



Testing an approach to distance professional development in Senegal: Summary of pilot results and recommendations

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Context and Rationale

In July 2020, the USAID Lecture Pour Tous program supported Senegal's Ministry of Education to pilot a distance learning approach to providing continuous professional development (CPD) to early grade reading educators. The purpose of the pilot was to assess the feasibility and applicability of self-guided distance professional development for teachers at public school and instructors at *daaras* (Quranic schools) and their coaches (school directors and *daara* resource persons, respectively), as well as school inspectors, that could be used on a wider scale in the country.

The rationale for developing and piloting distance professional development focused on early grade reading was three-fold: (1) to address ongoing constraints associated with bringing together large numbers of educators for in-person training due to the COVID-19 crisis; (2) to identify a lower-cost alternative to in-person CPD; and (3) to provide more opportunities during the school year for educators to build their knowledge and skills through peer learning and interactions with coaches.

About Lecture Pour Tous

The USAID-funded Lecture Pour Tous (LPT) program supports the Ministry of Education in Senegal to improve reading outcomes in three national languages for students in Grades 1-3 through an explicit, systematic, and evidence-based approach to instruction. Lecture Pour Tous is contracted under USAID/All Children Reading. The initiative is implemented in six regions (Diourbel, Fatick, Kaffrine, Kaolack, Louga, and Matam) from October 2016 through July 2021. To learn more about Lecture Pour Tous, visit

<https://www.usaid.gov/news-information/videos/lecture-pour-tous-helping-all-children-read-senegal>

Information is also available in French at <https://www.usaid.gov/fr/news-information/videos/lecture-pour-tous-aidant-tous-les-enfants-%C3%A0-lire-aus-%C3%A9n%C3%A9gal>

Lecture Pour Tous Distance CPD Approach

The new distance CPD approach was informed by several factors. This included the technology currently accessible to participants (mobile phones, text messaging and/or access to WhatsApp), as well as likely to be available in the future, and factors related to the feasibility and cost of implementation on a wide scale, both during and following the conclusion of the Lecture Pour Tous program. Time needed to develop and deliver content also was considered. Finally, the approach also aimed to encourage interaction among peers, as well as between teachers and their coaches.

Four CPD modules, each targeting a specific topic previously identified for in-service training, were developed for the pilot, one module for teachers and *daara* instructors for each grade level: *Cours d'initiation* (CI, equivalent of Grade 1); *Cours préparatoire* (CP, equivalent of Grade 2), and *Cours élémentaire, première année* (CE1, equivalent of Grade 3), as well as one module for coaches on how to provide remote coaching support.

Each module, which was implemented over 10 days, included background information about the topic, reflection questions, activities (such as a case study), and opportunities for teacher interaction (via WhatsApp discussions around guided prompts) and between teachers and their coaches, whether in-person at the school or via distance (telephone calls, SMS or WhatsApp messages). The modules were distributed to teachers in PDF format via WhatsApp. An SMS message with a link to the module on the Lecture Pour Tous website, which is embedded in the Ministry of Education's website was sent to each participant.

Research Questions and Pilot Methodology

The Lecture Pour Tous distance CPD pilot focused on three key research questions, specifically:

1. What is the feasibility of providing distance professional development for teachers, *daara* instructors, coaches (school instructors and *daara* resource persons), and school inspectors?
2. What are the experiences of teachers, directors, and inspectors implementing the new distance professional development approach?
3. What conditions need to exist for educators to effectively participate in a distance professional development?

To answer these questions, Lecture Pour Tous identified a convenience sample of three existing school clusters, or *cellules d'animation pédagogique* (CAP), one each in the regions of Kaolack, Fatick, and Matam. The predominant language in each CAP was, respectively, Wolof, Seereer, and Pulaar, the three national languages the program uses for early grade reading instruction. A fourth cluster of *daaras* from multiple regions was also identified to participate.

In total, 91 teachers, *daara* instructors, and coaches were identified to participate in the self-guided distance learning, which took place over two weeks. During implementation, Lecture Pour Tous staff assisted participants in accessing content and gathered monitoring data.

Directly following the conclusion of the implementation period, the program conducted a participant survey via telephone using a standardized questionnaire. Eighty-five (85) of the 91 participants were reached by telephone. Lecture Pours Tous also gathered feedback from school inspectors and program staff involved in the pilot. Data was captured via SurveyCTO and analyzed using SPSS statistical software.

Pilot Findings

An analysis of data gathered via the participant surveys found the following related to module accessibility; appreciation for content and activities; and interaction among teaches and between teachers, *daara* instructors and their coaches.

Accessibility. Of 85 teachers, monitors and coaches interviewed, 74 (87%) reported they were able to access the modules, almost exclusively via WhatsApp on a smartphone. Nearly two-thirds (61%) reported some difficulty accessing content (due to poor Internet connection or issues downloading the video), with challenges being most pronounced in Matam. Of the 74 people who accessed the modules, 73 participants reported they completed at least one part of a module.

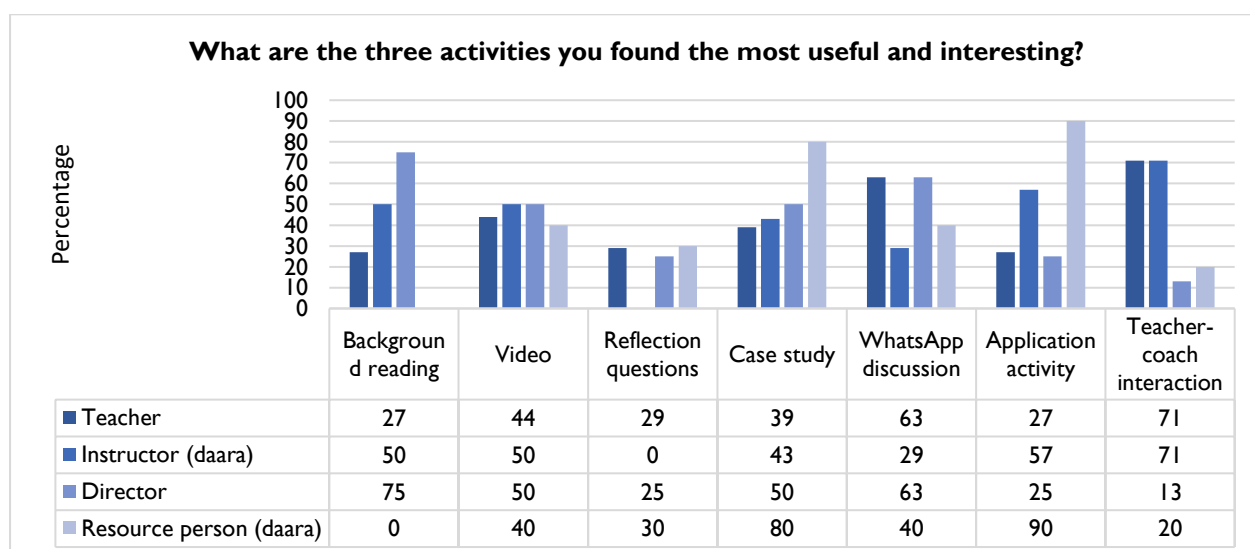
Content. Survey results indicate that most participants found CPD content and activities pertinent and useful to their work (see **Table 1**). Overall, 90% of those who engaged in a module reported that the content was clear and comprehensive. Most participants also felt the content would allow them to improve their instruction. Nearly all teachers, monitors, and coaches (97%) felt they could apply the content in their class.

Table 1. Participant feedback on distance CPD content

Participant type	Number/ % of respondents	Most of the content was clear & understandable	The content was sufficient to help me improve instruction	I feel I can apply content in class	Total
Teacher	N	35	36	40	41
	%	85%	88%	98%	100%
Daara instructor	N	13	14	13	14
	%	93%	100%	93%	100%
Director (coach)	N	8	8	8	8
	%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Daara resource person (coach)	N	10	10	10	10
	%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Total	N	66	68	71	73
	%	90%	93%	97%	100%

Activities. Overall, participants reported that the interaction between coach and teacher was the most useful and interesting, with 58% of participants who engaged with a module ranking it among their three favorite activities (see Graph 1). Coach-teacher interaction was closely followed by the WhatsApp group discussion (which 54% of participants ranked as one of the three activities that was most useful and interesting), the case study activity (46%) and watching the video (46%). Fewer participants indicated the background information and the reflection questions were among the three activities they found most useful and interesting.

Graph 1. Participant preferences for CPD activities



Some noteworthy differences emerged among participant groups with respect to which activities they liked the most. For example, 63% of teachers ranked the WhatsApp discussions as one of the activities they found most interesting and useful, compared to only 29% of *daara* instructors, a difference likely related to the existence of teacher WhatsApp groups prior to the pilot. Another noteworthy difference: The activity focused on applying what participants learned ranked among the top three activities by 27% of teachers compared to 57% of *daara* instructors, and 25% of coaches who are school directors compared to 90% of coaches who are *daara* resource persons. The difference in the perceived utility of

this activity may be due to the fact that *daara* instructors and resource persons were more appreciative of application activities because they have not previously had sustained access to such professional development resources.

Teacher-coach interaction. Almost all teachers interacted in some way with their coaches, with only two reporting they did not (one due to coach illness). In alignment with directions in the module, 71% reported sending an SMS to their coach, and 66% reported receiving an SMS from their coach. Importantly, 63% of teachers reported they sent their coach information on the activity they chose to demonstrate how they would apply what they had learned, and that they received feedback. Other forms of interaction between teachers and their coaches included group discussions and in-person discussions. Most coaches—92%—reported they had an “excellent” or “good” experience during the FAD pilot.

Future participation in distance CPD. Overall, nearly 90% of those who engaged in a module indicated they would recommend distance CPD (85% of teachers and 79% of monitors). All coaches (school directors and *daara* resource persons) said they would also participate again.

Lessons Learned and Recommendations

The research findings suggest the following lessons learned and recommendations for continued implementation of distance CPD:

- **Distance CPD is feasible to implement with certain conditions in place.** In Senegal, content can be widely distributed and received via WhatsApp, with provision of hard copies (paper) to each school recommended to address gaps (e.g., some participants lack appropriate device, have poor Internet access and experience difficulty reading material on smartphones).
- **Peer interaction is highly valued by teachers.** The study showed that participants greatly appreciated exchanges organized on WhatsApp, an increasingly common means of communication in the country. Use of WhatsApp can be further enhanced to make it an effective tool for synchronous and asynchronous exchanges between peers.
- **Coaching is an essential element of distance CPD.** Both teachers and coaches indicated it was one of the activities they appreciated the most. Teacher-coach interactions can be strengthened through better orientation of coaches to distance coaching.
- **Content can be improved to make it easier for everyone to learn.** Participants noted specific areas for refinement and revision. For example, text readability needs to be improved, while new approaches to delivering content (such as audio files) could be added.
- **Ongoing monitoring, evaluation and research should be conducted.** As distance CPD expands in the coming year, assessing participant knowledge and skills, and whether educators are successfully applying what they learned in the classroom will be important to informing ongoing design and implementation.
- **System-wide support and motivation for participation is essential for success.** The mobilization and involvement of institutional actors at the central and decentralized (regional and departmental) levels are essential for future distance CPD. Processes and personnel are also needed to provide ongoing support with respect to both content and technology. Educators also underscored the need for financial or non-financial forms of motivation to encourage their participation.

To respond to a variety of needs—from COVID-19 disruptions to the adoption of new and diverse instructional approaches—distance CPD offers an important opportunity to increase access to continued professional development that is sustainable and relevant. The results of this research show that distance learning is feasible and can be successfully implemented, while at the same time providing new opportunities for peer learning and teacher-coach interaction.