Exploring the Domain of Early Language, Literacy, and Numeracy: Accounts of Teachers and Parents

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explores the experiences of teachers and parents in the implementation of Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) subject and the use of Mother Tongue (MT) language as a medium of instruction. Moreover, this study discovers the coping mechanism and insights of the teachers and parents. In Schools A, B, and C, purposive sampling was used in choosing 15 participants for the in-depth interviews and focused group discussion. In this study, the teachers' and parents' responses are centered to MTB-MLE as a subject per se and as a medium of instruction. The results revealed the themes for experiences: struggling with MT language use, sustaining MT for instruction, determining the downside of MTB-MLE subject, preferring English for numeracy, and losing interest to learn. To cope with the challenges, teachers, and parents' resort to bridging the languages, creating solutions, and strengthening parent-teacher links. The participants continue to experience the challenges with insights for re-evaluating the curriculum, intensifying the second language use, and retaining the mother tongue language instruction. This implies that an evaluation is needed to address the challenges in teaching particularly in using MT as the medium of instruction in the primary schools. The benefits of using the second language may be considered following the demands of 21st century education.

Keywords: mother tongue-based multilingual education, literacy, numeracy, K to 3 learners

INTRODUCTION

Educational research revealed that teaching techniques that allow bilingual kids to use their whole linguistic repertoire are helpful to both their bilingual development and their overall school accomplishment (Ganuza & Hedman, 2019; Garcia, 2009). The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) published on the feasibility of teaching in the mother tongue or first language in a bilingual early childhood setting in Asia and the Pacific. They have pressed it on its commitment to growth and sustainability.

Formal education is also proven to be important for literacy development. Nonetheless, many bilingual kids are educated in only one language, which is usually the main language (Ganuza & Hedman 2015; Hyltenstam & Milani 2012).

The evolution of English in ASEAN, demonstrating that English has become increasingly significant even in ASEAN countries that were not colonies of the United Kingdom or the United States. The language policies of ASEAN countries almost always require people to learn both their native language and English. This combination of studying English and a national language. As a result, local and indigenous languages, in addition to the national language, are being phased out of many school curricula and other spheres in favor of English (Jenkins, Baker, & Dewey, 2018; Kirkpatrick, 2012).

In the Philippines, DepEd has been using the mother tongue as a medium of instruction, but it was implemented as a separate subject in June of the 2012-2013 school year (DepEd order No. 74, series of 2012-2013). The Key Stage 1 which is comprised of kindergarten and grades 1 to 3, shall be taught in the first language. First language or L1 is our mother tongue language (Sumalinog, 2018).

However, language-in-education policy has recently become a contentious issue in the Philippines, where the MTB-

MLE, or Mother Tongue-based Multilingual Education, was introduced (Alieto, 2018). This was thought to be a way to ease the linguistic change from the L1 to the national and official languages of Filipino and English in classrooms further equalizing prospects for social development for speakers from various linguistic and social contexts throughout the archipelago (Osborne, 2020). Problems arose because of the multilingualism in the Philippines. The implementers encountered obstacles for the flow of the newly implemented system (Sumalinog, 2018).

In the Division of Tagum City, limited research has been seen on the implementation of Mother Tongue-Based-Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) subject after it was implemented for several years. Despite the continuous efforts to support the implementation, numerous challenges are encountered by teachers and parents from the beginning of the implementation up to the present. Conducting research to see if teachers and other stakeholders recognize its educational value not only fills in the gaps, but also highlights the necessity for sentiment analysis to confirm the premise that teachers' attitudes on teaching MTB-MLE will be very positive (Arispe, Capucao, & Maligat, 2019).

In general, both students and teachers find learning to be a frustrating experience. There is clearly a gap between policy and practice. This study highlights the in-depth perspectives of teachers and parents on the matter. Their insights play a vital role in reviewing and crafting policies that would serve the best interest of the learners.

Even though DepEd provided a rather progressive framework for expanding language in education policy, allowing teachers and parents to select their preferred medium of instruction, the majority of primary school learners remain at a disadvantage in literacy and numeracy. The dilemmas stated above led to crafting this study which explored how public teachers and parents viewed the pros and cons of MTB-MLE as a subject and Mother Tongue (MT) as medium of instruction, especially in literacy and numeracy; their experience and challenges in teaching MTB-MLE as a subject and using the mother tongue language in teaching literacy and numeracy; and how they cope up with the challenges they encountered to achieve the desired competencies in literacy and numeracy.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative design study utilizing a phenomenological approach. It means that all the qualitative methods view the world as subjective, rather than objective (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The phenomenology approach aims to describe the essence of a phenomenon by looking at it through the eyes of individuals who have experienced it (Teherani et al.,2015).

In this study, it explored how 15 K-3 teachers view the implementation of MTB-MLE as a subject, their experiences in the implementation of the subject and the use of mother tongue as the medium of instruction, and how these teachers addressed the challenges they encountered to achieve the required literacy and numeracy of the learners.

Two methods were employed in collecting qualitative data through focus group discussion (FGD) and in-depth interview (IDI). Focus group discussion is a common qualitative method for gaining a deeper understanding of social issues. An in-depth interview, also known as a one-on-one interview, is a technique for gathering more thorough information or gaining a deeper grasp of a subject or concept.

Research Participants

This study is participated by teachers and parents. Six among them were teachers designated for the in-depth interview: one kindergarten teacher, one Grade 1 teacher, one Grade 2 teacher, two Grade 3 teachers, and one Grade 4 teacher.

There were nine participants for the focus group discussion which is comprised of five teachers and four parents. The teachers who participated in the FGD were as follows: one Kindergarten teacher, one Grade 1 teacher, one Grade 2 teacher, one Grade 3 teacher, and one Grade 4 teacher. For the parent-participants, there were two

parents from Grade 1 level, one from the Grade 2, and one from the Grade 3 level.

The purpose of this selection is to triangulate the responses of the participants and saturate data based on the conducted interviews. Creswell (2009) advised that a phenomenological study conducted with a heterogeneous group should be a minimum of 3 to a maximum of 15 individuals.

Data Collection

Creswell (2007) mentioned that qualitative researchers will be tied up in a series of activities in the process of collecting data. A vital step is to find participants involve in this study, the availability of material, and place where to conduct study to obtain accurate information.

The researcher took laborious steps in the data collection procedure. The researcher also engaged in a series of activities in the process of collecting data before arriving to the completion of the research study. These are asking permission to conduct the interviews, selecting the participants, conducting the orientation and interviews, and storing data.

Data Analysis

Qualitative design includes a variety of data gathering methodologies that researchers can employ to aid in the supply of cultural and contextual descriptions and interpretations of social phenomena (Vaismoradi & Snelgrove, 2019).

This study made use of the content and thematic analysis in analyzing the data to be collected and gathered. Qualitative content analysis (QCA) and thematic analysis (TA) were the two common approaches in data analysis. According Vaismoradi and Snelgrove (2019), the researchers who use QCA aim to provide a concise yet comprehensive report on the data's commonalities and discrepancies.

Trustworthiness

In this study, the researcher observed the facets of trustworthiness to maintain the integrity of the data gathered from the selected participants.

According to Shenton (2005), the researcher would state the importance of assessing the worth of the study such as establishing credibility, confirmability, transferability, and dependability to create trustworthiness in the conduct of the study.

Ethical Considerations

According to Creswell (2007) as This study will follow the standards of the Schools Division Research Committee (SDRC) for the guidelines of ethical consideration particularly in addressing the population and data such as, but not limited to voluntary participation. No one should ever feel compelled to participate in a research study. Any sort of persuasion or deception used to acquire someone's trust falls under this category (Enago Academy, 2020).

The participants were granted the option to participate without any plan of consequence or compensations or loss of benefits. Therefore, after the purpose and the benefits of the study was shown to the participating person, the rights of the participant to provide the body of knowledge was carefully measured and foresighted upon. In this study, the participants were not forced to be part of the study. They were free to withdraw their participation when they feel uncomfortable during the conduct of the study.

RESULTS

Experiences of the Teachers and Parents in Early Language, Literacy, and Numeracy Using the Mother Tongue

The experiences of the participants in the implementation of the MTB-MLE subject and the use of mother tongue language in instruction revealed the following themes.

Struggling with MT Language Use. Teachers and parents struggle in the mother tongue language use. This is attributed to different home languages of learners that required them to contextualize materials and strategies. For the participants, it would be easier to implement the MTB-MLE subject only if we have our own orthography, meaning we don't depend on other languages or

dialects as they have their distinct features applicable to its locals. The teachers also shared the unaligned materials to the curriculum which makes it hard for them to deliver MTB-MLE instruction. Parents also have aired that using the mother tongue language should not be forced in schools because home orientations are diverse. Lastly, learners also have encountered struggles, as per teachers and parents' account, in terms of literacy and numeracy where they frequently encounter language confusion.

Supporting the MT-Based Instruction. Teachers are positive in using mother tongue as a medium of instruction. They seem to have no problems as the use of MT in instruction highlights the identity of our culture. However, it should be used as a supplemental language especially in literacy and numeracy to catch up with the demand of producing 21st century learners.

Determining the Downside of MTB-MLE Subject. The relevance of MTB-MLE subject to real life practice is questioned as the subject will only end in Grade 3. It no longer has its counterpart in the higher grades; thus, teachers opt to use Filipino and English in their respective classes. Also, the inappropriate bridging of the languages has affected learners in terms of spelling and writing.

The teachers have looked at the MTB-MLE subject as compliance to the mandates of the curriculum. It has been considered as an additional subject for the learners and teachers where they struggle to make ends meet considering the inadequate materials for teaching the subject.

Preferring English for Numeracy. The use of the English language in teaching numeracy is a crucial factor in maintaining the learners' proficiency. Many teachers are encouraged to use English, deviating from the curriculum, because they see that a paralleled approach to learners is important. Learners have acquired knowledge in numeracy as early as kindergarten, thus the English terms are commonly taught at home. With this, schoolteachers should assess the language use of the learner to give complementary numeracy practices in English.

Losing Interest to Learn. In a heterogenous class, the diversity of the learners would serve as a challenge for the teacher. Therefore, doing differentiated instruction would help them address the individual needs of the learners, especially to those who no longer pose interest in learning since they are either proficient or doubtful of the mother tongue language.

Coping Mechanism of Arts and Design Students under Distance Learning

After determining the experiences that the participants met, the participants laid down their coping mechanisms to address the challenges they encountered on the implementation.

Bridging the Languages. As parents and teachers have immersed themselves in the concerns of their learners in mother tongue language and the implementation of MTB-MLE, they have experienced negative effects besides the bulking advantages of the use of mother tongue language. Hence, they have several coping mechanisms to adapt to the curriculum.

The challenges that have resurfaced were dealt by parents and teachers through language bridging. This means that although they can do nothing about the mandates of the curriculum, they simply must adapt with the implementation at their own levels. Initiatives were made to ease the burden of the learners who, instead of learning the concepts of the other subjects, are also learning the mother tongue language separately.

Creating Solutions. One of the problems in the implementation of MTB-MLE subject in our region is the lack of orthography that would serve as the basis for instruction. The textbooks cascaded in the locale are based on other region's orthography thereby creating repercussions among parents and teachers.

In line with this, there are teachers who took the step to create a contextualized dictionary that could aid the teachers in delivering instruction.

The versatility of the teachers can be seen in the efforts they put up in their classrooms; also, some initiatives such as

creating a vocabulary book or contextualized dictionary is an innovation to support the needs of the learners.

Strengthening Parent-Teacher Links. Cooperating with parents is seen to be an effective strategy to keep the relationship with stakeholders strong. Establishing connections with them is vital to focus and monitor learner development. At the height of the implementation of MTB-MLE subject and the use of mother tongue language, it is advisable to keep the parents informed so that teaching will be reinforced in their homes. The teachers tapped the parents, especially those who are struggling in learning, to keep being posted on the progress of the child.

Parents admittedly see the long-term effects of the mother tongue-based instruction, but they still choose to support the implementation of the curriculum through being open to discussion regarding learner development. Teachers also make sure that their links with parents are not compromised therefore proper and transparent reporting is needed to keep the parents informed.

Insights of Arts and Design Students in Distance Learning

The participants expressed their perceptions, observations, and suggestions on the implementation of MTB-MLE subject and mother tongue language as medium of instruction. The insights would bring significant effect on the teaching and learning process.

Re-evaluating the Curriculum. The teachers showed intense passion in their professional work which enabled them to present insights through their lens. One of which is the re-evaluation of the MTB-MLE implementation as a subject. Teachers have considered the subject as an additional baggage in teaching.

As the participants expressed their insights of the subject and the medium of instruction, most of the teacher-participants favor the removal of MTB-MLE as a subject saying that it is an additional burden for their preparation.

On the contrary, a few teachers found no problem with the subject because it is part of the curriculum therefore everyone is bound to follow. As per the parents' perspective, some agrees to the removal of the subject, and a few has no problem with it being implemented because they got no choice.

Intensifying Second Language Use. In this study, it was analyzed that most of the teachers would prefer to use the mother tongue language as a medium of instruction but not as a subject. In this case, to further intensify the literacy and numeracy rate of the learners, exposure to the second language must be done at the classroom level.

Teachers are the key players of the implementation and they have seen the effects of becoming too comfortable with the language that would later be used minimally as learners advance through life.

Retaining the Mother Tongue Language for Instruction. In this study, one of the insights of the teachers and parents is retaining the mother tongue language for instruction. The use of mother tongue in classrooms is backed up by empirical studies which laid down its effectiveness to learning.

Moreover, teachers and parents also want to continue the use of mother tongue to establish sustainable and strong foundation in teaching literacy. As per the numeracy factor, teachers and parents suggest that English should be used.

The insights shared by teachers and parents magnify the help that mother tongue language brings to learners especially in literacy. Moreover, it is suggested that the use would be minimal if the learner is approaching to higher grades. Frequent practice of the English language would lead to mastery. With this, the level of development and capabilities of the learner should always be a top priority.

DISCUSSION

This section presents the discussion of the results of the study and implications for practice and for future research.

Experiences of Teachers and Parents

The use of the mother tongue language in instruction has produced desirable effects especially in literacy and

numeracy. The use of the mother tongue language is widely used in schools. There are cases, however, that it debilitates the impact of mother tongue language to learners.

Parents were adamant when it comes to language use at home and in school. As the public schools focus on the mother tongue language implementation, some parents are having difficulties with providing academic support at home. This includes 1) learners speak or are exposed to the English language at home; 2) some learners came private institutions where the mother tongue is not widely used; and 3) teachers and parents do not understand Cebuano terms as the place of study does not have its own orthography.

The participants have expressed their experience with using MT as the medium of instruction as per result of the analysis: 1) MT is helpful for teachers to deliver the lessons; 2) most of the learners are proficient in MT since it is their home language; and 3) learners can freely express themselves using MT.

Furthermore, one is generally enthusiastic in learning one's native tongue. This optimism is thought to be driven by ethnic pride. As a result, it's not surprising that the kids in this study are performing well in learning their L1 (Perez & Alieto, 2018; GonzálezRiaño, Hevia-Artime & Fernández-Costales, 2013).

As for the implementation of MTB-MLE subject in the curriculum, it allowed the teachers and parents to identify whether it is necessary or not. The individual cases of the participants contribute to the public bubble of implementation, these cases have seen the downside of the subject to learners and to literacy and numeracy learning.

The data revealed that there are teachers and parents who see MTB-MLE as an extra *'baggage'* due to the following: 1) inappropriateness of the learning materials to the context of the teachers, parents, and learners; 2) the subject is quite laborious on the teachers' end due to the inappropriate and unavailable teaching materials; 3) the span of the subject ends right at the third grade and may affect to the transition of learners to the higher grades; and 4) teachers and learners are forced to engage with the subject because it is mandated by the curriculum.

Regarding numeracy, the implementation of the mother tongue-based instruction in mathematics has drawn attention particularly to parents who have raised children in an English-based numeracy classes. As kids are exposed to the universal terms in Mathematics, the shift to MT-based numeracy instruction confused the learners where the terms and concepts are inherently translated to Sinugbuanong Binisaya.

With the problems arising in the numeracy of the early grades, based on the analyzed data, there were instances that learners taught in MT could not catch up with others especially in participating Math and Science contests. Second, teachers are more comfortable in using English terms such as plus, minus, equals, etc. One scenario was recalled by the teacher when the learner misspelled the word 'one' with '*wan*.'

Immediate feedbacking is a vital part in teaching where the teacher should correct the learners' mistakes in literacy and numeracy. Lastly, the learners who have been taught using the English terms in Mathematics could do better than the other learners, based on the teachers' statements.

Another factor is the implementation of MTB-MLE subject where the terms used are slightly foreign both for teachers and the learners. In this case, the learners and the teachers had to abide with the curriculum. According to the data in this study, the Sinugbuanong Binisaya seemed to be new to the learners hence, the learners would prefer Filipino and English over MTB-MLE. One example is the '*pulingan*' in Grade 2 textbooks, which became '*pungan*' in the third grade. Both terms mean noun in English or *pangngalan* in Filipino which are familiar to the learners.

Coping Mechanisms of Teachers and Parents

Teachers who experience challenges in the implementation of MTB-MLE subject and using the mother tongue language in teaching literacy and numeracy have devised ways to meet with

the learners' needs. Parents have also made efforts to support their child's learning amidst hurdles they need to take.

Bridging languages was made possible through contextualization, code-switching, and using picture words. These methods are only supplemental to the background knowledge of the learners. In case the learner is not exposed to or has not banked as many words as possible, then language bridging could be limited. Parents have been encouraged by educators to continue exposing young children to enrich their background knowledge. Contextualization would be a great avenue for learners to relate their experiences to the class.

Perez and Alieto (2018) stated that the concepts would become more solid and relatable because of language bridging and using the MT as the medium of instruction. This technique would imply valuing and capitalizing on the knowledge youngsters acquire before entering school, as well as the information they continuously gain from their homes and environments, which is a characteristic of early education quality.

Some have made a localized materials and dictionaries that would aid their instruction. To further support the learners, putting up a reading corner in the classroom also helps the teacher to ignite interest in reading. Jaramillo-Ponton, et al (2019), creating a little library or reading corner is an effort to address the needs of the community. Literacy resources are needed in classrooms. The program's goal is to introduce students to books as a source of literacy. The reading materials should be in the three languages: Mother Tongue, Filipino, and English.

Parents and educators, according to Katenga (2017) as cited in Peleme (2022), are the two most important stakeholders in a child's mathematics learning. A line of efficient communication between the instructor and the family must exist for parents to be involved, either directly or indirectly (Pelemo, 2022; Butler et al., 2019).

Teachers has seen the need to establish a strong parent-teacher relationship. This helped them to make the concepts taught in schools to be parallel with the teachings at home. Parents, on their end, perform their duties to attend to meeting and discussions that would contribute to the development of learners. The learners have been considered as the center of the practice and community links, underscoring the importance of raising functionally literate individuals for the society.

Insights of Teachers and Parents

The insights of the teachers and parents in the implementation of the MTB-MLE and the use of mother tongue language as a medium of instruction prove that there is necessity in helping teachers and learners in these aspects.

Subsequently, it raised two ideas among the participants: retain and/or remove the MTB-MLE subject.

First, MTB-MLE implementation is deemed necessary for cultural identity. Teachers have noted on the importance of learning the cultural identity of the learners through the language they speak. Hence, they opted to retain the subject as it is not doing any harm for them and the learners.

Second, there are teachers who suggest that the subject must be removed. In this case, while teachers strive to help learners improve their English skills, the MTB-MLE topic does the exact opposite by teaching the learners concepts that are equal to English and Filipino terminology. Ironically, English is now merely a primary school subject with little application in other courses (Apolonio, 2022). The subject is believed to restrict the efforts of the learners to understand a foreign language.

As of the present times, early grade learners are already exposed to different digital media. This makes them learn English at the earlier age, opposing the notion that English must be fully used in the higher grades.

Parents also have confirmed both sides. A parent with less educational background could not suffice to support teaching their children in the English language at home, therefore, they choose to use the mother tongue language as the main medium of instruction.

On the other hand, parents who are English-proficient, perceived that the MTB-MLE subject be removed since it does not necessarily prepare their children to go outside their shells and that their children are only repeating the concepts in the second languages. MTB-MLE is a mere translation of the other two languages in the curriculum. As the subject ends in the third grade, it will not be further intensified since it is not included in the Key Stage 2 curriculum.

Balanced bilingualism is an idealized concept. No one is equally competent in two languages across all situations. Most bilinguals use two languages for different purposes and with different people. An intensified use of second language could bear two end results: 1) increase proficiency among learners in the second language; and 2) denigrate the use of the mother tongue language in the classroom.

In this study, the teachers aim to produce English proficient learners to prepare them before entering the higher grades. Teachers give instruction in English but resort to code-switching and translating which lessens the effect of introducing the second language. To stabilize English and Filipino teaching, though it may be tedious in the beginning, teachers should not do any code-switching or translation to give the learners a chance to process and understand the second language. Consistent use of the language would give optimal outputs.

As per the mandate of the curriculum, some teachers would deviate through using the second languages in instruction. Apolonio (2022) specified that English is widely used outside the classrooms and homes. It can be found in the menus, prices, tags, etc. The Internet, which can be accessed by children these days, are using the English language.

Standardized examinations such as admission tests, PISA, and the like, use English to measure the proficiency of the learners. Learners are confronted with the reality that outside the classroom, they must catch up with the demands of the world. In this way, teaching strategies also need to be reshaped and integrate English in instruction.

Further, as much as teachers would want to use English as the medium of instruction in most content areas, they choose to retain the mother tongue language as a supplemental medium of instruction. In certain instances, as the learners are non-English speakers, casual use of mother tongue language could aid in bridging second languages.

Difficult or unfamiliar words in English may be contextualized through the mother tongue language or a presentation that could activate their schema or prior knowledge. The motive for using the mother tongue in teaching is to produce a connection between the known to the unknown (Apolonio, 2022).

In education, the language of instruction plays an important role, since the chosen language can aid in understandingg the concepts in subject areas (Perez & Alieto, 2018; Orwenjo, 2012). As the result of this study laid out their perspectives, the teachers and parents favored the use of mother tongue language as an auxiliary language especially for Grade 3.

Implications for Teaching Practice

The findings of this study provide implication for teaching practice as follows:

One, this study supports the use of mother tongue language as a supplemental medium of instruction for literacy and numeracy, specifically in connecting the background experiences of the learners to their current learning context. The use of English as the primary medium of instruction in some learning areas could help the learners process and understand the concept in the second language. The use of mother tongue could help aid the learning whenever necessary. Subject areas such as Mathematics and Science should be taught in the English language.

Two, intensifying the use of second language could help young learners be familiar with English terms. As the world outside their homes and classrooms require them to learn and speak the English language, teachers and parents suggest that introducing the second language should be as early as possible. The underlying results also suggest that

learners should be prepared for standardized tests such as PISA.

Three, the study also supports the contextualization of learning materials as initiated by teachers to localize the Sinugbuanong Binisaya terms since the locale does not have its own orthography and code-switching is almost always practiced.

Implications for Policy Formulation

Schools and other education officials have dynamic roles in improving the proficiency of learners in the language learning areas. The use of mother tongue language as a medium of instruction provides desirable benefits on the end of the learners. However, teachers and parents have a slight negative reception of MTB-MLE as a subject.

This study supports the perspective of teachers and parents to re-evaluate the implementation of MTB-MLE as a subject in the early grades. It is noted that the subject ends at the Grade Three level and does not continue in the Key Stage 2. The third grade is a critical grade level for teachers as they prepare the learners for transition, hence, the application of MTB-MLE subject is deemed unnecessary and a mere translation of the concepts of the Filipino and English subjects. Teachers and parents aim to solidify bilingualism among learners through the mother tongue language as a medium but not as another subject.

Implication for Further Research

The study is limited only to the investigation of the experiences, coping mechanism and insights of the teachers and parents in the implementation of the MTB-MLE subject and the use of mother tongue instruction in literacy and numeracy among K-3 learners. It is only limited to the teaching practices of the teachers.

The study also focused on the domain that contributed to the literacy and numeracy learning of learners. Parental support through paralleled instruction in their homes could help build a foundation in literacy. Exploring these areas might provide how parents and other stakeholders affect learning of the learners as they transition from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2 levels.

There is also a potential to explore on how bilingualism could be sharpened in classroom among elementary learners, teachers, and school cultures. Bridging languages, reading, writing, code-switching, and translation of languages can also be explored. It was also suggested that primary teachers should start preparing these learners for learning higher skills in the Key Stage 2 (Grades 4-6).

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