

# Developing and Publishing Early Grade Teaching and Learning Materials in Liberia

# 10 Lessons learned

## 1. Use strong criteria when analyzing current materials

At its inception, the United States Agency for International Development's (USAID's) Read Liberia Activity conducted an inventory and evaluation of all teaching and learning materials (TLMs) created under the previous Liberia Teacher Training Project, as well as other core textbooks and story books available on the market. The team prioritized several criteria for evaluating the books, including the following: relevance of themes; quality of plot structures and character development for narratives; gender and inclusion; and strategic use of repetition, humor, suspense, action, and other elements to engage the reader's interest. Read Liberia also analyzed teacher instruction guides (TIGs) to identify ways to improve pacing, chronology, cross-referencing, gender and inclusion, assessments, differentiated instruction, layout, and font size. Based on these reviews, Read Liberia partnered with the Ministry of Education (MOE) to revise the materials, adding songs to build children's oral language skills and, based on teacher feedback, improving pacing and reducing the number of letter sounds introduced each week—while still covering all the MOE's phonics curriculum content. Additionally, Read Liberia added words to the student activity book that the students can easily practice at home. Because some students are learning English as a second language, Read Liberia increased the vocabulary lesson time and added simple vocabulary definitions to the TIG to support teachers' instruction. Based on student assessment data, Read Liberia also allocated more time to read alouds, reading fluency, and comprehension activities.



Child with their Read Liberia Let's Read Book. Photo credit. RTI.

## 2. Plan material revisions as an ongoing process to enable continuous improvement of new editions

Improvements to Read Liberia materials were implemented over two cycles of revisions. Throughout the project, MOE stakeholders, including teachers, and Read Liberia instructional coaches gave feedback on the TLMs. Student assessment data and realities on the ground, such as teacher comfort levels and student home language profiles, also informed the recommended improvements. The MOE should consider undertaking additional revisions in the future to continue improving the materials.

## 3. Seek collaboration and involvement within ministry teams

At the start of Read Liberia, the Senior Reading Director participated in a two-week MOE Curriculum Syllabus Writing Workshop. This was a valuable opportunity for her to share the Read Liberia instructional approach to reading; as a result, the Read Liberia approach was included in Liberia's revised curriculum and is being rolled out to every school across the country. The Senior Reading Director also worked with the MOE curriculum team on setting outcomes and competencies related to the teaching of reading, grammar, spelling, and writing. The MOE was involved in the revision cycles, providing detailed feedback on the first set of materials and later participating in a workshop to review data from the first two years of implementation. This close collaboration with the MOE ensured buy-in from all parties and will continue to support the sustainability of early grade reading (EGR) in Liberia.

## 4. Achieve suitable pace and content of scopes and sequences before developing materials

A scope and sequence is the template and schedule for what is to be taught each day, week, term, and year. Once this is in place, it serves as the framework that all writers, illustrators, and designers refer to when developing a title. During Read Liberia's review of prior materials, they determined that the pacing in the scopes and sequences of previous materials was too intensive and did not allow sufficient time for students to truly master the skills being taught. As a result of these observations, and in collaboration with the MOE as it revised the materials, Read Liberia slowed the pacing in grades 1 and 2. To align with the MOE's instructional cycle, the number of scripted lesson plans in the materials was increased from 30 to 36 for the whole school year.

Week 2 Lesson Planner					
	Monday (Day 1) pages 22–25	Tuesday (Day 2) pages 26–29	Wednesday (Day 3) pages 30–33	Thursday (Day 4) pages 34–37	Friday (Day 5) pages 38–40
Phonological Awareness	Blend syllables to make words.	"What's Your Name?"	Blend syllables to make words.	"What's Your Name?"	
Song		"What's Your Name?"		"What's Your Name?"	
Alphabet Recognition and Phonics	• M, n • Read words with the letter n as /n/.		• C, c • Read words with the letter c as /k/.		• Quiz • Differentiated review
Spelling		am, at, mat, rat, ran, fan, man, on		am, at, mat, rat, ran, fan, man, on	
Sight Words	see, a		see, a		
Written Vocabulary	this, rat, mat, on		cat, ran, fan, see		
Reading Comprehension	"The Rat"		"The Mat"		Differentiated review
Reading Fluency Practice		Pairs: "The Rat"		Pairs: "The Mat"	Differentiated review
Oral Vocabulary		hunt, agree, swim, watch, have fun, forget		hunt, agree, swim, watch, have fun, forget	
Read-Aloud		"Toe, the Young Hunter"		"Toe, the Young Hunter"	
Homework	• Page 7 in Student Activity Book • "The Rat"	Write spelling and sight words 3 times in copybooks.	• Page 8 in Student Activity Book • "The Mat"	• Write spelling and sight words 3 times in copybooks.	Re-read "The Rat" and "The Mat."

Page from Read Liberia Teacher Instruction Guide. Week 2 Lesson Planner. Photo credit. RTI.

## 5. Utilize proven methodologies for teaching reading and writing and highlight learning objectives

RTI International's experiences in Liberia, Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, Nepal, and elsewhere have taught us that effective EGR instruction relies on three core elements:

1. Provide teachers with materials that include structured, daily lessons based on a robust but reasonable scope and sequence with easy-to-understand instruction.
2. Provide students with culturally relevant, grade-appropriate, high-quality reading materials in ample quantities.
3. Provide robust teacher training and follow-up support using coaching tools for monitoring instruction and student outcomes.

In line with international best practices, the Read Liberia instructional approach covers phonological awareness, phonics and word study, spelling, sight words, vocabulary, reading comprehension, listening comprehension, fluency practice, and writing composition. Research indicates that writing is an essential component of a balanced literacy program; therefore, writing is integrated into the regular daily lesson plans. Formative assessment and differentiated instruction are also embedded in the instruction. The Read Liberia materials include independent alphabet letter strips and syllable cards to help students learn alphabet recognition and sight words. Based on teacher feedback, Read Liberia also made the TIGs more user-friendly by clearly noting for teachers exactly what they should write on the blackboard and what page in the student books they should be on for every lesson.



**READING FLUENCY PRACTICE** 10 MIN  
Now you will read the story "On the Move" with your partner. Please turn to page 36 in Let's Read.

Have the students work in pairs, taking turns to read the story aloud to each other and helping each other read correctly and fluently. Students should read the story 3 times each. Time permitting, call on individuals to take turns reading aloud correctly and fluently for the whole class.

**ORAL VOCABULARY** 10 MIN  
Now we will review our vocabulary words.

1. live: "I live. The place where you live is where your home is. For example, I live in (Name of Town). Many people live in Monrovia. Where do you live?" (Help individuals respond in well-formed sentences using live.)
2. hometown: "I hometown. Your hometown is the place where you were born and grew up and where your family is from. People who move away often go back to visit their family in their hometown. My hometown is (Name of Town). What is your hometown?" (Help individuals respond in well-formed sentences using hometown.)
3. environment: "I environment. The environment is the land, buildings, air, water, and other things around us. (Point to your surroundings.) For example, our school is part of our environment. What else is part of our environment?" (Help individuals respond in well-formed sentences using environment.)
4. clean: "I clean. Clean means washed, tidy, and not dirty. Turn to page 151 in Let's Read. What are the children in the picture doing to keep their environment clean?" (Help individuals respond in well-formed sentences using clean.)
5. dirty: "I dirty. Dirty means messy or not clean. For

[Top] Students reading from their Read Liberia Let's Read Book. [Bottom] Page from Read Liberia Teacher Instruction Guide. Photo credit. RTI.

## 6. Reference gender, disability, and religious minority guidelines at all stages of development

When revising the materials, Read Liberia ensured balance in the frequency of representation of genders in the texts in the student readers, the read aloud stories, and the supplementary storybooks. Similarly, Read Liberia ensured positive representations of religious minorities and people with disabilities. The Read Liberia team used the USAID Guide on Strengthening Gender Equality and Inclusiveness in Teaching and Learning Materials to achieve this balance. Writers, illustrators, and reviewers should all refer to these guidelines and other MOE guidance in the materials development process.

Material Title	Page	Depiction
Student Activity Booklet - KG	44	Female student in wheel chair
Student Activity Booklet - KG	101	Customer in market wearing Muslim <i>hijab</i> (headscarf)
Student Activity Booklet - KG	111	Male student with <i>crutches</i>
G1 Supplementary Reader <i>New at School</i>	2	Male student with <i>crutches</i>
G1 Supplementary Reader <i>New at School</i>	8-12	Albino male character
G1 Supplementary Reader <i>Dogs Can Help</i>	10	Male character who is blind
G1 Supplementary Reader <i>Dogs Can Help</i>	12	Boy in wheelchair
G2 Supplementary Reader <i>Finding Friends</i>	6	Boy and Girl in Islamic dress
G2 Supplementary Reader <i>Finding Friends</i>	7	Muslim child who says " <i>assalama</i> " (Koranic Arabic)

Instances of inclusion in Read Liberia books. Photo credit. RTI.

## 7. Integrate assessment in instruction as part of ongoing practice and support teachers to undertake differentiated instruction

Read Liberia included formative assessments in the TIGs to help teachers continuously assess students' learning and to adjust and differentiate instruction based on continuous assessment results. In this way, daily checks are conducted within the flow of instruction. Once a week, the teacher gives a short quiz that is easily administered in a group format; based on the results of the quiz, the teacher assigns the students to groups for extra practice in areas where they need additional support. The TIGs also include guidance to teachers on how to revise and reinforce lessons based on students' needs.



Teacher conducting a lesson in Read Liberia supported school. Photo credit. RTI.

## 8. Pilot books with the target audience and research locally produced learning materials prior to new development

To be truly effective, revised teaching materials need to be reviewed and tested by both newly trained teachers and those who have been in practice for many years. Many ministries and project teams have former teachers within their materials development teams. However, for user testing, it is essential to use the target audience where possible. Teachers, coaches, USAID and Read Liberia staff, pedagogical experts, special and inclusive education specialists, and MOE staff have all contributed to improvements in the Read Liberia materials. Grade 1 and 2 teachers, principals, and coaches tested the materials and conducted classroom observations. They also monitored the use of student books in the home, which led the developers to include a list of spelling and sight words in the student books to better enable practice at home. Where possible, teachers and students should be able to give feedback throughout the lifespan of materials.



Parent listening to student reading at home. Photo credit. RTI.

## 9. Expect delays in approval, printing, and distribution

Even a 'light' revision of existing materials can be extremely time consuming. Quality control measures can be compromised if a production manager is not in place to plan, organize, and track a detailed production schedule. Different stakeholders—such as the MOE steering groups, donors, and implementers—may have their own approval processes that should be considered. Procurement teams should be given ample time for sourcing publishing houses, printers, and distribution companies. Large print runs will require knowledgeable staff, often on site to check and approve all print proofs. Staff travel should be factored in where printing is undertaken outside of the country unless virtual approval processes are possible. Thorough research of requirements for large cross-border shipments is essential.



Materials delivery truck being dug out of the mud en route to the MOE warehouse. Photo credit. RTI.

## 10. Ensure accessibility and flexibility of material source files

Read Liberia adjusted activities to support students, parents, and teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent school closures. To support the MOE's COVID-19 response, Read Liberia developed and recorded radio-based lessons in reading and grammar that corresponded with the TIGs for grades 1 and 2. Content from student books was easily adapted and recorded into radio versions of lessons in collaboration with the MOE Teaching by Radio team. Through listening to the radio content, students were able to actively participate in the lessons by singing, reading, writing, answering questions, and solving problems in ways that imitated the active listening and learning that teachers foster in a classroom. To enable creative uses of the materials in the future, it is important that material source files are fully editable in industry-standard formats so that future implementers and the MOE can easily edit and update materials.



Students following the Teaching by Radio lessons. Photo credit. RTI.



Student reading Read Liberia Let's Read Book. Photo credit. RTI.

### More Information:

The USAID Read Liberia Activity is a five-year (September 2017–September 2022) program that aims at improving early grade reading skills for Liberian students in 640 public schools in grades one and two. Read Liberia also pilot tested a program to develop emergent literacy skills for Liberian students in 60 public kindergarten schools. The Activity is implemented in six targeted counties—Lofa, Bong, Grand Bassa, Nimba, Margibi, and Montserrado. Read Liberia is funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and implemented by RTI International with Another Option, Brattle Publishing Group, and Diversified Educators Empowerment Program (DEEP) subcontractors through direct partnership with the Liberian MOE.

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