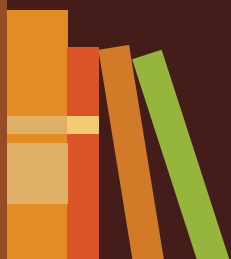


WHERE ARE THE ELL BOOKS?

EDUCATORS WANT TO EASE THE WAY FOR ELL STUDENTS, BUT NEED MORE CONTENT TO SERVE GROWING DEMAND



TECHNOLOGY MAY BE TRANSFORMING THE WAY PEOPLE LEARN a second language—but not in K–12 schools. Instead, librarians and teachers still prefer to use print books to support their English language learners (ELL), according to a survey by *SLJ* and Rourke Educational Media.

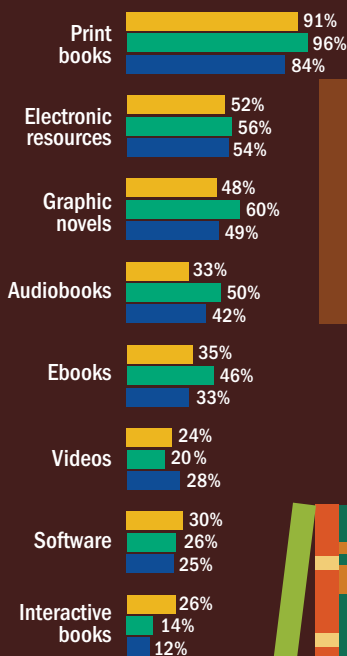
In the survey on English language learning conducted in May 2015, about 90 percent of the 198 respondents that serve ELL students report that they turn to print books to help their students master English. Additionally, about two-thirds of these teachers and librarians employ books written in a student’s native language or turn to bilingual titles for their ELL students. Yet even if they can find dual-language or foreign language materials, these books are rarely bestsellers or titles these kids’ peers are reading, say 55 percent of respondents, who report having difficulty finding suitable material. Desired resources include popular, age-appropriate titles in dual languages, and in languages other than Spanish, according to the survey report.

“[Our] school district has a very small population of children who are bilingual but prefer to read stories in Spanish over stories [in English],” says Patti Blount, director of the Durand (WI) Community Library, whose branch serves as a public and school library for grades 6–12. “With this need, it’s hard to find series that children enjoy such as *The Maze Runner* (Delacorte, 2009) and *Divergent* (HarperCollins, 2011) and other titles that become popular throughout the school year.”

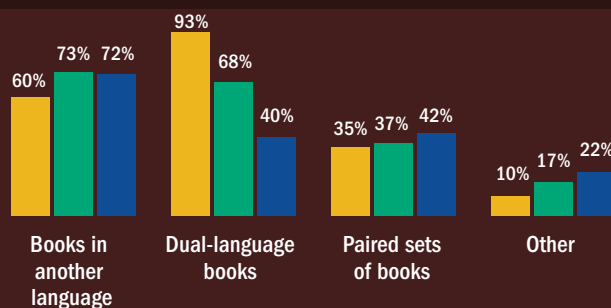
Fiction is in great demand across K–12 schools. Educators turn to picture books, thrillers, and classics, depending on students’ grades, when looking to help students grasp their adopted language. At the high school level, fiction comprises 68 percent of the ELL collection. Meanwhile, nonfiction is more prevalent at elementary schools, making up 43 percent of ELL collections.

Spanish is the predominant language, spoken by 95 percent of ELL students. Respondents also noted that ELLs spoke other languages including Arabic, Mandarin,

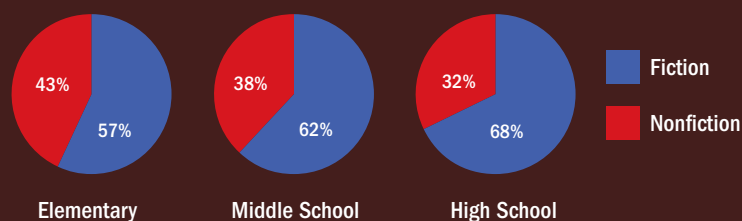
What types of materials do you provide for ESL students?



Types of books provided for English language learners



What percent of the books you provide for English language learners are fiction versus nonfiction?



and Russian. That presents an even greater challenge. Books outside of Spanish “are limited and mainly picture books,” says Sandra Parks, a teacher librarian at Skyline Middle School in Harrisonburg, VA.

Parks says that while Spanish and even Russian-language books are becoming easier to find, securing books for her other English-language students, on a range of grade levels, is not. She believes that this is crucial to not only meeting children’s academic needs, but making them feel welcome at school.

“Having something in a student’s native language makes an important connection with that student—it says we know where you are coming from, and we are glad you are here,” says Parks.

Money for materials

Although print resources are popular, electronic resources (generally dictionaries and ESL databases in English, according to respondents), are making headway and are used by 56 percent of those surveyed. Software and interactive books are most popular at elementary schools, with half of middle schools turning more often to audiobooks than to software and interactive books, and 46 percent using ebooks. Video was most popular at high schools, with more than a quarter using this media with their ELL students.

Funding is a major hurdle. A majority of educators say they pull from their school library budgets, with only 40 percent stating that their school has a dedicated ELL budget. Some have been hesitant to buy ELL resources, as the cost can quickly eat up their existing funds.

“We have a good budget for book purchases, but I find that ELL materials are often more expensive,” says Donna McAndrews, library media specialist at Niskayuna (NY) High School. “Sometimes it’s hard to justify the expense.”

About one in eight respondents, 12 percent, has turned to grants to purchase ELL titles. Of those, almost half, 47 percent, tap a school-specific grant—used to buy ELL materials throughout a school building—and a quarter receive library grants. Blount’s library, for example, received \$250 to purchase bilingual books from the Indianhead Federated Library System after it won a Foreign Language Materials in Mid-Western Wisconsin grant of \$14,120 in 2005 through the federal Library Services and Technology Act.

“Also, the Durand Library is fortunate to be part of the state-run Share-It interlibrary loan system, which allows us to borrow books from other libraries,” Blount reported.

Educators want to do what they can to ease the way for their ELL students and their families, the survey revealed, even though just one-quarter of respondents speak ELL students’ native language.

“Although there are [digital] programs available to translate documents, our fear is that they aren’t always accurate,” says Jackie Skiple, library media specialist at St. Helen School, a K–8 school in Dayton, OH. Instead, the school turns to a parent to help. “These students have been a wonderful addition to our school, and we want them to feel welcome.”

Lauren Barack is a contributing editor for SLJ.

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