

Case Study from DRC

Integrating Family Life Education into Distance Learning during COVID-19 Closures

Background

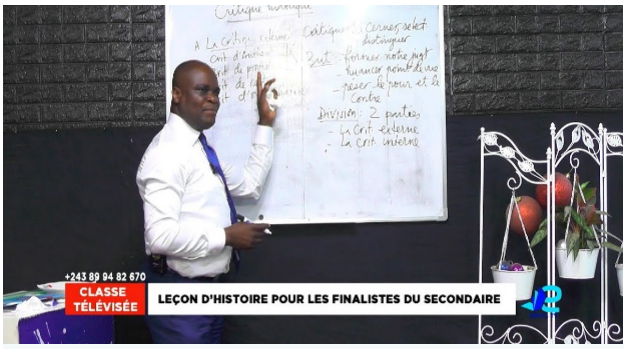
In May 2020, as an effort to continue children's education after COVID-related school closures, the Democratic Republic of the Congo's Ministry of Primary, Secondary, and Technical Education (MOE) developed TV and radio broadcasts of core school curricula. Comprehensive sexuality education, known as Family Life Education (FLE) in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), was originally not included in these core broadcasts. However, Save the Children and DRC's Directorate of Life Skills Education recognized this gap and worked to include FLE material on sexual and reproductive health (SRH) knowledge and development, puberty, gender equality, and HIV/AIDS from the Growing Up GREAT! (GUG) program—a multilevel intervention in Kinshasa designed to address social and gender norms related to SRH.

Study Objectives

In early 2021, the Kinshasa School of Public Health led a mixed-methods rapid learning study to:

1. Describe the process taken by Save the Children and DRC's Ministries to implement
2. FLE education alongside MOE's core TV and radio programming; and
3. Better understand the feasibility and acceptability of this FLE distance learning among adolescents, parents, and implementers.

GEH Center on Gender Equity and Health | UC San Diego School of Medicine
Ecole de Santé Publique de Kinshasa | Kinshasa School of Public Health | KSPH | Université de Kinshasa
Save the Children



The Minister of EPST, Willy Bakonga, teaches a history course on Educ TV (Source: EducTV)

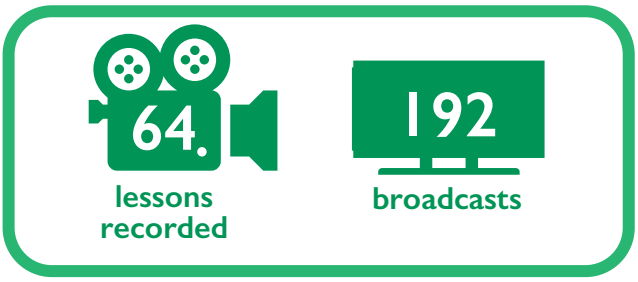
Methods

Semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with 13 adolescents (8 girls, 5 boys) aged 10-18 years; teachers (n=5); parents (n=4); Save the Children staff (n=3). Monitoring data of the program's implementation were collected, and quantitative analysis completed using data from the Global Early Adolescent Study's (GEAS) COVID module (n=397).

Key Findings

Implementation Process

All lessons (core and FLE) were broadcast on the channel EducTV, a station owned by the MOE (EPST). The curriculum for the core lessons was developed in collaboration with the MOE, namely those in the General Secretariat, education and family life education officials. Save the Children provided both FLE material and financial support.

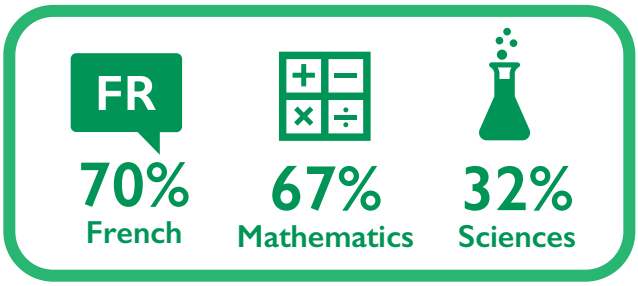


- 64 total lessons were recorded and broadcast a cumulative 192 times as of February 2021 (and they continue to be broadcasted).
- Students and parents learned about the TV and radio broadcasts through their teachers and GUG participants. Some students and parents discovered the lessons by chance.

A second phase of the program started in March 2021. In this phase, students were given homework and parents were encouraged to engage with their child to complete the work. This encouraged parents to watch the programs and also fostered continued student engagement and attendance. In addition, a phone number was provided during the live television sessions through which viewers could ask questions or make suggestions (though the line was not used frequently by respondents).

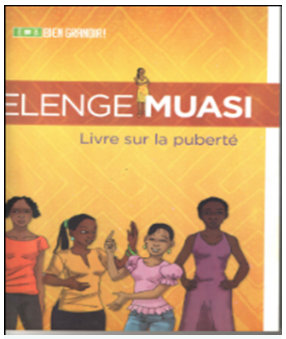
Viewership

The GEAS data were collected in two poor urban communes: Kimbanseke (population 946,000) and Masina (population 485,000). A small sample of adolescents (n=408) in these communes participated in the GEAS COVID module. Of these, roughly half (45.6%, n=181) indicated they had engaged in some form of the Distance Learning program (101 boys (56%) and 80 girls (44%)). More boys than girls indicated access to programs on TV, while more girls than boys reported completing paper-based school work.



- The lessons most watched were French (70%), mathematics (67%), and sciences (32%). FLE lessons were watched or listened to by 13% (n=13) of 181 adolescents.
- Viewership was impacted by the fact that the lessons were broadcast between 12 and 6pm, when most parents were working. This

reduced the ability of some parents to encourage their children to watch. In addition, we learned (perhaps unsurprisingly) that teenagers, in times of confinement and often in the absence of parents, preferred to watch films or cartoons instead of FLE sessions.



GUG Puberty Textbook

Acceptability of FLE Material

When speaking with the adolescents who had seen the FLE Distance Learning broadcasts, almost all of them said that the programs helped them improve their knowledge of the various topics covered, including certain methods of contraception, abuse and maltreatment, sexual violence and gender-equitable behaviors such as chore sharing.

- Almost all of the adolescents who saw/heard the FLE lessons found the lessons "very interesting" (4-point Likert scale: not interesting to very interesting).
- Some parents who watched with their children also found the programs to be helpful in covering topics not normally discussed in the household.

> *I watched programs that talked about menstrual cycles, about childhood. It was very interesting because in these shows they encourage parents to talk about this subject with their children because it is often a taboo in our house."*
>
> Parent, Female

Challenges

Electricity outages were frequently mentioned as barriers to participation. Other barriers to participation were lack of access to a TV and lack of knowledge of the broadcast schedule, which was irregular rather than standardized. One participant noted that if she had known the schedule, she could have gone somewhere else to watch, even if there were electrical outages at her house:

> *What I would like first of all is for them to give us a fixed schedule, when these programs are on; for example, on Monday at such and such a time; that will make it easier for us; even if there is no power, knowing the time of the program, I can manage to go and follow it elsewhere. But because we don't know anything—had no program—it was difficult to follow."*
>
> Adolescent, Female

Some parents who *did* know of the broadcast schedule reported that it was not always followed (e.g., instead of FLE lessons, other subjects were broadcast).

Conclusions

TV and radio broadcasts on FLE topics are a feasible and acceptable mode of education in the urban DRC context. This Distance Learning approach may be a useful mode of education in times of crisis-related school closures. Participants also noted that these broadcasts could be a useful way to routinely complement what students learn in school. Future efforts should consider several lessons learned from this effort. These include:

1. Advertising the Distance Learning programs more widely—especially among adolescents and parents.
2. Consider broadcasting after 7:00 p.m. when parents are at home to reinforce interactivity between adolescents and parents.
3. Make lessons available on an online platform to allow continuous accessibility.

Center on Gender Equity and Health & Save the Children International. 2021. *A Case Study from DRC: Integrating Family Life Education into Distance Learning during COVID-19 Closures.* La Jolla, CA: University of California San Diego.