub-IR 3.5: Parent and community involvement in supporting early-grade learning increased	Achieved

**EFFECTIVENESS: EVALUATION SUB-QUESTIONS**

Program evaluation on effectiveness has three sub-questions. The results for two questions are presented here: one investigates which IRs contributed the most to the learning outcomes and the other looks at unintended outcomes brought by COVID-19.

**Sub-Question 2.1**

*Which of the three IRs contributed the most to improving EGR, math, and social and emotional skills for children in the early grades (kindergarten to Grade 3)? What were the explanatory factors, if any, for achievement, overachievement, and underachievement or non-achievement?*

IR2 (provision of learning materials and resources) contributed the most to the access of quality materials to the EGR and SEL skills of children in grades K–3. IR2 has an estimated 75 percent progress achievement from the KPIs as it has the most significant outputs and outcomes achieved during the ABC+ implementation. Testimonials from interviews with key informants and FGDs with participants from varied backgrounds indicate 43 percent progress against its target. Accessible and quality materials as the output were effective in supporting the beginning reading skills of K–3 learners during remote learning. This ensured more opportunities to practice reading various reading titles. SRMs were produced in two languages: the children's mother tongue and the Filipino language. Home learning partners and teachers whose mother tongue differs from the one used in the reading materials can still teach the learners because of its Filipino translations.

Qualitative data from KIIs also showed that learners benefited the most in this program (n = 55, 100 percent), which is connected to SRMs under IR2. An analysis of harvested outcomes also validates this. Results show that most outcomes about learners' improved reading skills correspond to ABC+ interventions (Annex 7). For example, ABC+ activities such as the production of learning guides and SRMs, delivery of materials to schools and HLPs, books received by schools and HLPs, school heads training teachers on the development of SRMs, teachers trained how to conduct a proper read-aloud lesson, and most importantly the learning recovery plan contributed to the improved learning outcomes of K-3 learners. Specifically, the delay in reading abilities of K-3 learners was accelerated in the LRP of ABC+ and host regions. This is very evident in OH data of one teacher where learners were already observed reading out loud in the fifth week of the program instead of on its eighth week: *“Nakikita na ang progress sa mga bata kahit five weeks pa lang. Kasi ito ay total ng eight weeks. Iyong nakakarecover, nakakapagbasa na. Nakakabasa na iyong umulit ng Grade 2 modular instruction.”* (Even if we are only in the fifth week of the program, we can now observe the progress of learners. This [learning recovery plan] runs for eight weeks. Learners recover and can read texts. Those who were part of the modular instruction in Grade 2 and were not promoted to Grade 3 can now read in the classroom).

However, some challenges were observed. For instance, not all schools have sufficient library space to store some SRMs for classroom use, and some schools lack libraries. Many teachers constructed dedicated reading and numeracy corners in their classrooms. Classrooms, including libraries, are often prone to typhoons, floods, landslides, and fires. Given the limited capacity of teachers, school personnel, and most especially, limited Maintenance and Other Operating Expenses from DepEd, every school faces challenges in protecting and providing space to store SRMs properly.

Despite the challenges posed by the pandemic, the ABC + program remained effective in improving early-grade literacy and achieved its target outcomes.

**Ability to adapt quickly.** The program was highly responsive to the needs during implementation and adjusted its initial intervention plan to provide appropriate and relevant activities during the pandemic. These strategies were effective and useful to the target stakeholders, making the teachers' “presence”

felt in the learners' homes. The Regional Director of DepEd Region V said, “Strategies formulated by ABC+ helped the region bridge the learning gap during the pandemic. The strategies such as blended learning, use of technology, and home learning guide for home learning platform were successfully applied amid the challenging situation”.

ABC+ materials enhanced the reading of learners, including their siblings. Initially, the goal was to produce and distribute 8,608,310 materials, but to date, 11,634,849 EGR materials have been made and distributed to K–3 learners. The principal of Montes II Elementary School of Iloilo City Division stated in her interview: “ABC+ materials are very timely during the pandemic, especially that we have distributed it to our children that helped and enhanced them in their readings not only to our learners but also to their brothers and sisters at home.”

In the FGDs, informants explained that ABC+'s SRMs contributed to literacy because they are in the local language, which parents could understand and explain to their children. The materials were also developed according to grade levels and were aligned with DepEd's Most Essential Learning Competencies. Teachers reported that materials “strengthened children's reading comprehension, widened their vocabulary, and developed their fluency.”

ABC+ also strives to complement the government's policy direction and, to this end, complements program implementation with efforts to advocate for the program to LGUs/DepEd to generate ownership among stakeholders. At the Results Validation Workshop with DepEd, one informant said that the produced SRMs in the local language were very helpful in developing children's reading skills that their school has decided that they will continue to use the SRMs even if DepEd had ordered the discontinuation of the teaching of the mother tongue as a language subject.

**Facilitative and collaborative.** ABC+ strengthened the collaboration between home and school by engaging HLPs and community members to partake in the program. ABC+ also gained the DepEd's trust in the process of program implementation. According to the DepEd Region VI Education Program Specialist, MTB- MLE and Filipino Coordinator-Curriculum and Learning Management Division Regional Office, “ABC+ is facilitative and collaborative. They provided budget support and training and also selected the right people to partner with us. Hence, despite the pandemic, ABC+ still achieved its outcomes. ABC+ has gained the full support of the leaders in the regions.”

**Continued/sustained monitoring during the pandemic.** Consistent program monitoring at all levels ensured that activities were on track and the program delivered its outputs. While in the middle of the pandemic, the program shifted to utilizing online platforms to achieve its objectives. “Even during the pandemic, ABC+ is still highly effective because of the dedication and hard work of the project staff of ABC+. They were persistent in following up/monitoring. They won't stop until work is done,” according to a Roxas City Focal Person.

With the return of in-person activities, program effectiveness should continue relatively quickly. The Schools Division Superintendent of Maguindanao II Division thought they should “only rate four out of five on the effectiveness since the implementation is still halfway.”

Similarly, according to the Assistant Schools Division Superintendent, Special Geographic Area Division, MBHTE of BARMM, “Strategies must be implemented in a F2F setting. If you want to see the effectiveness of the strategies, it should be done face-to-face. Some strategies require a teacher knowledgeable on how to conduct the activity.”

Sub-Question 2.1

*Have there been any outcomes brought by COVID-19 in implementing ABC+ that would tell us whether the program improved early-grade instruction and delivery, improved access to quality materials, and improved education capacity and commitment to manage and implement interventions supporting early-grade instruction?*

There are two parts to the section of this sub-question. First are the results of outcomes harvested from evaluation participants, and the second is the selected most significant change story.

The OH method defines an outcome as a change in an individual, group, community, organization, or institution’s behavior, relationships, actions, activities, policies, or practices. It could also be an unexpected or unintended demonstrated change in awareness, knowledge, or skills, collaborative effort, or the use of knowledge or innovative solutions. Outcomes might also describe unexpected or unintentional, more profound institutional changes relating to policy, citizen engagement, government accountability, and organizational arrangements. The evaluation team asked key informants and FGD participants to describe what they perceived as the outcomes for each IR and ABC+’s contributions. Since ABC+ is only approaching its fourth year, the OH focused only on the project's processes and how they affected its inputs and outputs.

Figure 2 presents the harvested outcomes associated with the three IRs. These outcomes include intended and unintended outcomes expressed by the participants during the OH and MSCT workshops.

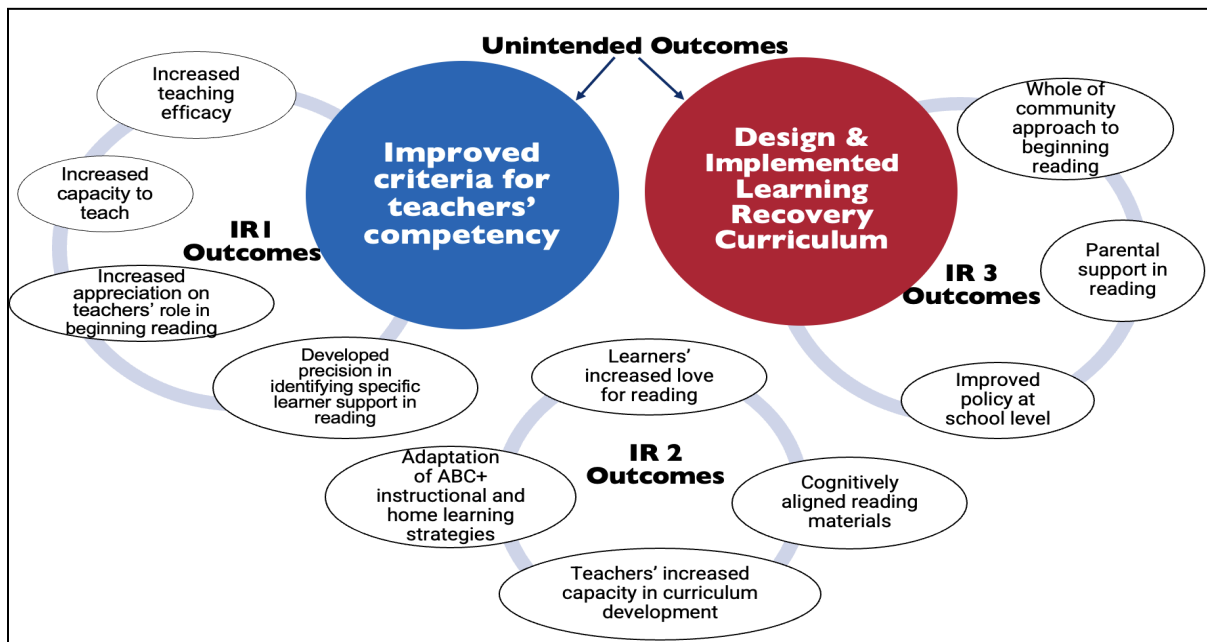


Figure 2. Verified Harvested Outcomes Per IR

Figure 2 shows that the harvested intended outcomes in IRI are increased teaching efficacy, increased capacity to teach, increased appreciation of teachers' role in beginning reading, and developed precision in identifying specific learner support in reading. This can be attributed to the various teacher training that ABC+ delivered to the recipient schools across covered regions, cultivating confidence, competencies, and strategies among teachers in teaching literacy to K–3 learners.

One of the FGD participants praised the quality of the program's materials and training: "The materials distributed to the school were beneficial in teaching reading, especially the picture book for the kinder. The teachers benefited from the training. They were refreshed with the strategies and techniques in teaching reading."<sup>11</sup>

In IR2, the evaluation team confirmed four intended outcomes: learners' increased love for reading, an adaptation of ABC+ instructional and home learning strategies, teachers' increased capacity in curriculum development, and cognitively aligned reading materials. This supports ABC+'s provision of contextualized and developmentally appropriate SRMs to K–3 learners (access and use of materials), capacitation of HLPs (training of parents and guardians on how to teach their children at home), and capacitation of teachers (training, workshops, and monitoring).

In IR3, the harvested intended outcomes are improved capacity at the school level, parental support in reading, and a whole community approach to beginning reading. The harvested outcomes can be attributed to the expressed support and involvement of various stakeholders, awareness, and capacity building of parents and other community members in reading practice, the commitment of multiple stakeholders to monitoring, and the support of the ABC+ program to DepEd policy.

Two significant unintended outcomes emerged towards the end of PY3. These are improved criteria for teachers' competence (IR1) and the learning recovery curriculum (IR3).

Improved teacher competence was not brought about by the pandemic but was a positive outcome. The development of MTB-MLE-based instructional materials was added as a criterion for K–3 teachers' competency for professional promotion. ABC+'s materials workshops helped regional DepEd leadership realize the importance of materials development and the corresponding value of capacitating teachers. Teachers can earn a professional promotion by being involved in developing or producing MTB-MLE instructional materials. A materials development focal person reported this as a welcome recognition of their efforts and an additional motivation to keep producing leveled local SRMs.

The strategies at the K–3 level of the learning recovery plan developed and initiated by DepEd Region V were influenced by instructional practices that ABC+ introduced during teacher training 1 and 2. As a partner of DepEd Region V, ABC+ provided critical technical inputs to the region's learning recovery plan and program, also known as the Recovering for Academic Achievement by Improving Instruction

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<sup>11</sup> The program used the 5Ts framework (Teach, Time, Text, Tongue, and Test) as a scientific approach to teaching reading in the early-grades. Details of this approach are further discussed in the value-added discussion at the end of this section. This unique and novel approach still needs to be employed by the host regions before ABC+.

through Sustainable Evidence-based learning (RAISE) program. Part of the RAISE plan was to start the school year with an eight-week learning recovery curriculum, focused solely on directly supporting learning remediation and intervention on literacy and numeracy for Grades 1–3. ABC+ developed the assessment tools and capacity building for teachers using the said tools.

These two unintended and significant outcomes ensure that the outcomes outlined in the theory of change will be fully achieved in two years because they are integrated into the host institutions’ policies and are connected to the ABC+ program.

#### BOX 1. MOST SIGNIFICANT CHANGE STORY

One of the intended outcomes of ABC+ is the whole community approach (upper portion of IR3). This outcome connects to the emerging most meaningful change story that underwent three selection levels, titled “Nothing is Impossible for the Learning of Children” by a Master Teacher from Region V.

The story was chosen because it illustrates the classic adage, “It takes a village to raise a child.” The story cuts across the intermediate results (IRs) of ABC+ and captures all its goals. The story was about reading materials and, just as equally, about training and systems ability.

It tells the story of a teacher empowered by ABC+ training. The teacher extended her initiative to develop children’s literacy by becoming an advocate and engaging the community to launch a literacy project during the pandemic. According to one story selector, “It is a complete story since it captures several activities...it captures what has been happening on the ground, it captures the series of pivots and innovations, and it is the story of the two years of learning during the pandemic” and, ultimately, presents the fruit of the activity (see Annex 22 for the actual story).

Analysis showed that ABC+ influences the story because of the training received by the teacher. Two levels of program recipients were seen, the individual (teacher) and the community. Also, there are two types of changes (outcomes). These are changes in behavior (an initiative of the teacher) and changes in the community’s activity (provision for learning home library).

In summary, although ABC+ activities underwent several pivots, most harvested outcomes were aligned with the intended outcomes outlined in the theory of change. And as planned, these contributed to early-grade instruction.

### Sub-question 2.3

*How has ABC+ contributed to enhancing policies on EGR instruction and learning outcomes in kindergarten to Grade 3?*

ABC+ enhanced three types of policies: 1) strengthening data-driven planning and investment programming through strengthening the assessment systems for Grade 1–3 learners, 2) multi-stakeholder sectoral planning to improve education financing for early-grade learning, and 3) contextualization of policy.

**Strengthening data-driven planning and investment programming through strengthening the assessment systems for Grade 1–3 learners.** ABC+’s introduction/co-development of the Comprehensive Rapid Learning Assessment (CRLA) tools with DepEd Region V, VI and selected Maguindawan-speaking districts in BARMM paved the way to creating a systematic data dashboard that enabled the teachers to quickly identify learners who are eligible to undergo designed remedial intervention strategies based on their learning needs.

Region V has begun incorporating CRLA results as one of the key performance indicators in their quarterly Monitoring and Evaluation sessions. In Region VI, CRLA was instrumental in profiling learners



and data-driven interventions. According to Region VI Focal Person, non-readers in Filipino and English languages decreased - “Profiling of learners to make materials and training for teachers suited to students were created from the CRLA. Non-Filipino readers dropped from 34.3 percent to 11 percent, and non-English readers dropped from 14.8 percent to 6.6 percent.”

Schools then continued bridging the learning gaps by maximizing CRLA results in formulating plans and activities even after concluding the 8-week DepEd Regions V and VI curriculum. status of K

#### BOX 2. BENEFITS OF CRLA

CRLA has proven effective in reporting class, school, and regional data on the status of K-3 reading skills. It allows educators to identify children’s reading levels and inform instructional decisions and interventions quickly and easily.

One of the key benefits of CRLA is its effectiveness in reporting data at various levels. For example, a teacher can determine her students’ reading levels at the beginning of the school year. This data can then be aggregated to provide a picture of the reading skills of the entire class. Similarly, data from multiple classes can be combined to provide an overview of the reading skills of an entire school. This data can then inform decisions about curriculum, instructional strategies, and interventions. Data are also collected mid and the end of the school year. This provides information on the progress of reading skills of K-3 learners based on the visualized data.

Another benefit of CRLA is the ease with which data can be visualized. It collects and analyzes data, displaying the results in an easy-to-understand format. This makes it easy for educators, administrators, and policymakers to quickly identify trends and patterns in the data at division and regional levels.

The most significant benefit of CRLA is its scalability. It is technology-based and uses Looker Studio, which can be availed for free via a web browser (Google Chrome). Hands-on training related to its use is easy to learn by teachers, supervisors, and regional coordinators.

**Multi-stakeholder sectoral planning to improve education financing for early-grade learning.** ABC+ introduced a model for sub-sector planning called the multi-stakeholder local education sectoral mechanism (ESM). ESM was designed to strengthen the existing policies and practices relating to decentralized planning and financing for early-grade education by LGUs and DepEd regions and division offices. ABC+ introduced a structured, standardized process and tools/rubrics for determining the gaps along the three areas of access, quality, and governance and facilitated the prioritization of programs, projects, and activities (PPAs).

Some of these priority PPAs were considered in the LGUs’ Executive-Legislative Agenda and School Education Fund, thus contributing to improving learning outcomes and strengthening the link between DepEd and LGUs. These DepEd and LGU partners include those in Tabaco City, Legazpi City, Negros Occidental, Antique, Capiz, and Sorsogon.

**Contextualization of policy.** Regions contextualized the National Policy on Bawat Bata Bumabasa (3 Bs) by localizing the 3Bs in their policy/program. To date:

- Region V spearheaded the Bawat Batang Bikolano Bihasang Bumasa (5Bs)
- Region VI has its Pagbabasa ng may Unawa Nakatutulong Labanan ang Agam-agam (PUNLA)
- BARMM has a Bawat Batang Bangsamoro Bumabasa at Bumibilang (5Bs) program.

The National Memorandum prompted the contextualization of policies that established a standard school-based reading program that responds to improving learners' reading challenges. Region 5 ABC+ Focal Person explained: "In Region V, we created 5Bs or the *Bawat Batang Bikolano Bihasang Bumasa* (Every Bikolano Child Reads Very Well), before the pandemic, to respond to 3Bs with a focus to establish standards for schools for implementation of school-based programs in implementing the reading program."

ABC+ uses a whole community approach to the early-grade instruction ecosystem. This approach added three micro-ecosystems: teacher education institutions, local government units, and home learning partners. In this ecosystem, the roles of this micro-ecosystem became explicit in ABC+. For example, in teacher education institutions, the courses offered did not have existing modules for their pre-service teachers. ABC+ helped the faculty in charge of courses write and produce the Beginning Reading and Literacy Development modules. The home learning partners were guided on how to use the home learning modules for K–3 learners. A case study in Albay Central School describes this whole community approach.

Additionally, ABC+ used core elements—the 5Ts of Teach, Time, Text, Tongue, and Test—found to improve early-grade literacy instruction and learner outcomes. These provide structure to this reading intervention and ensure the approach is inclusive.

During the complex pandemic context, ABC+ effectively used 3Ts: Text (SRMs), Tongue (mother tongue-based materials), and Test, which supported incremental progress for K–3 learners.

For teachers and school heads, the training component, which is the teaching part of the model, deepened pedagogical knowledge and increased teaching efficacy about MT as a separate subject.

Classroom observations on how teachers apply skills from the training to help learners read have yet to be possible due to the pandemic and remain an urgent concern for the full achievement of the program goal.

The last T – Test - has a significant contribution as well but must be fully understood by the entire system using the suggested approach of the evaluation team - the use of 3Ds (Data, Discourse, and Design). Data should be continuously generated via tests, discourses on the implication of the data should happen at all levels, from regional to classroom levels, and design how resources (e.g., human, financial) may be used to improve EGR.

#### BOX 2. ABC+ PROGRAM IN ALBAY CENTRAL SCHOOL (REGION V)

In 2019, ABC+ was introduced to Region V and Region VI and selected the Maguindanan-speaking district in BARMM. The program, primarily in partnership with the DepEd, aims to improve basic literacy skills in the early grades (K–3), focusing on three IRs: IR 1: Improve early-grade instruction and delivery systems, IR 2: Increase access to quality, leveled, locally developed supplementary reading materials to support early literacy, and IR 3: Support the enabling environment by improving education system capacity and commitment to manage and implement interventions supporting effective early-grade instruction.

The alignment of the ABC+ program to the DepEd policies proved mutually reinforcing, providing credibility to the various program activities, which optimized the implementation of the existing DepEd policies on literacy, specifically in the native language. The national memorandum on 3Bs, *Bawat Bata Bumabasa*, was contextualized by Region V into 5Bs (*Bawat Batang Bikolano Bihasang Bumasa*) along with the implementation of the eight-week learning recovery program to address learning

losses. As soon as Region V adopted the ABC+ program, many schools immediately implemented and supported it, including Albay Central School (ACS), one of the pioneer schools under the Legazpi City Division. ACS is currently notable for its exemplary performance across the three IRs.

The Training of Trainers (TOT) and teacher training designed by ABC+, DepEd, and the National Educators' Academy of the Philippines strengthen teaching skills and strategies on how to teach the mother tongue to early grades. The need for teacher training emanated from research-based data and assessments. Teachers diligently adopted the teaching strategies and teaching processes, including integrating gender equality and social inclusion, and social-emotional learning. During the COVID-19 pandemic, they learned how to utilize and navigate different platforms and made the teaching-learning experience more fun and effective amidst the pandemic. The skilled trainers or the TOT inspired and motivated teachers to perform and show their commitment to improving their teaching. In addition, the schoolteachers were also trained to utilize their dashboard to conduct systematic assessments using the Comprehensive Rapid Literacy Assessment, which then served as their basis for data-driven interventions.

ABC+ provided supplementary reading materials (SRMs) to support early-grade literacy (i.e., wordless, decodable, and leveled readers in English, Filipino, and MT small and big books) for K–3 learners. With the support of the barangay and volunteer parents, ACS was able to collaborate and orient the six catchment barangays to the program and distribute SRMs. While one barangay among the six catchment areas could put up a community learning hub, others established reading centers, which benefited not only the learners but also illiterate community members. “The reading materials provided by ABC+ enhanced their interest in reading, which made it easier for the kids to understand the lessons,” a parent explained.

Some teachers and parents encountered difficulties translating mother tongue words due to multiple variations of the Bikol language. Some K–3 teachers lacked confidence due to their infrequent use of Filipino and English. A supervisor-teacher-parent support system was developed through the virtual platform to support them. School coordinators became more responsive to the needs of the teachers and students in implementing Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education. The intensified monitoring was also vital in ensuring that activities were on track and facilitating proper rollout to the target partners/participants.

ABC+ and the ACS principal and teachers engaged the community, including home learning partners, municipal/barangay LGUs, and non-government and government organizations, to improve early-grade literacy despite the school closure. Education partners were able to augment educational resources during the implementation of the program by reproducing and distributing SRMs.

In addition, the LGU of Legazpi City leveraged support through the School Education Fund. With the help of ABC+ and the collaboration with DepEd and other stakeholders, the whole of community approach successfully promoted early-grade literacy. ABC+'s support system played a significant role in improvements in early-grade literacy. The region regarded the ABC+ program as highly responsive to the educational challenges brought by the pandemic, and DepEd Region V was, therefore, very supportive and committed to sustaining what ABC+ started.

## KEY MESSAGE ON EFFECTIVENESS

Following the evaluation criteria on effectiveness, the emerging key message in this evaluation parameter is that even in the context of the pandemic, ABC+ used an agile program model, which allowed for positive results. It quickly adjusted to ensure that intended outputs and outcomes will be achieved. Although some activities were delivered in an alternative format, there is still fidelity to the program design. Outcomes of ABC+ are starting to surface incrementally, especially since face-to-face classes are now in full swing.

## CONCLUSIONS ON EFFECTIVENESS

ABC+ activities on professional development for teachers, school heads, and supervisors, production, and access of quality SRMs that can be publicly shared, and technical assistance on the learning recovery plan were instrumental in catching up with the reading delays of K-3 learners brought about by the pandemic. The ABC+ efforts on the DepEd system's capacity to strengthen the use of assessment data are very helpful in monitoring children's reading outcomes.

- From the qualitative findings and secondary quantitative data from participant feedback, it is clear that the ABC+'s provision of contextualized, localized, age and developmentally appropriate

SRMs; capacitation of home learning partners on how to teach their children at home; and teachers' capacitation on designing and implementing early-grade instruction using the science of reading, workshops, and monitoring together are helping the learners to read in their mother tongue and even in the Filipino language.

- From the harvested outcomes, it can be concluded that the unintended outcome brought by COVID-19 is the learning recovery plan. This plan contributed to improved instruction and access to quality materials. Regional focal persons, supervisors, school heads, teachers, and MTB-MLE coordinators collaborated on an eight-week recovery plan to ensure that K-3 students could catch up and recover their learning losses in reading skills. This catch-up strategy was supported technically by ABC+.
- The evaluation team concludes that ABC+'s contribution to enhancing policies was observed most in curriculum development and assessment at the K–3 levels. For the curriculum development, this was evident in the budgetary support of ABC+ in the production of SRMs and the learning recovery plan for students to catch up on their reading losses brought on by the pandemic. For the assessment, the CRLA was very helpful in monitoring children's reading outcomes and how they can be addressed. Data dashboards showing children who can read were effective in the host regions ensuring that technical support was given to schools in need. Further, the institutionalization of these policies was observed to be a top-down approach, where the regional office provides the implementing rules applied to the classroom level. Specifically, Region V has begun incorporating CRLA results as one of their key performance indicators in their quarterly Regional and Division Monitoring Evaluation and Adjustment sessions.

## RECOMMENDATIONS ON EFFECTIVENESS

On the effectiveness of capacity development for teachers, school heads, and supervisors and the effect of SRMs on improving reading of learners in their mother tongue, Filipino, and even in the English language, the following recommendations are addressed to ABC+, DepEd-Regional and Division Office, National Educators Academy of the Philippines (NEAP), and the LGU:

### I. ABC+ could:

- gather real-time data on teachers' abilities to implement the 5Ts of teaching to understand better actual teaching and learning practices in K–3 instruction. This is better done via classroom observations in the three regions; and
- add training and technical assistance on research in instructional differentiation and focus on the transition of ownership of the program to host institutions and organizations.

For the first recommendation, a research write-shop where K–3 teachers are taught how to design and implement research may increase teaching reading efficacy and, at the same time, provide classroom research evidence on the effectiveness of ABC+. For the second recommendation,

efforts should be made to institutionalize improved literacy training for teachers and, at the same time, encourage host institutions to commit to the continuous production of quality SRMs.

2. DepEd-Regional and Division Offices could provide financial and technical assistance for teachers to continue applying what they learned from the teacher training. This, in turn, will serve as a refresher approach, as most of the training was conducted during the height of the pandemic. Locally trained ABC+ facilitators may include this in their monitoring and evaluation activities in their regions and divisions.
3. The NEAP could continue exploring a training design and schedule to support and cater to teachers' needs, situations, and well-being. While several pivots have been made from the original training design to cater to the evolving circumstances of teachers during the pandemic, participants relayed some additional suggestions in training design and schedule. They expressed the need to moderate the number of training tasks/assignments so that they can rest at night. Training also must consider that training participants regularly do other jobs as teachers. Finally, while online data allowance was provided, some teachers had to travel to a more urbanized part of their area to access stable Wi-Fi connections, incurring added cost of transport.
4. Since SRMs from IR2 contributed the most to learning outcomes, space should be allocated to store them in safer places. Collaborating with provincial, municipal, and even barangay offices and officials is imperative to address challenges in keeping quality SRMs. School heads and teachers could seek help and request a library room or building to store all the SRMs safely. Some schools do not have printers or photocopying machines to reproduce SRMs in case schools need extra or additional copies. Schools that lack printers or copy machines to produce SRMs should be given a more significant budget by their LGU to ensure that copies of SRMs are readily available; this would be particularly important for schools with no access to the internet. Finally, the private sector and LGUs could help transport SRMs for remote storage.

On the contribution of the learning recovery plan as the unintended outcome:

1. ABC+ assists schools in disseminating best practices, especially in implementing recovery programs concentrating on literacy development. Findings show that some partner schools in Region V have developed implementation efficiency and achieved targeted literacy outcomes for their learning recovery programs. Schools can be supported to create platforms for sharing good practices, such as school visits for benchmarking or an online/F2F forum or presentation; and
2. Because numeracy instruction is designed to be a pilot model that will support the plan for developing a National Framework on Numeracy, ABC+ can strategically use this as an opportunity to develop and design a supplementary framework that targets numeracy instruction in the key stages. This framework may emerge from the lesson development and implementation with UP-NISMED as their partner institution.

On enhanced policies on curriculum development and assessment at the K–3 levels, the evaluation team recommends that ABC+ help regions disseminate ideas to strengthen or contextualize national or

regional policies that ABC+ already supports. Data revealed that due to partner schools' confidence in ABC+ support, some regional policies that involved only literacy had been expanded by partners to include numeracy. Some policies were also enhanced in terms of budget allocation. Processes for initiating these local policy enhancements can be shared with other regions through fora or meetings so that other regions can also identify local policies that can be enhanced or further contextualized.

**SUSTAINABILITY: EVALUATION QUESTION**

*Will the achievements in improved early-grade reading, math, and social and emotional skills for children in early grades persist after the project's conclusion?*

To gauge if the achievements in improved early-grade reading, math, and social and emotional skills for children will persist beyond the project, the sustainability milestone of ABC+ was reviewed and analyzed based on the findings and core principles of sustainability, namely: human, economic, social, and environment.

**Midline Sustainability Analysis.** The Years 1–5 plans were revisited, including the IRs and KPIs,<sup>12</sup> to decide if the set goals were achieved and, if not, what alternative plans of action were made to achieve the goals (unexpected outcomes). A plan of action (i.e., local strategies and activities spearheaded by DepEd and ABC+ in collaboration with stakeholders) was undertaken in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Indeed, the pandemic was a great challenge to ABC+ and DepEd to ascertain the program's sustainability from the program's start-up to midline evaluation because ABC+ has a limited timeline of five years.

**Early Grade Literacy Ecosystem towards Sustainability**

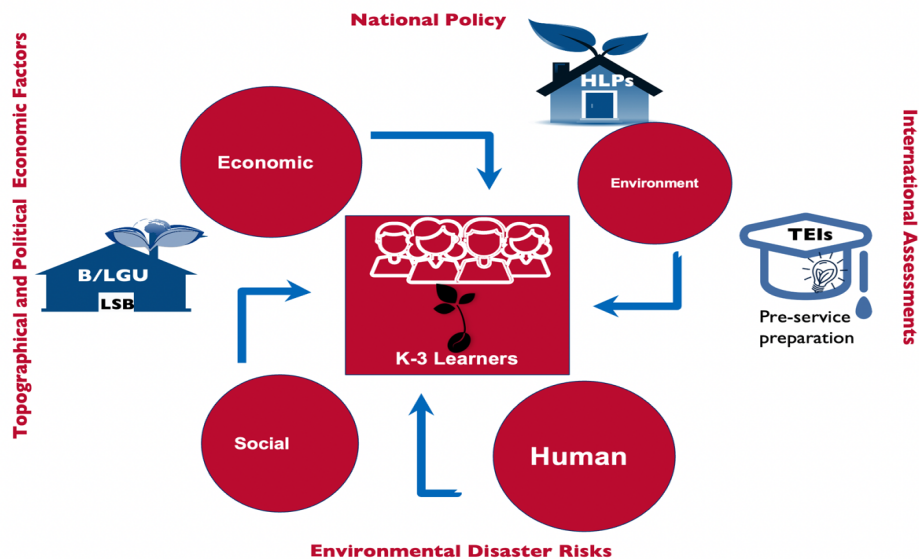


Figure 3. Early-grade Ecosystem Toward Resilience and Sustainability

<sup>12</sup> Research Triable Institute, ABC+ Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Plan, 2019

Figure 3 shows the early-grade ecosystem toward resilience and sustainability during the implementation of the ABC+ program amidst the pandemic. ABC+ and DepEd collaboration and partnership with agencies and community to promote and achieve target early-grade literacy is about core principles of sustainability (i.e., human, social, economic, and environmental).

In the human aspect of sustainability, the project supplied technical assistance for teachers through focal persons (the proper communication and monitoring of expectations from division to school) and training of trainers (technical assistance from the regional level to division and district levels). The continuous implementation of physical and online learning to learn about and develop adaptive teaching strategies and classroom assessments also contributed to sustainability. Furthermore, the pre-service training preparation given by the identified TEIs in their respective region continuously contextualized the development of teaching and learning materials based on context. Training pre-service teachers is a succession model for DepEd in-service teachers to guarantee many well-trained in-service teachers.

The social aspect of sustainability is manifested through partnerships with HLPs and community stakeholders (i.e., B/LGU, NGOs, the private sector, etc.). ABC+ trained parents and community members/volunteers from barangays who will serve as a trainer of trainers to promote and use Parents and Community Session Guides to build the capacity of the parents and community members (i.e., barangay-based organizations of youth, the elderly, women, parents volunteers, and barangay officials and volunteers). In addition, ABC+ partnered with the Department of the Interior and Local Government Academy (DILG-LGA) to develop a model for Early-grade Literacy education governance to capacitate local communities.

The economic aspect of sustainability is seen in the continuous production, printing, and usability of quality-assured SRMs and the accessibility of platforms such as TV, radio, and social media. Inventory of equipment for all the schools managed by the LGU will provide helpful information to decide which schools require an additional budget for the production and supply of SRMs to ensure that the reading practices of K-3 learners are well supported.

ABC+, DepEd, and NEAP utilized cost-effective strategies: 1) the use of CRLA to develop Learning Recovery programs and Literacy Developments programs in three regions (Regions V and VI and BARMM); 2) the migration of modules from the Teacher Professional Development programs to DepEd Professional Development and Learning Management System, making them more accessible to many; 3) continuous development of SRMs that have been stored to the Learning Portal for future utilization; and 4) the use of Learn Kernel<sup>13</sup> as another intervention for ABC + Beginning Reading Program.

The environmental aspect of sustainability refers to creating safe learning spaces like community reading centers, learning hubs, and reading and numeracy corners inside the classroom. ABC+ supported DepEd to establish and gain support from the local community and mobilized them to develop learning hubs and

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<sup>13</sup> A Learn Kernel is a rechargeable, tablet-like device that functions even without internet access, which many educators believe is ideal for use in remote and rural communities.

community reading centers/learning centers to create a good learning environment. Inclusivity and building resilience also contribute to sustainability, mainly by protecting the learning resources developed. It is also important to acknowledge the role of all stakeholders, from top agencies down to grassroots levels, given the numerous challenges such as environmental disaster risks (climate change, typhoons, flooding, landslides, earthquakes, and volcanic eruptions), as well as geographic and political-economic factors (far and remote school, limited livelihood, malnutrition among learners).

Based on the evaluation data, the team found sustainability mechanisms that will likely support improved EGR and literacy beyond the program’s life. See Table 6.

**TABLE 6. ABC+ AREAS OF ACHIEVEMENT AND IDENTIFIED SUSTAINABILITY MECHANISMS**

INTERMEDIATE RESULTS	ACHIEVEMENT OF ABC+	SUSTAINABILITY MECHANISM
IR 1	Capacity development for teachers	Training by NEAP and commitment of teacher trainers to continuously adapt ABC+ instructional strategies
IR 2	Quality-assured SRMs	License attribution of the SRMs is under creative commons
IR 3	Precision in assessment, formation of sectoral educational management, and robust community support system	Use and functionality of CRLA in communicating and monitoring. The Mandanas-Garcia Ruling Parent-Teacher Community Association Involvement

Under IR1, collaboration with NEAP is an excellent mechanism to adapt the ABC+ program continuously. Many teachers appreciated ABC+ training, which helped them improve their literacy instruction. Informants explained, “The Professional Development Information Technical Assistance provided for NEAP is a good start, and DepEd is adopting the system.” Another informant stated, “The training is NEAP-certified and Philippine Regulatory Commission-recognized. One of the directions is to build up the capacities of the division trainers of Negros Occidental and other Schools Division Offices so that they will be given NEAP-Regional recognition as Regional Learning Facilitators on the ABC+ training program and other programs intended for K-3 teachers.” Based on these statements, ABC+, in collaboration with NEAP, showed significant improvement in teacher professional development. At the same time, ABC+ focal persons, teachers, and informants saw the long-term importance of capacitating the teachers through professional development. The instructional approaches and strategies they acquired through training were of immense help to them as a teacher and for improving early-grade literacy.

Under IR2, the creative commons as the license attribution, where program recipients may distribute copyrighted SRMs freely, were helpful to many teachers and parents. Teachers could easily access and reproduce the SRMs. Likewise, parents recognized the value of these learning materials. During the KII, one of the informants stated, “In the future, we can sustain the ABC+ development materials,” while another mentioned that “I printed out reading materials and let the students read them; if they were able to read the materials, I gave them stamps depending on the number of words they’ve read.”



Under IR3, teachers and school heads proved the remarkable functionality of CRLA in many participating schools from Regions V and VI and selected school districts in BARMM. If this initiative introduced by ABC+ in collaboration with DepEd continues, this would be a positive indication of the program's sustainability.

Given the relevance of the policies and effectiveness of training, teaching, and learning materials, how to continuously finance the program will be one of the biggest challenges after the conclusion of the ABC+ program. DepEd adaptation and mainstreaming of ABC+ interventions would ensure their inclusion in the DepEd and local government budgets and their sustainability. Based on evaluation team findings from FGDs and KIIs, ABC+ and DepEd strengthened the ongoing collaboration with provincial, district, and municipal education committees to gain financial support for training and SRM production and distribution. The education committee from the governor's and members of Congress' offices supported ABC+ and DepEd's efforts to distribute and raise funds for the program. In addition, the local school board offers assistance to schools and learners through the Mandanas-Garcia ruling by giving more funds to improve school facilities and infrastructure. NGOs, alumni, and other stakeholders provided financial support and in-kind donations such as printers, bond papers, photocopying machines, small and big books, and other school supplies and kits.

During the school closure brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, education leaders experienced limited manpower. In response, ABC+ and DepEd worked with the Parent-Teacher Community Association (PTCA) to mobilize volunteer parents, youth organizations, NGOs, and B/LGU to assist schools in reproducing and distributing learning materials. The continuous aid of PTCA, especially during the pandemic, is another robust sustainability mechanism to ensure achievements in improved early-grade reading and SEL continue. Parents, teachers, and community efforts were crucial because they directly interacted with learners. Teachers could guide parents on how to teach their children at home.

In regions V and VI, teachers, through FGDs, and school heads, through surveys, expressed their readiness to continue ABC+ activities after the project ends. Teachers articulated that they learned more strategies during the training and recognized the support of the ABC+ program. Furthermore, the survey shows that more than 50 percent of the participants answered, "strongly ready" and "ready." See Annex 13 for more detail.

**Identified Successful Elements towards Sustainability.** Teachers' and school heads' responses to the survey aligned with the identified successful elements towards sustainability, such as 1) continuous support and institutionalization on contextualized policies and memos and collaboration with stakeholders (internal and external) through MOAs and MOUs, 2) established functional data-driven planning and investment programming through strengthening the assessment systems, 3) consistent and continuous development and production of quality assured SRMs, 4) continuous innovation, implementation and monitoring of innovative programs on literacy with GESI and SEL, 5) continuous innovation in the teacher training/professional development and making it meaningful to teachers, and 6) continuous support for teachers to improve learners' performance, a promising indication that program interventions and achievements might continue after ABC+ closes out.

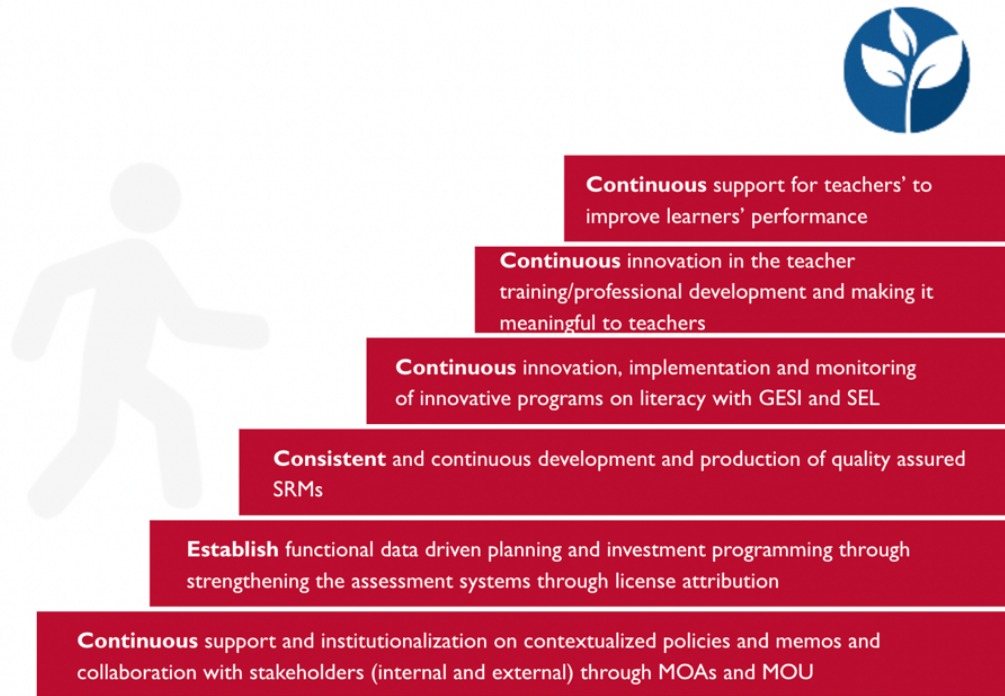


Figure 4. Successful Elements Toward Sustainability

The stairs in Figure 4 represent the elements of sustainability wherein the first step is considered the first element. This creates chain reactions to achieve sustainability of the ABC+ program. Once the agencies or organizations establish collaborative relationships, the intervention only needs continuous support and institutionalization of relevant contextualized policies and memos. Partnerships with external stakeholders and the private sector through Memorandums of Agreement/Understanding (MOA/MOU) were also great support systems. One of the key informants in Region VI stated, “Our mayor also pledged his support. LSB (Local School Board Development) funds were used as well. Signed proposal for training of teachers and parents on the proposed remedial instruction, as ideas came from the ABC+ project.”

Once policies and memos are in place, other elements will follow, such as: established functional data-driven planning and investment programming through strengthening the assessment systems through license attribution (assessment tools were ready and in place and matched with teaching and learning materials); continuous development and production of quality-assured SRMs; continuous innovation, implementation, and monitoring of literacy programs that integrated GESI and SEL at the onset; continuous innovation in teacher professional development and making this meaningful to teachers; and continuous support for teachers to improve learners’ performance.

*How did ABC+ strengthen local ownership and leadership on the enhanced instruction and learning outcomes in kindergarten to Grade 3?*

The peak of the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in school closures across the country. The pandemic hurt the entire education system, more specifically, its delivery. However, despite experiencing various calamities and disasters, many educators were able to innovate through technology and local communities were capacitated to provide additional support. ABC+ and DepEd central office collaborated with various local agencies on how to continue education and work around the barriers brought on by the pandemic.

As shown in Figure 5 below, DepEd regional offices could contextualize policies through memos disseminated to school divisions to innovate programs and adapt them to their context and pandemic restrictions. One of the education leaders stated, “At our level, this provided us guidance that aside from the regular work, we need to include certain activities in the budget to ensure continuity of the interventions.” This informant also noted that they “consider that newly hired teachers and teachers assigned to kindergarten to Grade 3 classes should receive the Teachers Training 1 and 2 as part of their induction program.” Each school was able to implement innovative school activities based on the needs of the learners and parents through the support of the local community.



Figure 5. Strategies and Activities that Strengthen Local Leadership and Ownership Toward Sustainability

ABC+ assisted and capacitated communities through diverse local activities, as shown in Figure 5. The following activities strengthened local ownership toward sustainability:

1. Establishment of an enhanced support system of stakeholders where the barangay LGU, through the local school board ensures an ample School Education Fund.
2. Partnership with the DILG-LGA to develop modules to capacitate communities for early-grade learning education governance.

3. Linkages and partnerships with the private sector and NGOs in the form of cash and in-kind donations help improve facilities and infrastructure to support the reading literacy program;
4. Engagement with HLPs, which led to the construction of barangay reading centers and parent volunteers, and guiding volunteer parents in the delivery and distribution of modules during school closures;
5. Conduct regular home visitation and organizing of physical and virtual group study and buddy systems to continue and reinforce the ongoing literacy program; and
6. Increasing teachers' awareness led to guiding the parents on how to help their children read. Some parents and guardians were encouraged and supported to become teacher/parent volunteers to help develop home-based and community-based supplemental learning materials.

The reflected and observed strategies and activities concurred with the survey result on the extent to which ABC+ activities involved community stakeholders (i.e., LGU, NGO, etc.) to improve early-grade instruction. Almost 50 percent of the participants (school heads) responded to this statement with “to a great extent” or “moderate extent.”

#### KEY MESSAGE ON SUSTAINABILITY

Based on the collected data and reviewed documents on ABC's sustainability milestones, the critical indication of sustainability is the resilience built during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic through the commitment of all education stakeholders, from DepEd to HLPs in the community. This was made possible because of ABC+ initiatives and collaboration that focused on the following: 1) consistent and continuous capacitation of teachers, including monitoring and evaluation using accessible technology; 2) continuous innovations in teaching and learning modalities; and 3) continuous robust support system provided by various stakeholders to sustain ABC+ program interventions even after its project conclusion.

Given the limited funds and human resources of several schools, DepEd and ABC+ collaboration with other government agencies, private sector, and community stakeholders is an excellent means to achieve continuity of the designed training program (i.e., pre-service and in-service), reproduction and distribution of SRMs, and improvement of physical infrastructure and facilities. These are future strategies that can be explored. Enhancing literacy achievement is not limited to curriculum and the four corners of the classroom; instead, it goes beyond “schooling.” It is what we call “community,” a living laboratory for and of learners where each member of the whole community plays a significant role.

#### CONCLUSIONS ON SUSTAINABILITY

The achievements in improved early-grade reading and social and emotional skills for children in early grades will likely continue after the ABC+ project conclusion because of the identified mechanisms and elements that have been employed toward the achievement of sustainability. The sustainability mechanisms include 1) training by NEAP and commitment of teacher trainers to adapt ABC+ instructional strategies continuously, 2) license attribution of the SRMs is under creative commons, 3) use of CRLA in communicating and monitoring, 4) the Mandanas-Garcia Ruling, and 5) PTCA involvement.

The successful elements of sustainability are:

1. continuous support and institutionalization of contextualized policies and memos and collaboration with stakeholders (internal and external) through MOAs and MOUs.
2. established functional data-driven planning and investment programming by strengthening the assessment systems;
3. consistent and continuous development and production of quality-assured SRMs;
4. continuous innovation, implementation, and monitoring of innovative programs on literacy with GESI and SEL.
5. continuous innovation in the teacher training/professional development and making it meaningful to teachers; and
6. continuous support for teachers to improve learners' performance.

The community's resilience, the adaptation of DepEd, ABC+, and other agencies to deliver education amidst the pandemic, and constructive collaboration through collaboration with TEIs, LGU, NGOs, and other stakeholders in the community also contribute to sustainability. However, there was limited collaboration with the private sector, as indicated in the five-year sustainability milestone of ABC+.

At the regional level, ABC+ and DepEd collaborate with TEIs to train pre-service teachers in preparation for their in-service tasks to support and continuously improve early-grade literacies (i.e., reading and numeracy). ABC+ established local ownership and leadership, resulting in various innovative strategies and activities based on the needs and conditions of the communities. Adapting the whole community approach helped education leaders, teachers, parents, and learners build resilience to sustain the community's practices on literacy. The concept of the whole community approach is firmly anchored on the core principles of sustainability (i.e., human, social, environmental, and economic).

## RECOMMENDATIONS ON SUSTAINABILITY

To sustain the ABC+ program,

1. ABC+ could:

- assist DepEd in scaling up collaboration with the private sector to outsource funds for the continuity of the ABC+ program while transitioning for PY 4-5 and before its conclusion.
- strengthen collaboration with TEIs in the region through MOA/MOU to prepare and train future in-service teachers to promote and support early-grade literacies for PY 4-5.
- encourage active participation of volunteer parents, youth organizations, and other willing individuals in the community during the school learning action cell session for PY 4-5.
- collaborate with schoolteachers to do action research focusing on classroom and community-based reading literacy and numeracy for future reference and create an additional action plan toward sustainability PY 4-5.

2. The DepEd-Regional and Division Office could support teachers, students, community volunteers, and HLPs' resilience through contextualized well-being mechanisms such as counseling, open dialogue, psychosocial training, and distributing well-being flyers, PY 4-5.

3. The DepEd-Central Office could:

- adopt enhanced institutionalized policies on using CRLA as an assessment and educational sector management tool at the national level. ABC+ provided technical support on early-grade-related policies to Regions V and VI. Education policies related to MTBMLE were effective, and this may work in other regional contexts; and
- collaborate with LGUs on the process needed to enable annual education financial review and to plan to sustain the needs in achieving continuous improvement on early-grade literacy.

4. The LGU could:

- assist DepEd in sustaining the financial needs of the ABC+ program by allocating additional funds to the following: teacher training, technology transfer capacity building program for school personnel, implementation and monitoring of the program, maintaining barangay reading centers and learning hubs through HLPs, and SRM production and distribution in PY 4-5; and

- collaborate with LGUs and local stakeholders to mobilize, support, and sustain the established program. Given the limited human and financial resources of numerous schools in regions V and VI and selected schools in BARMM, especially in remote areas, educational public-private partnership is crucial to learn the program's sustainability before and even after its conclusion.

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