Issues and trends in remedial education: what do the teachers say?

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to investigate issues and trends in remedial education in Malaysia. Participants were remedial teachers from schools in Selangor and Kuala Lumpur. Data was gathered through interviews and questionnaires administered to these teachers to get their views and perceptions on different aspects of their teaching experiences on Special Remedial Programme. Findings indicated that few respondents have full qualifications in remedial education. Among other issues identified were teachers' workload, lack of fund, non conducive learning environment and lack of support from schools administrators which contributed to the problems. Suggested solutions to these issues include training for these Special Remedial Programme teachers, reducing their workload and providing financial assistance for infrastructure and teaching aids.

1. Introduction

Special Remedial Programme in Malaysia is provided for students who have trouble in mastering the 3R’s (reading, write, arithmetic) complex skills due to environmental factors. This program is run by trained teachers (KPM, 2008). Implementing this program requires inter-related processes. The processes are; determining the eligibility of students, screening, diagnosing, intervention implementing and follow-up. Circular of School Division KP (BS) 8502/5/PK/Jld V(26) dated 8th January 1986 states that, "the remedial lessons are efforts in education to overcome the weak pupils learning problems in primary schools, particularly focused on basic skills of reading, writing and arithmetic, under the auspices of Special Remedial Teachers who have received special training in this field ". If they are not given the remedial lessons, they may fail to acquire the necessary education and their potential would be wasted. Thus, through a special rehabilitation programme, the needs of low-achieving students may be identified and met.

In Malaysia, remedial education began in 1967 utilizing the ‘withdrawal system’. The pilot project was done in nine primary schools across the country, which later continued with the government introduction of various programs to enhance the 3R’s, such as Early Intervention Classes for Reading and Writing in 1998, Intervention Classes for Basic Reading and Writing in 2006, Reading Skills Remedial Programme, Literacy and Numeracy, Guidance Programme for Reading, Writing and Arithmetic Skills and Special Remedial Programme to prevent failure in mastering the basic literacy and numeracy skills, reduce the number of school-dropouts and low-
achievers. Therefore, the Ministry of Education established 3,399 Special Remedial Classes across the country. In 2009, a total of 111 classes (3.3%) were set up, 2,917 (85.9%) were under construction and three (0.1%) in the pre-construction phase (Muhyiddin, 2009).

Education Development Master Plan (EDMP) 2006-2010 (KPM, 2006) reported that in 2004, a total of more than 115,000 (7.7%) of Level 1 primary school pupils (Year 1, 2 and 3) are still yet to master the skills of reading, writing and arithmetic (3R’s). In 2006, the Ministry of Education Malaysia has conducted a research and found a total of 138,271 Year 1 students in Peninsular Malaysia with 35.52% have not mastering the basic skills of reading and writing. In 2008, there were more than 54,000 Year 1 students have yet to master the skills of reading and writing, while PROTIM 2008 reported a total of 117,000 Year 4 students have not mastered arithmetic. National Key Result Area report (NKRA, 2010) of Ministry of Education Malaysia stated that early screening of Literacy and Numeracy Screening (LINUS), which was conducted in 2010 found that 37% of Year 1 students passed the recommended level of literacy and 46% passed the recommended level of numeracy. Consequently, the NKRA targets that 90% students who have followed three years of primary education will be able to master the skills of literacy and numeracy through the LINUS Programme in 2012. Until 2010, approximately 15,500 teachers to teach LINUS (PEMANDU, 2010).

The question now is whether EDMP’s aim to eliminate the gap in education achievement in Malaysia can be achieved, especially if the issues within Special Remedial Programme are not resolved. Although the Remedial Education Programme was initiated in Malaysia 30 years ago, but still it has not been fully effective in eradicating the problem of mastering 3R’s especially basic reading skills among remedial students. The same issues remain without much improvement.

2. Methods

47 Remedial Teachers filled up questionnaires on their educational background, work load, physical facilities, the cooperation of the school administration and financial allocation to manage the remedial classes. 10 of these teachers were also interviewed.

3. Results and Discussion

Robiah (1988) studied the duties of Remedial Teachers at two schools in Selangor. Three major problems were found; difficulty in obtaining a suitable room for remedial classes, the difficulty in obtaining financial assistance or funds to purchase and develop learning materials, and poor support from headmasters/headmistress and colleagues. In addition, the burden of other duties assigned to teachers who taught remedial education such as extra-curricular activities, administration tasks and other curriculum activities was also a problem. Remedial Education should be given more serious attention if we really want to help students who face basic problems in education (Ho 1986; Robiah, 1988). The problems that have arisen are that there are schools that do not have a special room for remedial classes, insufficient teaching aids, the whole responsibility of remedial education passed to the teacher, school administrators gave more priority to the mainstream classes compared to Special Remedial Classes, the remedial teachers need more exposure and training, parents’ lack of care about their children who study in remedial classes, and teachers are not interested in attending trainings or getting exposures in this field (BPPDP/EPRD, 1998).

3.1. Background of the teachers

The study found that 80% of the respondents accepted a position as a Special Remedial Teacher due to interest and 20% said that they were appointment by the administrator as there are no other qualified Special Remedial Teachers. 70% admitted they have been given courses and 30% said they had never attended any remedial education courses. The research done by the Education Planning and Research Department (2002) identified lack of training among the Special Remedial Teachers as a factor related to the students’ learning problems. Lack of training leads
to limited knowledge among Special Remedial Teachers on remedial teaching and learning, thus failing to produce teachers who are committed to the task.

Regarding the issues in the recruitment of a special remedial teacher, a teacher said, "I was interested and I realize it is our responsibility to educate these children," while another admitted, "because I don’t have to follow strict measures like the mainstream, so it is flexible."

In questions related to the teaching and learning process, it was surprising that 20% of the Special Remedial Teachers do not agree to vary the inductions set in order to attract attention and interest of students to start the learning process. In fact, there are 30% of the teachers who do not agree with the preparation of the Individual Lesson Plan for teaching. They justify that the preparation of the lesson plan will interrupt their concentration if there are too many plans to be prepared. Meanwhile, according to Zainal (1989) Special Remedial Teachers are responsible for planning and implementing activities for special remedial programme. However, overall respondents agreed on the need to provide appropriate teaching and learning materials according to the cognitive level of the students.

3.2 Workload

The study conducted by Hamdan et al (2006) reported that the teachers’ workload in schools affect teaching and the students mastery of 3R’s in special remedial programme. In this study, Special Remedial Teachers’ workload was viewed from the aspect of time, high number of students and their role in implementing the LINUS programme.

3.2.1 High Number of Students

According to the procedures of remedial class formation, there are three pathways, namely: i) the schools have two or more classes for each Year, the students for the remedial classes may be taken from those classes if the number of remedial students in a class is only 3 or 4 people. However, the number of pupils in a session should not exceed 15.; ii) Schools with one class for one Year, the students for the remedial class may be taken from other Years, but should not exceed 15 people.; iii) If the students taken remedial class are from one Year only, then the number should not exceed 6 people. Selection of either alternative shall be subject to consultations between the Special Remedial Teacher, headmaster/headmistress and teachers. However, study findings show that there are teachers who teach more than 15 pupils in each class. One of the respondent said "My class includes Year 1 to Year 5, and they are many", while another, "my class includes Year 1 to Year 6, more than 50 people and I am teaching alone."

3.2.2 Teaching Time of the Special Remedial Teachers

According to circular KPM.BPKHAS.300-2/2/12 dated 4th August 2010 on the roles of Special Remedial Teachers in the implementation of the LINUS programme, the time allocated for teaching is between 900 minutes to 1020 minutes a week. However, the study found that there are teachers who teach up to 1200 minutes because they have for remedial students Year 1 to Year 6 remedial students. Teacher Hamidah (not her real name), “40 times a week, I don’t even have time to eat, and sometimes I have to take relief classes”. Teacher Lina (not her real name), “Actually I have to teach more but I combined the Year 1 and Year 2 classes, therefore I have more time. If not, I t would be a wreck since I have to do other tasks also at school”.

However, there was also a teacher who originally had over 1110 minutes of teaching time, but has combined some of the classes that have the same level of learning although from a different class of Year 2 and Year 3, resulting in just 570 minutes of teaching.

There is also District Education Officer (DEO) such as DEO of Batang Padang, Perak who ordered the Special Remedial Teachers to serve full-time in accordance with their position, and do not allowed the Special Remedial Teachers to act as substitute teachers in accordance with circular KP(BS) 8594/Jld. II/32 dated 22nd January 1985.

3.2.3 Issues of LINUS
According to reference circular KPM.BPKHAS.300-2/2/12 dated 4th August 2010 on the roles of Special Remedial Teachers in the implementation of the LINUS programme, Special Remedial Teachers are instructed to attend the internal LINUS course, facilitate the LINUS screening implementation and teach the students who failed the LINUS screening 2 Stage 1. Although in principle, the LINUS programme aims to improve literacy and numeracy, but at the same time, it gives additional duties to the Special Remedial Teachers. Feedback from the participants of Role Improvement of Special Remedial Teachers in LINUS Programme Course held in Batu Pahat Johor, on 26th Mei 2011, organised by the Special Remedial Unit, Education Department of Johor, admitted that a lot of information from the course had never been delivered to the Special Remedial Teachers, although the LINUS programme has been running for a year.

3.3 Physical Facilities of Classes

3.3.1 Congested Classes

In the Special Remedial booklet, there are sketches for the development of remedial classes which provides a space for teaching and learning, multimedia room, mathematical room, language room, observation room and administration room for teachers. According to the Implementation Guidelines of Special Remedial Programme 2008 (PBKhas KPM, 2008), the school must provide the physical facilities for the Special Remedial Programme as follows:

i. A classroom with an area of 3 bay (one bay is equal to 22.5m²) particularly for special remedial classes as stated in the original plan and letter of building submission, it should be maintained as a special remedial class (new school).

ii. A room that is conducive with a measurement of 3 bays. The class layout is subject to the plan that was approved in the Ninth Malaysian Plan.

iii. Schools that has no facilities stated in item (i) and (ii) above, shall provide at least two 2 bays area.

iv. Ensure that all equipments / materials supplied for the remedial programme are placed in the remedial classes.

Example of remedial class sketch according to Implementation Guidelines of Special Remedial Programme 2008 shown in figure below.

![Sketch Plan Guidelines for Remedial Class](image)
Although the researcher found that many remedial classes have good facilities and are comfortable, but all the teachers said that the situation was much different when started to set up the remedial classes. There are still a few classes with poor facilities and limited space. A congested room makes it difficult for students to study in comfort. The findings of the study by the Education Policy Planning and Research (EPRD, 2002) funded by UNICEF found that floating classrooms still exist and teachers teach in nomadic manner by using unused places like store rooms, resources rooms, school canteens, the resting huts and so on because there is no appropriate remedial room. The same issue was published in Utusan Malaysia on 24th February 2004 regarding the uncomfortable and congested remedial classes and in 2010, the same issue was published in Mstar Online on 4th January 2010.

Figure 2 below shows one of the remedial room at a primary school which is very narrow to the point it is very difficult for the students and teachers to move. This also hinders the setting up of the learning kiosk.

![Figure 2. Limited Space For Special Remedial Classes](image)

### 3.3.1 Insufficient Teaching Aids

In this study, 30% of respondents said their classrooms do not have access to electronic media such as computers, printers, radios or televisions for teaching and learning. 90% said that they made their own teaching aid and 10% said they used the existing equipments. Figure 2 also shows the lack of furnitures other than tables and chairs for pupils' learning.

It is better if teachers could teach using ICT to facilitate the preparation of various interesting activities and learning contents because continuous construction of teaching aids costs a lot. Chua Tee Tee and Koh Boh Boon (1992) stated that since Special Remedial Teachers are assigned to help weak students to master the 3R’s, it is best if they are exposed to the latest concepts and practices in the remedial of basic reading through the use of educational technology appropriate to students' developmental stages of remedial.

### 3.4 Co-operation of the School Administration

The study found that about 66% of the respondents said that the administrators cooperate well, but about 34% reported otherwise. This should not happen because the government has stressed the need for administrators to support the special remedial programme. According to the circular “Special Remedial Teachers in Primary Schools 1986”, KP(BS)8502/5/PJld. V(26) dated 28th January 1986, and circular “Special Remedial Teachers and Development of Special Remedial Classes in Primary Schools”, KP(BS) 8502/5/Jld.V(34) dated 30th Jun 1989, it was clearly stated that headmasters/headmistresses are required to cooperate and provide full support to ensure the implementation of the Special Remedial Programme in the interest of students. Koh (1989) said that the most significant problem faced by the Special Remedial Teachers is the lack of cooperation, especially from the school
headmaster/headmistress. He also stated that the headmaster’s leadership is one of the causes of the problem in the implementation of Special Remedial Programme in primary schools.

3.5 Financial Allocation

100% of respondents admitted that they had used their own money for remedial class activities. Two of the teachers interviewed admitted that they never get any special allocation for remedial classes and had used their own money to provide teaching aids and for classroom management prior to seeking financial assistance. Two others said that they had to seek financial assistance from the commission of other subjects such as Malay Language and Mathematics committee for classroom management.

In Malaysia, there is no financial assistance specifically to provide suitable rooms and equipments for special remedial students as what is given to special education. This is a constraint to special to provide the facilities and teaching equipments. However, Special Remedial Teachers are allowed to apply for the financial allocation under the Guidance and Counselling Aid, Finance Circular 2/91-KP1573/17/ Jld. 8(78) dated 11th February 1991, the provisions of the Per Capita Grant (PCG), which deemed appropriate under the committee of Subjects Mathematics and Malay Language. From the financial allocation for core subjects, 40% is for Science, 30% is for Mathematics, 30% is for English, while the balance 40% is for other core subjects. This limited allocation is very burdensome and restricting for some Special Remedial Teachers.

4. Conclusion

Although the Special Remedial Programme is being implemented in Malaysia, it still requires a lot of attention and improvement. Special Remedial Programme still requires adequate infrastructure and facilities to provide the conducive room environment. It is proposed that the schools give priority in providing a place to study for special remedial students and distribute the provision of funds to Special Remedial Programme in order to reduce the burden on teachers and help expedite the process of teaching and learning. The administration should also be more sensitive to the training needs of Special Remedial Teachers who have no specific professional qualifications. It is necessary in the education system to ensure Special Remedial Programme is running smoothly in order to reduce the rate of illiteracy among school children. To ensure the effectiveness of the programme, the parties responsible should monitor the implementation of Special Remedial Programme continuously.
References


