Save the Children®

Literacy Boost Toolkit

Introduction

Table of Contents

Figures

Cover Photo: A Literacy Boost Reading Camp in Nepal. Photo by Susan Warner.

Save the Children

Welcome to Literacy Boost!

Introduction

Literacy Boost is an innovative, evidence-based approach to improving literacy learning outcomes, and is increasing the reading skills of underperforming children in a growing number of program sites across the globe.

This introductory document is designed to provide an overview of Literacy Boost prior to an in-depth reading of the three-part Literacy Boost Toolkit. The introduction will address the following questions:

- General information:
    - What is Literacy Boost?
        - Literacy Boost objectives and components
        - The research principles that are at the foundation of Literacy Boost
    - How does Literacy Boost work?
        - The five core reading skills
        - The three program components
        - The Literacy Boost program cycle
    - Who is Literacy Boost designed for?
    - Adapting Literacy Boost to specific country and community contexts
- Getting started:
    - How do I begin?
    - What language do I use?

What is Literacy Boost?

Literacy Boost is a program designed to guide schools, parents and communities to better support the literacy development of their children. It was developed in response to growing evidence of gaps in basic literacy learning, which demonstrate a clear need to increase the effectiveness of basic reading instruction, including the promotion of good literacy practices in school and out. In order to improve literacy learning, Literacy Boost focuses on three areas:

- **Reading Assessment:** Literacy Boost practitioners assess children's reading levels and evaluate their literacy learning needs based on those assessments. Assessments are used to inform school-based personnel of children's strengths and weaknesses, and help staff and teachers tailor their lessons to meet children's needs.

- **Teacher Training:** Teachers are trained to incorporate skill-building into their regularly scheduled curricula. By focusing on five core reading skill areas throughout lesson planning and implementation, teachers ensure that children build a solid foundation for literacy. Ongoing assessments of student progress are used to guide teachers' focus.

- **Community Action:** Quality teaching and learning environments inside and outside of schools help all readers grow their reading skills. The Literacy Boost program guides parents and communities to support children as they learn to read and foster their love of reading.

The first two components, Reading Assessment and Teacher Training, are focused in schools, while the third component, Community Action, is focused outside of the school environment with parents and communities. <u>All three of the components are essential for increasing literacy learning. Literacy Boost cannot be implemented partially, with any one of the three components missing.</u> However, there is a great deal of flexibility within the Teacher Training and Community Action components, which allows for adaptations to suit local contexts. In fact, these two components must be adapted to suit the targeted area in order for Literacy Boost to be successful.

The program is outlined through the Literacy Boost Toolkit, a package of resources designed to support country offices to design and implement effective reading-focused basic education programs. The Literacy Boost Toolkit guides practitioners through each of the components, providing lessons, session plans, and notes for facilitators, as well as handouts and additional materials.

Research Principles for Literacy Boost

Literacy Boost addresses four widely accepted research conclusions on literacy learning.

Research Conclusion	Programmatic Implication
It is essential that reading development take place during the early grades of primary school; reading development entails the development of skills in five key areas: **l**etter knowledge, phonological processing, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension skills (Snow, Burns and Griffin, 1998).	**WE MUST DIRECTLY ADDRESS ALL FIVE SKILLS EARLY**
Reading is complex. It is a cognitive, social and cultural activity. Its development leads to literacy, which is at once an individual competence, a social act, and a cultural tool (Wagner, 1993; New, 2001).	**WE MUST LINK READING MATERIALS AND ACTIVITIES TO LIFE OUTSIDE OF THE CLASSROOM**
The real, predictive power of motivation to read must be lit and sustained using child-centered and active learning approaches that ensure progress to and success in higher levels of education (Pang, Muaka, Berhnardt & Kamil, 2003; Snow, Burns and Griffin, 1998). Ensuring children's active participation in classroom sessions and via practice in the home is essential to learning to read.	**WE MUST MAKE READING ACTIVE AND FUN, AND ENSURE THAT IT TAKES PLACE WITHIN AND OUTSIDE OF THE CLASSROOM**
Children's literacy development depends on both teachers and parents (Goldenberg, 2001), and on finding the means to vary the kinds of reading materials and increase the quantity of reading materials in children's lives, both at school and outside of school. For optimally effective programming, parents and teachers must collaborate both inside and outside of school walls.	**WE MUST ENSURE THAT CHILDREN HAVE ACCESS TO VARIED READING MATERIALS INSIDE OF SCHOOLS AND OUT**

How does Literacy Boost work?

All Literacy Boost activities are built around the aim of promoting five core reading skills: alphabet knowledge, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. Some activities focus on what teachers should be doing to build these skills in school, while others focus on what parents and other community members should be doing outside of school.

Literacy Boost Five Core Reading Skills

1. **Alphabet Knowledge:** recognition of the letters of the alphabet.

2. **Phonemic Awareness:** the ability to recognize and manipulate the phonemes, the "smallest units composing spoken language" (NRP, 2000).

3. **Fluency:** the ability to read accurately, quickly and with the correct intonation.

4. **Vocabulary:** the comprehension of a sufficient number of words to be able to understand text.

5. **Comprehension:** "the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with the written language" (Rand, 2002).

The five core reading skills are the focus of all three of the Literacy Boost components.

Literacy Boost Three Program Components

1. **Reading Assessments:** Evaluations of children's concepts related to print, their ability to identify letters and read and understand text.

2. **Teacher Training:** Regularly scheduled capacity-building sessions designed to equip teachers to focus instruction on the five core reading skills within the framework of the government prescribed curriculum they continue to follow.

3. **Community Action:** Activities that bring reading outside of the classroom, focusing on varying available text and reading activities and on involving families in children's literacy learning.

The Literacy Boost Program Cycle

1. Reading Assessments

The assessment component is the first step in the Literacy Boost model. Assessments are conducted annually to collect student background information and establish student reading skill levels before and after the Literacy Boost intervention. Assessments help implementers, school, and Ministry of Education partners identify strengths and gaps in students' reading skills and track progress as they learn to read. Additionally, assessments are used to compare the progress of Literacy Boost students to the progress of those students who are not yet receiving Literacy Boost support.[1]
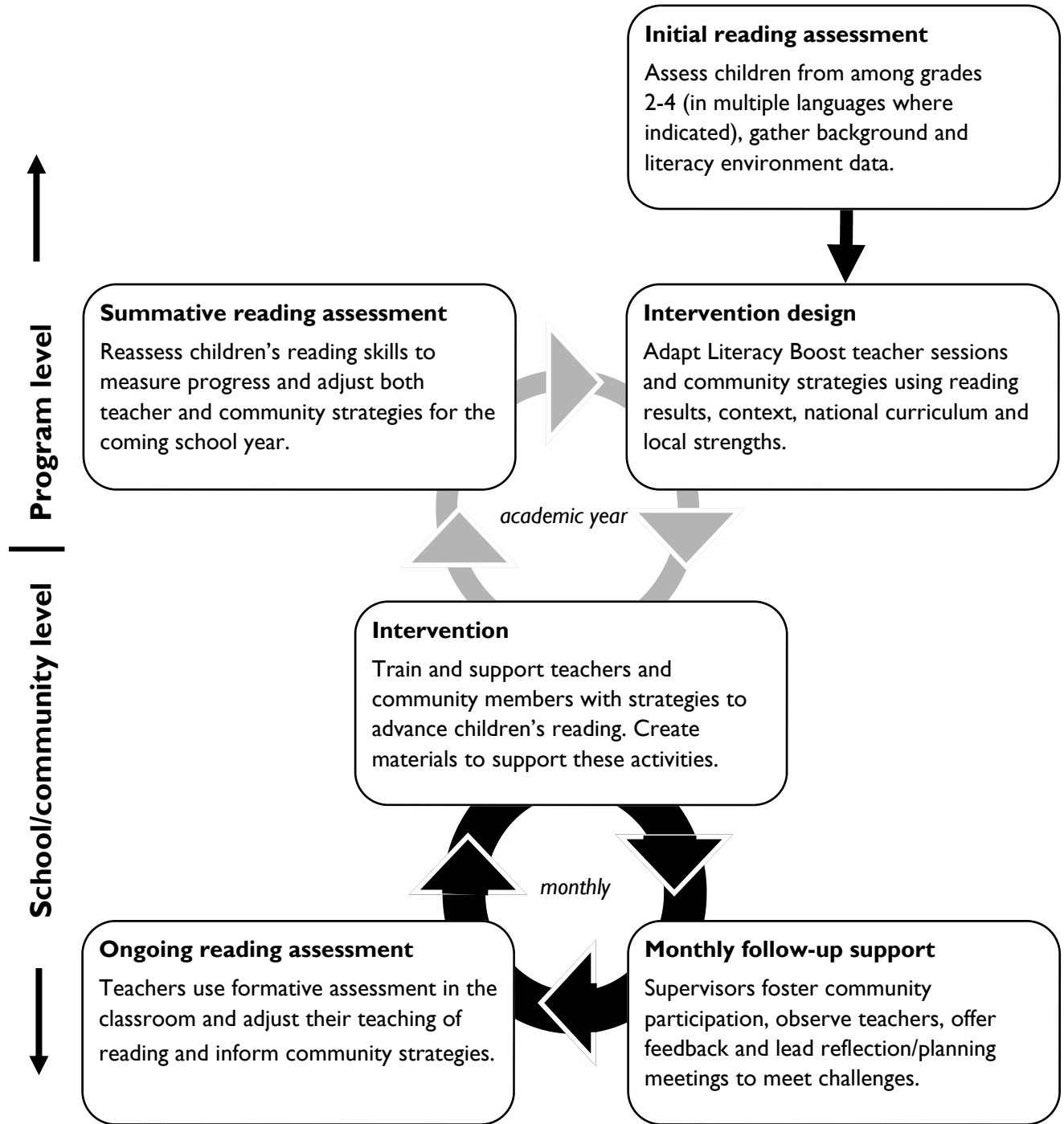
Literacy Boost includes three types of assessment: a baseline prior to the start of interventions, assessments over the course of the school year, and an end of the year assessment to determine child and school-level progress.

- **Prior to the start of Literacy Boost interventions:** An assessment of emergent and early reading skills takes place to provide information on children's reading abilities, focusing on their strengths and weaknesses in the five core reading skills.

- **Over the course of the school year:** Teachers are supported with training and mentoring to conduct regular assessments, track students' increases in skill proficiency, and adjust instruction to meet children's learning needs.

- **At the end of the school year:** A summative evaluation determines children's progress and school-wide progress.

Literacy Boost practitioners collect data on children's abilities in the five core reading skill areas along with background information related to their homes and families. When coupled with data on the surrounding literacy environment and tracked over time, this data demonstrates the impact of Literacy Boost activities across a spectrum of literacy-related criteria. The Literacy Boost program cycle therefore begins and ends with an assessment of children's reading skills, as seen in Figure 1. Step-by-step guidance on planning baseline and summative assessments is provided in the Literacy Boost Assessment Toolkit.

---

[1] To date, schools participating in assessments as part of a control group have been included in the subsequent year of Literacy Boost programming.

Figure 1: Literacy Boost Program Cycle

Program level | **School/community level**

Initial reading assessment

Assess children from among grades 2-4 (in multiple languages where indicated), gather background and literacy environment data.

Summative reading assessment

Reassess children's reading skills to measure progress and adjust both teacher and community strategies for the coming school year.

Intervention design

Adapt Literacy Boost teacher sessions and community strategies using reading results, context, national curriculum and local strengths.

academic year

Intervention

Train and support teachers and community members with strategies to advance children's reading. Create materials to support these activities.

monthly

Ongoing reading assessment

Teachers use formative assessment in the classroom and adjust their teaching of reading and inform community strategies.

Monthly follow-up support

Supervisors foster community participation, observe teachers, offer feedback and lead reflection/planning meetings to meet challenges.

2. Teacher Training

Research shows that teacher training is more effective when teachers are trained on a regular, scheduled basis. Literacy Boost trains teachers slowly over the course of the year, allowing them to practice each individual skill in the classroom between training sessions, and to reflect on their successes and challenges together. Literacy Boost's Teacher Training component includes nine monthly sessions (see box), which are designed to equip primary school teachers with useful tools to effectively teach children how to read with a focus on the five key reading skills.

Literacy Boost teachers observe, discuss and practice techniques for building children's letter knowledge, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension in monthly reflective training sessions. During these sessions, teachers model how to teach key skills in the classroom and how to assess student progress on each skill, and discuss their successes and challenges when using each technique. In each session, trainers work with teachers in the same grade from their own and neighboring schools to devise lesson plans for use in their classrooms and follow up on the implementation of lesson plans developed during the previous session.

Literacy Boost Teacher Training sessions are not designed to replace existing curricula. Rather, they are designed to enhance literacy instruction by *using* the government curriculum. Ministry of Education representatives participate in training of trainer (ToT) sessions in order to be able to lead teacher training themselves, thereby promoting ownership and establishing a base for sustainability and eventual expansion.

Teacher Training Sessions

1. Introduction to Reading Development and Instruction for Young Children

2. Formative Assessment

3. Addressing Language Issues in the Literacy Classroom

4. Letter Knowledge/Alphabetic Principle

5. Phonemic Awareness

6. Reading Fluency

7. Vocabulary

8. Reading Comprehension

9. Conclusion

---

3. Community Action

Encouraging literacy development outside of the classroom is an essential component of Literacy Boost. This includes ensuring that children have access to adequate resources, both human resources and text-based resources, and that literacy activities take place outside of schools. Activities are designed to highlight and model the use of reading in daily life and foster a literate environment. By supporting the development of reading materials and promoting literacy and language activities in children's villages and homes, Literacy Boost gives children more opportunities to practice reading skills outside of school. It uses fun activities that promote literacy and learning to motivate children's participation and kindle their enjoyment of reading.

The Literacy Boost Community Action component includes three action areas to support children in the early grades as they learn to read:

1. Parent activities, including workshops and strategies to help parents and other caretakers read with their children.

For parents, Literacy Boost implements activities that engage everyone, regardless of their reading ability, in simple tasks to promote children's reading skills and language development. Literacy Boost emphasizes that everyday activities have the potential to boost children's learning of letters, sounds and words, and contribute to the development of their knowledge of the world around them. The Community Action component includes seven session guides for conducting reading awareness sessions with parents. An accompanying flipbook, *Community Strategies to Promote Literacy*, supplements parent sessions.

2. Book Banks and the creation of materials.

Ensuring that communities have a variety of reading materials available is another essential part of Literacy Boost. In most communities, the only print material children typically see is a school textbook. Literacy Boost practitioners work with partners and communities to create engaging and relevant children's print material for Literacy Boost Book Banks, collections of 150 to 200 books and reading materials, in every village.

With guidance on how to create age- and language- appropriate materials locally, communities can produce reading materials themselves and take advantage of an enriched literacy environment. The Community Action section of the toolkit provides guidance on how to develop simple beginning reading primers and guidelines for program staff on criteria to consider when selecting or developing reading materials for children across the stages of literacy development. Children borrow materials from Literacy Boost Book Banks and use them to practice reading at home, on their own and with their parents.

3. Reading activities outside of school, such as Reading Camps and Reading Buddies.

Children need frequent opportunities to practice their literacy skills and to see reading as an enjoyable activity so that they are motivated to keep learning. Literacy Boost includes a variety of community-based activities for children, designed to complement school-based activities. These include weekly Literacy Boost Reading Camps, Reading Buddies, Reading Festivals and Story Time. The activities are centered around the five core reading skills — using songs, read-alouds, and games to help children practice their skills in fun ways. By drawing on community members to conduct these activities with children, Literacy Boost promotes the development of a community-wide reading culture.

The most structured of the out-of-school reading activities included in the Literacy Boost package is Reading Camps. Reading Camps are after-school activities for children that promote good reading practices and make reading fun for children. The Literacy Boost Toolkit includes a Reading Camp curriculum and a detailed guide for implementing the curriculum.

Who is Literacy Boost designed for?

While it is beneficial for all of the stakeholders involved in the implementation of Literacy Boost to be familiar with all of the program components, certain tools are more closely linked to the roles of certain actors, as outlined on the following page.

Literacy Boost Component	Description	Key Actors
Complete Literacy Boost Toolkit	For these program designers and managers, the Toolkit lays out a wide variety of literacy-enhancing strategies, and a Literacy Boost program cycle in which to apply them.	Designed for educators responsible for teacher training and/or community mobilization programs to enhance children's education.
Teacher Training	The training component details nine teacher training sessions designed to enhance the teaching of reading. Trainers adapt and use the sessions to train and support teachers.	Teacher trainers/supervisors within an NGO or government agency
Teacher Tools	These tools include lesson plans, assessment schedules, and recording schemes, organized by reading skill and designed for use in classroom activities.	Teachers
Community Action	The Community Action component provides guidance on creating materials, mentoring, and raising awareness in order to broaden the opportunities and resources for children to practice literacy skill-building outside of school.	NGO staff, government outreach workers, head teachers, School Management Committee presidents, community leaders and others

How do I begin?

The early stages of Literacy Boost implementation are outlined below. Implementation has proved more successful when practitioners are familiar with the Literacy Boost Toolkit prior to startup. All stages of implementation include significant support from technical advisors initially, with particular support provided to assessments.

Step 1: Familiarize yourself with the Literacy Boost Toolkit Teacher Training and Community Action components. Literacy Boost implementers have had the greatest success when they have read through sections and discussed them in small groups. For example, three or four staff members form a group and determine how much of the content to cover; on the designated date, they come together to discuss what they've read, highlighting:

- What they find interesting or surprising
- Where they think challenges might arise

- Which activities they think might have especially high levels of impact, and why

Step 2: Conduct a situation analysis for the target sites where you intend to implement Literacy Boost. This will inform the planning and toolkit adaptation processes prior to the actual launch of Literacy Boost programs in your sites.

Step 3: Work with Literacy Boost technical advisors to discuss situation analysis findings, any questions you may have regarding the Literacy Boost Toolkit, and to jointly plan for an in-country launch/program roll-out.

The process of defining the intervention components, developing or working from an existing reading assessment, as well as determining the language(s), materials and appropriate partners in a target area takes several weeks. Once complete, Literacy Boost will be ready to launch at the start of the school year.

Literacy Boost and language

Literacy and language are inextricably linked. Oral language is the foundation on which literacy skills are developed. In most countries where we work, children have to contend with the fact that the language they are most familiar with is not the language used in school. In order for Literacy Boost to be relevant in the context in which it is implemented, and to build upon the knowledge that children already have, these language issues need to be carefully considered.

The Multilingual Decision Trees for Teacher Training (Figure 2) and Book Banks (Figure 3) are tools to assist you in determining which language(s) to use for these components, while this issue is addressed through a simple set of questions for the Community Action component. The Assessment component will account for children's home and school languages. Note that the language of Literacy Boost activities may not be the same for every component. For example, the Nepal Save the Children team found that extremely low third grade reading results were related to the fact that nearly half of the children in the classrooms spoke a local language, and not the language of instruction, at home. So they looked more closely at the context to see how to support children learning to read in a second language, and were able to find partners who produced children's reading materials in their local language as well as partners who worked with adults on literacy skills in the local language.

Language determination is a complex and sometimes volatile process. The central technical consideration that should remain the focus is: how will the children in our impact areas learn to read most effectively and efficiently?

Research from across the globe makes clear that children learn to read best in their first language, but it is not always feasible to support mother tongue literacy development. In determining which language to use for Literacy Boost implementation, we must carefully consider elements as varied as what languages are present in children's daily lives, assessment results, alphabets, curriculum resources, political will and parental support. The Impact Area Language Situation Analysis gathers data to assist us in thinking this though thoroughly; examples of the kinds of questions posed are below.

Use this situation analysis to consider the questions in the following decision tree; both the situation analysis and your responses the decision tree will provide the basis of your Literacy Boost work and your initial work with technical advisors.

IMPACT AREA LANGUAGE SITUATION ANALYSIS

Example Questions

1. How many different languages are spoken in the homes in the area?

2. How many different dialects of each language are spoken in the area?

3. Which languages/dialects are only spoken?

4. Which languages/dialects are written?

5. For those which are both spoken and written, what system of writing do they use? (Ex: Alphabetic, Ideographic, Roman Alphabetic, Arabic Alphabet, Devengarai alphabet, etc.) Is this the same alphabet as the language of instruction?

6. Do schools in the target area have children from several language/dialect groups – or do all children in a school speak the same language at home?

7. In children's home communities, is the language used by children at home the community's main language, or is another language used extensively for communication?

8. For written languages, does government have primary school curriculum in them?

9. For written languages, do parents or other community members regularly read materials in these languages?

10. What language is the language of instruction in the target primary schools?

    • What is the official policy on language of instruction?

    • What languages are being used regularly in target primary schools?

    • If there is more than one language of instruction and it differs across the primary school cycle:

        i. Which are languages of instruction at each grade?

        ii. Which are subjects of study at each grade?

11. What is the political situation vis-à-vis language in the target area? For Example:

    • Is one language preferred over another? Why?

    • What are the implications of choosing one dialect over another?

Save the Children

Figure 2: Multilingual Decision Tree, Teacher Training

Does the local/national government endorse local language teaching?

→ no →

Are there resources to recruit, train and support bilingual volunteers or teacher aides to help second language learners in the early grades comprehend Language of Instruction (LOI)?

yes ↓

Are there curriculum resources and teachers trained in implementing the national curriculum in Language X?

no →

no ↓   yes ↓

yes ↓

Implement Literacy Boost teacher training in Language X. If there are children who speak another language(s) in the community and this/these languages are not a LOI, be sure to include the teacher training session on supporting second language learners to develop reading skills and to utilize the section of each monthly teacher training session focused on this specific type of support.

Implement Literacy Boost teacher training in the LOI, and be sure to include the teacher training session on supporting second language learners to develop reading skills and to utilize the section of each monthly teacher training session focused on this specific type of support.

Implement Literacy Boost teacher training in the LOI, including the teacher training session on supporting second language learners and devise a system of teacher-local speaker partnerships to support comprehension and skills development across languages.
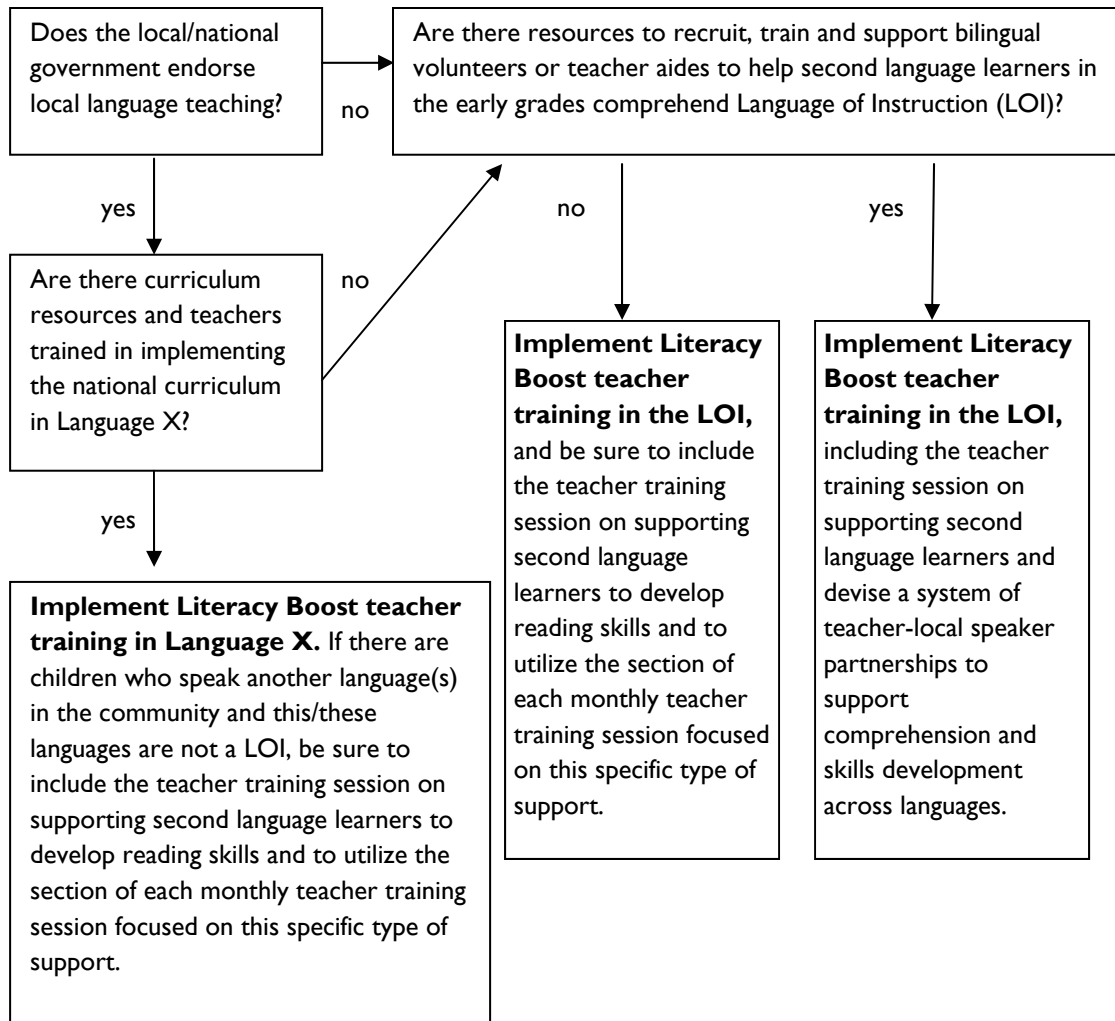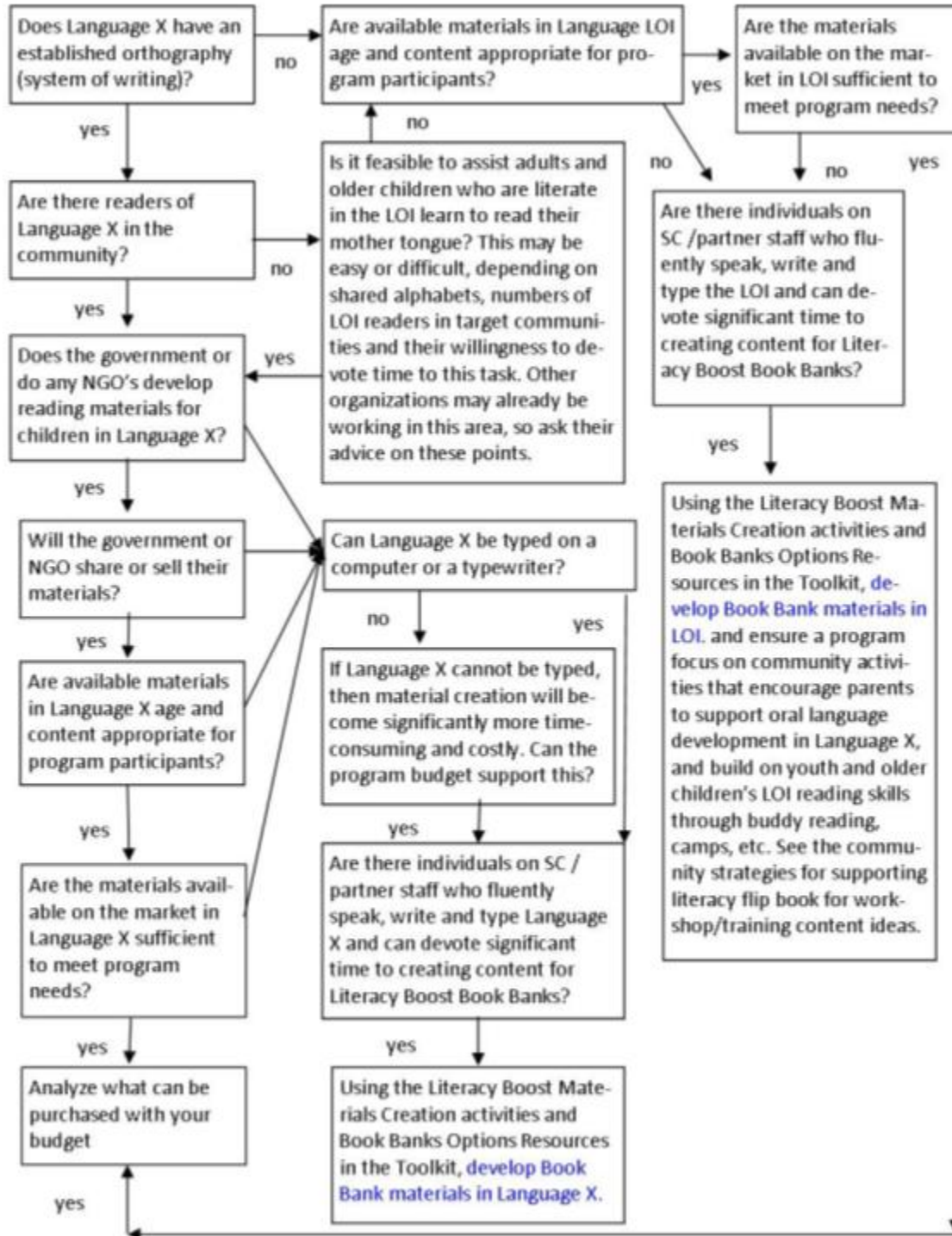
Figure 3: Multilingual Decision Tree, Book Banks

Conduct the children's literacy market research before starting this decision-making process.

Key Questions to Determine the Language(s) of Community Action Activities with Parents and Children

1. Is there more than one home language spoken by parents in the target communities?

    - **Yes**: gather groups of community members together for workshops according to the language in which they are most comfortable: Language X or Language Y. Ensure that community reading awareness sessions use the appropriate language for each group.

    - **No**: conduct community literacy awareness raising in Language X.

2. Is there more than one home language spoken by the students in the target schools?

    - **Yes:** Arrange it so that Reading Camps are run by camp counselors who can speak and understand the home languages spoken by the children. (Note: If camps have to be done in mixed language groups for logistical reasons, programs could opt to assign a pair of counselors who speak/understand the various languages represented, as well as get support from the children themselves to help in explaining questions, instructions or concepts to other children in the group.)

    - **No:** Conduct Reading Camps and activities for children in their mother tongue.