What are the best uses of supplementary materials in an MLE reading program?

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6.1 Introduction

In many places, few instructional materials exist in non-dominant languages. Sometimes, the only books available are reading primers or textbooks that focus on sequential phonics instruction. While materials of this sort are fundamental for learning to read and write, they are insufficient for developing proficient readers (Mullis and Martin 2019). Therefore, it is essential to develop a variety of supplementary reading materials for various purposes. This chapter will describe four types of supplementary reading materials and how best to use them in a Multilingual Education (MLE) reading program.

- Listening Stories
- Large Texts and Big Books
- Leveled Reading Books
- Literature for Independent Reading

6.2 Context

The goal of reading is to comprehend the text. Therefore, the prerequisite for reading comprehension is to understand the language of the text, which is why education in the students' primary language is crucial. However, understanding the language is just the foundation of the reading process. On that
foundation, readers must build proficiency in the following five basic skills (National Reading Panel 2000):

- recognizing and manipulating the sounds within words
- phonetically decoding the sound symbols
- understanding the vocabulary
- reading fluently with expression
- using a variety of comprehension strategies

To learn these skills, students need to see them modeled and practice them by reading independently (Grabe and Stoller 2011). Listening stories and large texts are supplementary materials teachers can use to model reading skills. Likewise, leveled texts and a variety of literature are supplementary materials students can use to practice reading.

An effective instructional strategy for using the supplemental materials listed above is to organize the literacy lesson into three parts with specific activities used before, during, and after reading (Literacy Matters 2021). This three-part strategy is especially helpful for beginning readers but can be adapted to facilitate intermediate readers to develop greater fluency and comprehension. The following activities are provided as an example.

6.2.1 Before reading

**Comprehension:**

- Read the title and ask students to look at the picture on the front cover. Then ask them to make predictions about the content.
- Discuss some of the illustrations. Be careful to maintain suspense by not telling the ending.
- Explain features such as indices, captions, or graphs.
- Give students a reason to read. For a fictional text, they could read to discover the main character's problem. For a nonfiction text, they could discover five facts about the topic.

6.2.2 During reading

The following activities are appropriate to use while modeling reading. However, when students are reading independently, it is best to allow them uninterrupted time to practice reading.

**Fluency:**

- For the first reading, read the text through for enjoyment.
- Read with phrasing and expression to convey the characters' emotions and emphasize important words.
Vocabulary:

- Model thinking aloud strategies. For example, when there is a word that might be unfamiliar to the students, ask yourself aloud, "I wonder what this word means? I'll reread the sentence to see if I can figure it out." Here is another example, "I see in the picture that she is using a tool to dig; that must be what a shovel is—a tool to dig."

Comprehension:

- Ask students what they think will happen next and confirm or revise their predictions throughout the reading.
- Stop a few times to ask questions for discussion in groups or pairs.

6.2.3 After reading

Comprehension:

- Ask the students to
  - tell if their predictions were correct,
  - answer the “reason-to-read” question,
  - answer comprehension questions and do activities that require the ability to remember, understand, apply, analyze, evaluate, and create,
  - make their own questions based on the text,
  - share their thoughts about the text orally or in writing.

Fluency:

- Reread the text on subsequent days. Try echo reading, choral reading, or taking turns reading different sections.

Vocabulary:

- Have students find new vocabulary words in the text and discuss their meanings. Then ask them to use the words in original sentences.
- Do cloze activities in which vocabulary words are covered or removed from a passage for the student to complete.
Phonemic awareness and phonics:

- Do various activities using the text, such as finding rhyming words, matching words, breaking words into syllables, and looking for words containing a specific letter or combination of letters

6.3 Supplementary materials for modeling reading skills

6.3.1 Listening stories

Listening stories are essential supplementary reading materials that allow teachers to model fluent reading behaviors for the students to emulate. In addition, listening stories provide opportunities for the teacher to demonstrate comprehension strategies. Listening stories should represent a variety of genres, be above the students' independent reading levels, and have age-appropriate themes that promote conversation.

The use of listening stories with comprehension discussions is referred to as interactive read-aloud (Fountas and Pinnell 2019b). The teacher reads to the whole class and pauses to ask questions to promote dialogue. Rather than merely listening to stories, students interact with the teacher and other students by thinking and talking about the text altogether, in pairs or small groups.

6.3.2 An example from Timor Island

In Eastern and Western Timor, minority language speakers held a workshop to learn to write interesting listening stories. The same language group from each country (East and West Timor) shared their stories with each other. Then they translated the new stories to the languages of wider communication in each country so that other language groups could translate them to their local languages. In this way, they multiplied the number of stories for each language. The schoolchildren enjoyed listening to the stories even though there were no pictures, and they eagerly answered comprehension questions.

6.4 Large texts and big books

Large texts are an excellent way for teachers to model and motivate reading for their students. Often oversized books (referred to as Big Books) with enlarged print and illustrations are used, but the text could also be a song or poem written on a large chart or the blackboard. Besides being interesting, the text should be predictable, containing repeated phrases and sentences or rhyming words. It is important to design the illustrations carefully to help new readers figure out the text.

The use of large texts for whole group instruction is often called shared reading (Fountas and Pinnell 2019c). The most critical aspect of shared reading is for all students to see the words. Therefore, the text should be written with large letters, and the teacher should use a pointer underneath the words
as they are read. The same text can be used for several days, allowing plenty of practice and instruction on different reading skills.

**An example from Thailand**

First language MLE schools in Thailand have used Big Books for teaching beginning reading. First language speakers created the books using cultural themes chosen by the community. They even made smaller versions of the books for students to take home and read to their parents.

In some classrooms, people from the community shared their expertise about a topic. After the visit, the students dictated a story about the experience that the teacher wrote on the blackboard. The teacher then used the text for shared reading activities. In this way, the teacher modeled both writing and reading. Later the teacher copied the text on chart paper for display in the classroom. The students loved reading books they had a part in creating!

### 6.5 Supplementary materials for practicing reading skills

**Leveled books**

The primary purpose of leveled books is for students to practice reading. The use of leveled books in the classroom is called guided reading (Fountas and Pinnell 2019a), in which the teacher works with a small group of students who read at the same ability level. The teacher gives the students a text that is neither too difficult nor too simple but slightly challenging. The teacher assists them to read the text.

The beginning levels are usually about topics familiar to the children and have predictable patterns and repetitive phrases that correspond directly to the illustrations. The letters are large, with wide spacing between words. The final page often has a surprise ending to make the story interesting. The more advanced levels have smaller print, varied sentence structures, unfamiliar content, and challenging vocabulary.

A relatively simple way to determine students’ reading levels is to have them read a portion of text aloud and answer three or four comprehension questions. If the students make several errors while reading or cannot answer the questions, the text is too difficult. On the other hand, it is probably too easy if the students can read the text quickly and easily. After assessing the students, the teacher forms groups for instruction using the appropriate-leveled books.

**An example from Cameroon**

The Kom MLE program in Cameroon used leveled texts for reading instruction. The instructional team created thirty leveled stories for the first, second, and third-grade classes. The content of each story taught objectives from the national syllabus for Science (Environmental and Health) and Civics (Citizenship, Moral Education, and Culture). The use of leveled books to teach content objectives allowed
students extra reading practice at their instructional level. The students read one story each day for a week. After the daily rereading, the teacher taught lessons focused on comprehension, vocabulary, or phonics. In addition to these literacy activities, content area objectives were met by doing hands-on activities such as experiments or field trips.

### 6.6 Literature for independent reading

Beginning readers, as well as proficient readers, need lots of practice to improve their reading ability. A good reading program includes daily time for reading individually. During independent reading (Fountas and Pinnell 2019d), students choose the books to read by themselves or with a friend. The amount of time allotted for independent reading depends on the age of the students, but it is generally around 15 minutes.

The literature for independent reading should have materials at different levels to accommodate students' abilities and include a variety of genres such as poetry, fiction, nonfiction, comic books, and biographies. It is also essential to validate students' culture by developing literature about their traditions, art, folktales, and ways of life.

**An example from the Solomon Islands**

A significant component of MLE implementation in the Solomon Islands is the use of classroom libraries for independent reading. At a community writers’ workshop, people from the local community wrote and illustrated fifty to eighty books for each grade. First language speakers with good writing skills edited, photocopied, and stapled the books together with cardstock covers.

During independent reading time, the students choose books from the classroom library. There was always considerable excitement as they scrambled to grab books to read. Some read just one book, while others read several in the same period, but everyone enjoyed having time to practice reading independently.

### 6.7 Conclusion

Supplementary reading materials are essential for effective literacy programs, especially in contexts with few materials in the non-dominant language. In addition to the direct sequential instruction of phonics skills, effective MLE reading programs need supplementary materials for modeling fluent reading and providing independent reading practice. The best use of these materials is to employ instructional activities before, during, and after reading to promote vocabulary development, sound, and symbol correspondence, reading fluency, and comprehension. Students are enthusiastic as they listen to stories and engage in the shared reading of large texts and Big Books. These experiences model the skills needed for fluent reading, which students practice when reading leveled books and literature independently. The
benefits of creating supplemental reading materials in non-dominant languages are worth the effort to ensure that students become proficient readers in their own languages.

6.8 Sources for creating supplementary reading materials

Creating enough literature in the students' first language is daunting but not impossible. Here are a few outstanding resources.

- SIL's Bloom bookmaking software for producing a variety of literature is a powerful resource for creative vernacular literature. The software enables users to create books with illustrations in various formats, from Big Books and audiobooks for modeling reading, to leveled books for independent reading. The Bloom library contains thousands of books that can be downloaded and translated. You can visit the library and download the software at https://bloomlibrary.org/.

References


