

CAPACITY BUILDING THROUGH THE COVID-19 LENS:

HARNESSING INNOVATION AND MOBILIZING BEST PRACTICES FROM THE PANDEMIC

FOCUS AREA: LANGUAGE

IN BRIEF

The COVID-19 pandemic has created unique challenges for settlement and integration agencies as they seek to deliver language learning services to the newcomers they serve. The transition to virtual programming has increased the capacity for instructors to teach remotely and to offer some classes on a flexible schedule to better meet the diverse needs of students. The newcomer-serving sector has also developed innovative strategies to increase digital literacy as well as technological access (e.g., access to internet services, access to appropriate devices designed for virtual learning such as laptops). This pivot in services has also necessitated many swift adaptations and innovations by settlement and integration agencies which have engendered new best practices and opportunities for shared capacity building.

The Capacity Building Through the COVID-19 Lens Project seeks to capture and mobilize these best practices through key focus areas. This brief seeks to summarize the key findings of the two language focus group hosted in September 2021 and January 2022.

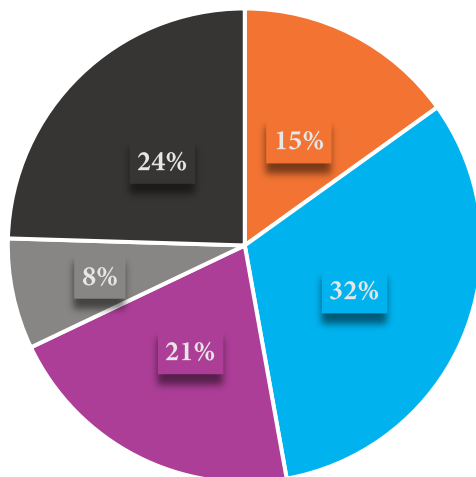
Please note that underlined terms throughout the brief can be found in the **Glossary**.

KEY FINDINGS

BEST PRACTICES

LOW LITERACY, LOW DIGITAL LITERACY, AND TECHNOLOGICAL ACCESS

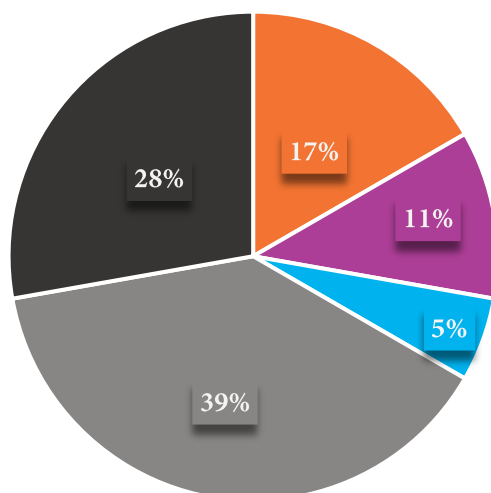
The best practices utilized to combat barriers associated with **low literacy, low digital literacy, and technological access** include:



- Use of physical hand outs (step-by-step guides) to increase digital literacy
- One-on-one supports (available virtually and in-person)
- Orientation and foundational digital literacy courses and workshops
- Utilization of popular social media platforms (WhatsApp, Facebook) for conversation circles
- Increasing technological access (laptop lending programs and providing affordable internet access)

APPROPRIATE WORKSPACES

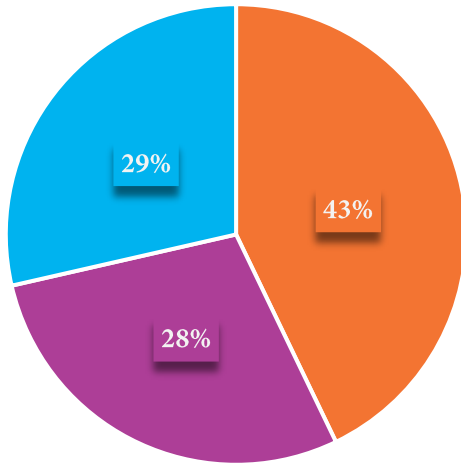
The best practices identified to assist both instructors and students to overcome **access to appropriate workspaces** include:



- Care packages (toolboxes and work kits) mailed or delivered to newcomer homes
- Virtual childcare and childminding opportunities
- Laptop lending programs to combat the reliance of tablets and cellphones for course work
- Flexible service delivery (hybrid model, HyFlex model, asynchronous course work) and testing
- Pre-recorded training videos and workshops available asynchronously

HYBRID AND FLEXIBLE LANGUAGE COURSES

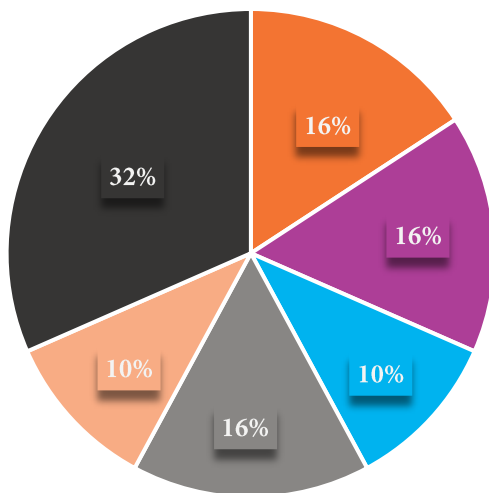
The best practices that have been adapted in response to programming in the virtual world include:



- No longer reliant on exclusively in-person referrals, agencies are now implementing online referrals
- Professional development workshops are now recorded online that can be accessed asynchronously
- File management shifting online rather than using paper copies

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT NEEDS OF LANGUAGE SERVICE DELIVERY PROVIDERS

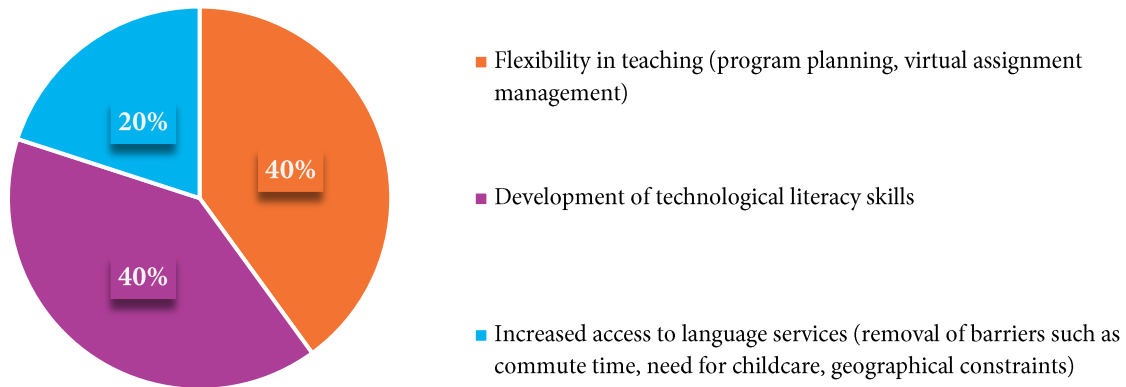
Emergent needs of language service delivery providers to support professional development and success of hybrid language course delivery include:



- Need for more ready-made modules that language instructors can reference and utilize in the course development
- Access to IT support in the form of funding for digital specialists available for both students and teachers
- Accessibility to see first hand examples of hybrid course delivery
- Opportunities to meet within the sector, knowledge mobilization of best practices with other settlement and integration agencies
- Flexibility in hybrid course delivery, the ability to troubleshoot and retrofit courses guided by the specific needs of individual classes and cohorts
- Opportunities for staff in leadership/admin positions to take professional development courses available to teachers

POSITIVE FEEDBACK REFLECTING THE TRANSITION OF IN-PERSON TO VIRTUAL PROGRAM DELIVERY

The benefits of implementing hybrid and flexible language courses include:



Both newcomer clients and language learning instructors have shared positive feedback from adapting to the world of virtual programming. Both students and instructors have indicated that their **digital literacy has increased**, that virtual program delivery has resulted in a **reduction in barriers to participating in language learning** (e.g., finding affordable and accessible childcare, transportation costs, and geographic constraints) and have indicated a strong push for continuing with **flexibility in program delivery** (e.g., offering hybrid courses, flexible testing times, and providing asynchronous independent course work).

NEXT STEPS

The findings identified from the two rounds of focus groups will be leveraged to support the creation of multi-media professional development resources for service delivery providers. These resources will include step-by-step guides, infographics, research briefs, as well as a training video for each focus area. The training video will be created in alignment with AAISA's certification program, where service providers can institutionalize these emergent best practices. The development of these resources is created with the intent to capture the innovative practices that have arisen in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, to ensure that the adaptations created during this time are carried into the post-pandemic world of settlement and integration service delivery.

GLOSSARY

Digital literacy: Having the ability to define, access, manage, understand, integrate, communicate, evaluate and create information safely and appropriately through digital technologies for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship. It includes competencies that are variously referred to as computer literacy, ICT literacy, information literacy and media literacy. It entails the ability to identify and use technology confidently, creatively, and critically to meet the demands and challenges of living, learning and working in a digital society. It extends beyond simple digital consumption behaviour and into digital fluency.

Hybrid courses: Hybrid courses refers to the practice of engaging a mix of both in-person course delivery as well as the use of virtual programming. It is a thoughtful fusion of face-to-face and online environments to conduct teaching and learning. It is often used interchangeable with terms such as blended learning, mixed-mode or flexible learning. It is usually based on specific needs, capacities, modalities and pedagogies of a particular institution or sector. This term is synonymously with the term blended learning.

Technological access: Access to the physical capacities to technology. A lack of technological access can include the infrastructure needed for internet access (particularly prevalent in rural areas or small centres), lack of access to internet due to financial limitations, insufficient devices to participate in virtual programming (e.g., sharing laptops within a household with children needing to participate in virtual schooling and parents needing the device for virtual programming, relying on cellphones rather than a laptop/Chromebook/tablet).

Virtual programming: Virtual programming is a form of distanced learning that is conducted completely over the Internet. It refers to newcomer and direct service agencies participating in courses virtually, through the internet and without the need of attending in-person courses. It can be performed both asynchronously or synchronously, depending on the instructor and/or course. This term can be used synonymously with remote learning.