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## EMBRACING DIVERSITY: ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF REMEDIAL PROGRAMS ON INCLUSIVITY IN ZIMBABWEAN SECONDARY EDUCATION

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**Abstract:** In the realm of education, remediation has evolved into a vital service following the adoption of UNESCO's Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education in 1994. Remedial education programs, as defined, aim to bridge the academic performance gap for students who have fallen behind their grade-level standards. These programs are designed to provide a tailored learning and teaching experience, facilitating the catch-up of students who are struggling academically. The ultimate goal is to bring these students to a level of achievement commensurate with their peers. Remedial education proves essential, especially when learners possess cognitive abilities that enable them to swiftly grasp previously missed concepts and seamlessly integrate them with their overall academic progress.

**Keywords:** Remediation, Special needs education, Academic performance, Learning program, Cognitive abilities

### Introduction

Remediation in educational settings has become a primary service since the adoption of the UNESCO's Salamanca statement and frame-work for action on special needs education (UNESCO 1994). Remedial education programme is as an educational programme that schools routinely use to bring low achieving students' academic performance closer to the standards of their grade in school (Melton (2010). In other words, it is the learning and teaching programme designed to bring students who are lagging behind up to the level of achievement realized by their peers, (Smith and Wallace, 2011). Remedial education is necessary where the learner is cognitively average or above average in intellectual ability and is therefore able to quickly assimilate the missed concept and relate it to the rest of the topic or area of study (Chakuchichi & Badza, 2004).

In the Zimbabwean context, the remedial education programme is for students who risk poor terminal performance in mathematics, reading and language comprehension, (Kasayira, Chireshe & Chipandambira, 2004). The establishment of the programme as a requirement was first spelt out in Chief Education Officer circular number 14 of 1982 as a draft (Chireshe & Mapfumo, 2002). The programme is also supported by the Chief Education Officer (CEO) Circular Minute number 12 of 1987. The circular announced that the remedial education programme is designed to assist pupils of average and above average ability who are at least two years behind in

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a subject to catch up. The remedial programme acknowledges the shortcomings that any educational system is bound to have, considering the human weaknesses and therefore attempts to save pupils who might not otherwise achieve their full potential at grade 7 and „O“ level if there is no early detection and intervention (Chireshe and Mapfumo, 2002). According to CEO circular minute number 12 of 1987, remedial education programme was extended in mathematics and reading to all primary schools. Initially, the programme was targeted at grade 4 pupils but the focus now includes other grades including secondary school learners, (Chireshe et al, 2003). Sadly, experience and evaluation of the programme indicate that there are still large numbers of learners who slip through the net at primary school and are discovered at secondary that they missed one or two basic skills or concepts in reading or mathematics. It is for this reason that this study will examine the implementation of remedial programmes for students with learning difficulties in secondary schools of Bulawayo in Zimbabwe. There are a number of reasons why a student might need remedial education. Some students attend schools of poor quality, and do not receive adequate grounding in Mathematics and Language to prepare them for secondary education. Other students may have transferred in and out of schools or missed school a lot, creating gaps in their education which contribute to lack of knowledge in core subjects (Chireshe and Mapfumo, 2002). Remedial education addresses these problems by giving students an opportunity to develop skills which they can use to pursue their learning (Kasayira et al, 2004). Learners placed in remedial education are later promoted into the regular classes when they are able to cope with the demands of the curriculum.

In Zimbabwe, teachers running the remedial programme are not specialist teachers (Chireshe et al, 2004). They gain relevant knowledge for remedial teaching through in-service programmes, seminars, workshops and demonstration sessions mounted by Remedial Tutors (CEO circular minute number 12 of 1987). With such difficulties this study focused on how these teachers will effectively implement the remedial programme in their inclusive classes. In secondary schools, there are still large numbers of students from primary schools who cannot read and calculate well, (Kasayira et al, 2004). Early detection and assistance by remedial education teachers are required for these students to grab a chance to develop their potentialities. These students are usually given an assessment test to determine their level of competence, (Chakuchichi and Badza, 2004). Based on test results, the students are placed in inclusive classes where remedial teachers are most likely to assist them in achieving their full potential. Observations made by the researcher show that there was a gradual increase in challenges faced by some of the secondary school teachers in implementing remedial programmes to children with learning difficulties in Bulawayo province. School administrators complained about lack of expertise among teachers and lack of resources for the school to assist learners with difficulties. Some teachers do not understand the needs of different Ministerial Circulars that compel them to implement remediation in schools. Therefore, the study focussed on how the schools are implementing remedial programmes in secondary schools of Bulawayo.

### **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

The implementation of remedial education in Zimbabwean secondary schools is facing various challenges which require great effort and determination to solve. This has prompted this study to examine the implementation of remedial education in assisting students with learning difficulties in secondary schools of Bulawayo. The study explored the challenges associated with the implementation of remedial education programme in secondary schools in Bulawayo.

### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

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1. Why do students need remediation in secondary schools?
2. How is the remedial educational programme being implemented in secondary schools?
3. What are the challenges experienced in implementing remedial education in secondary schools of Zimbabwe?

## **METHODOLOGY**

The qualitative research method was used in this study. The researchers opted for a qualitative approach because of the nature of data required and the interactive requirements of the data collection process. In this study the population was comprised of 35 remedial secondary schools teachers and 15 School Administrators. The remedial teachers were appointed by school heads and hence they were conveniently sampled for this study. Data was collected from remedial teachers and school administrators using questionnaires and semi structured interviews. The questionnaires were used to identify challenges associated with the implementation of the remedial education in secondary schools of Bulawayo. The questions were framed in a language that the respondents would understand. The questionnaires were personally given to respondents by the researcher. Interview sessions were carried out at respective selected secondary schools offices in Bulawayo province by the researcher himself. On receipt of the responses of the interview and questionnaire, the data was sorted, analyzed, and interpreted through a thematic approach.

## **FINDINGS**

The study was concerned with the challenges association with the implementation of remedial education programme in secondary schools in Bulawayo province. The findings from this research led to the following conclusions relating to the research questions.

### **Reasons for Failure to Implement Remediation in Secondary Schools**

The respondents from the interviews revealed that their secondary schools did not have any policy or instrument from the district or provincial SPS/SNE offices to guide them on the implementation of the remedial education programme in secondary schools. This supported by Respondent B who said, “The SPS did not even try to provide the school with guidelines or policy to implement remedial education in the school. The teachers for special needs education are more confused as they try to assist students with learning difficulties.” Some respondents pointed out that secondary school remedial teachers and administrators were guided by verbal reports and notes that they got from district school heads’ workshops. However, district remedial tutors admitted that the policy for remediation in secondary school level was available but it was not adequately accepted by the secondary schools. One remedial teacher felt that remediation in secondary schools was aimed at helping remedial students to assimilate missed concepts and skills but this was not the case as the teachers were not trained to deal with students experiencing learning difficulties. Respondent J supports this when she argued that: “how can I assist the students with learning difficulties when I was not trained to deal with such students. The students need a specialist trained teachers to assist them. The schools do not provide enough resources.” The findings revealed that lack of policy to provide guidelines for effective implementation of remedial education programme in secondary schools led the remedial teachers and school administrators to have different views on how to implement remedial education in secondary schools. The respondents showed that some remedial teachers and school administrators did not have basic knowledge about the purpose of remediation in secondary schools. Findings from the study showed that the majority of the remedial teachers and school administrators indicated that remedial students in their secondary

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schools were slow learners in all subjects. They identified their remedial students as students of average or below average ability in all subjects. This is corrected by Dakwa et al (2010) who identified the remedial child as the pupil of average or above average ability, not a slow learner only as indicated by the majority of remedial teachers and administrators in this study. This shows that the remedial teachers lacked the knowledge on how to implement remedial education in secondary schools.

### **The Implementation Remedial Education Programmes in Secondary Schools**

The school administrators and remedial teachers indicated that the selection and identification of remedial students was chiefly based on teacher's observation of a student's risk of failure. This concurred with the findings from a study by Stuck (2004) that selection of students for remediation in Canada was based on teacher's assessment of the pupil's risk of failure. All the school administrators indicated that most of their subject teachers used daily written exercises to determine students who needed remediation. However, some of the remedial teachers and school administrators indicated that selection of remedial students was based on school placement tests. This concurred with the announcement by Director's circular number 26 of 2008 that school based instruments should become the major inputs needed for selection of remedial students in secondary schools since the development of school national tests were still gathering momentum. Some remedial teachers and school administrators felt that the typical execution of the programme was in the hands of subject teachers but remedial teachers stated that the entire responsibility of the implementation of the programme was given to the school heads. Respondent C had this to say: "It is the responsibility of the school Head to implement the remedial education into the school system. The teachers have no authority to implement it."

Some of the remedial teachers and school administrators indicated that they used on-the-spot remediation to help their remedial students at least once a month not twice a week because they have no time for remediation during the lessons otherwise they would not finish the syllabus. They also confirmed that they could not cope with the afternoon sessions due to sports, lesson planning and marking. Study periods could be used for marking students' written work, otherwise remediation would increase their workload. Some of the remedial teachers openly indicated that remediation could not be done in the afternoon due to their personal commitments such as boosting up their financial status since their salaries could not sustain their lives, and were not getting teacher incentive out of the exercise. From the above findings it shows that secondary schools in Bulawayo province had different ways of selecting their remedial students and they used different methods of remediation. It was further indicated that lack of policy for guiding remediation in secondary schools led to use of different and unstructured formats of implementing the programme, thereby affecting the effective implementation of the programme in Bulawayo.

### **The Challenges Associated With the Implementation of the Remedial Education Programme in Secondary Schools**

All the respondents indicated that that remediation in secondary schools increased remedial teachers' normal workload. Since remedial teachers were also subject teachers for different classes, they felt that remediation increased their workload thereby affecting the smooth implementation of the programme. These are some their sentiments:

"Remediation increases my workload and I am failing to cope with the demands of my subject area." "It is difficult to plan for the individual educational plans for students with learning difficulties after I would have planned for

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the majority of students in class.” “The school administration is not aware that remediation needs extra work and time.”

This shows that most of the remedial teachers felt that they were having an extra workload thereby disturbing the effective implementation of the programme. Findings revealed that the majority of the remedial teachers and all school administrators unfolded that time tabling of remedial classes was difficult. The results illustrated that their secondary school time tables were fully loaded with their wide curriculum thereby making it difficult to fit in remedial classes. This concurred with findings from a study by Townsend (2007) that it was difficult for the South African secondary schools to include remediation on their master time tables. However, the results were contrary to the announcement by Director’s circular number 26 of 2008 that remediation in secondary schools had to be time tabled at least twice a week. All remedial teachers and school administrators complained that they did not receive or have a policy for remediation at secondary school level. They only relied on a verbal report and notes from heads’ workshop. The results were contrary to the announcement by Director’s circular number 26 of 2008 that secondary school remediation should be guided by its guidelines while the provincial remedial tutors are finalizing their researches.

Responses from the questionnaires indicated that remedial teachers had inadequate knowledge of the effective provision of remedial work at secondary school level. This concurred with the findings from the study by Guitierrez and Rodrigo (2011) that secondary school teachers in Mexico were not fully taught the intricacies of reading, and were unaware of the various techniques used by elementary teachers to teach remedial students. Some remedial teacher complained that departmental policies exerted more pressure on remedial teachers to complete syllabuses despite the difficulties they faced during the implementation of the programme. School departmental policies required total coverage of the syllabuses and high pass rate from remedial teachers despite their expectations by the programme. Other remedial teachers indicated that there was a negative attitude towards remediation in secondary schools crippled among the students and peers. This concurred with findings from Smith and Wallace (2011), Stuck (2004), Howeton (2004) and Rujukan (2007) that remedial students in Canada, England and Malaysia were frustrated and developed negative attitude towards the programme.

Results indicated that there were no workshops for secondary school remedial teachers to improve their skills on remediation at secondary school level. This contrary with what happened in the United States where all remedial teachers met the appropriate certification requirements and be fully qualified to teach remedial lessons (Cox, 2003). Findings also disclosed that remedial teachers’ teacher/pupil ratio was very high and that the remedial teachers could not cope with remedial students. This is contrary with what was stated by the Director’s circular number 26 of 2008 that remediation usually implies small-group or individual instruction that is conducted by the class teacher or special teacher.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the findings of this study it is apparent that majority of secondary school remedial teachers and school administrators felt that there were many challenges associated with the implementation of remedial education programme in secondary schools in Bulawayo. In the light of the above conclusion, the researcher found it necessary to make the following recommendations: The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, and the Department of Schools Psychological Services and Special Needs Education should provide a remedial education policy that guides the teachers on the implementation of remedial work to all secondary schools. The department



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of Schools Psychological Services and Special Needs should reconsider their proposed implementation of remediation at secondary school level in order to promote standardized procedures for selection of remedial students, use methods of remediation suitable for Zimbabwean educational demands. The staffing personnel such as provincial/district staffing officers and secondary school heads should review teacher workload policy by reducing the teaching and other core curricular workload of all secondary school remedial teachers for them to have enough time to conduct remediation effectively. SPS/SNE and district remedial tutors should conduct staff development workshops, seminars and in-service training for remedial teachers and administrators.

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