

## Teacher Perceptions on the Effectiveness of an English Remedial Teaching Programme in Primary Schools in Zimbabwe: Towards an Alternative to the Deficit Model

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**ABSTRACT** In the Zimbabwean education system, primary school pupils are tested at the beginning of grade four to determine their English proficiency and based on the test results those who fall below a certain predetermined score are placed on a generic remedial programme offered by a specially designated teacher. This study set out to evaluate the effectiveness of this English remedial education programme in Zimbabwe. Using the descriptive survey method, a total of thirty respondents from ten schools, comprising ten heads of schools, ten Grade four teachers and ten remedial teachers were issued with a semi structured questionnaire. For data analysis, substantive themes were deduced and outlined from the data through content analysis. The study showed that very few pupils were benefiting from remedial instruction. Remedial teachers were poorly trained for remedial teaching, materials for use for both teachers and pupils were grossly inadequate, while supervision and monitoring by Schools Psychological Services (SPS) was virtually non-existent. The study recommends that Schools Psychological Services considers an integrated approach where, rather than pupils being sent to an external expert for fixing, the grade four teacher provides the extra tuition using authentic contextualized grade four material.

### INTRODUCTION

At the dawn of independence in Zimbabwe, it was realized that there was a reasonable number of pupils who had the potential to pass their national Grade seven examinations but for some reasons could not make it. Something had to be done to help those lagging behind to catch up. An innovation in the form of a remedial education programme was then introduced to assist the average and below average pupils in grade four to master those problems they had not properly mastered from grades one to three. According to Ugwuanyi et al. (2014), a remedial reading programme is a specialized reading instruction adjusted to the needs of a child who does not perform satisfactorily with regular reading instruction and is an intensive, specialized reading instruction for children reading considerably below expectancy. According to Chief Education Officer (CEO) circular minute number 12 of 1987, the remedial education programme was introduced in all primary schools in Zimbabwe in 1982 in Mathematics and Reading. Each primary school head was asked to nominate a teacher in mathematics remediation and another in reading remediation, who would carry out the remedial work on at least two afternoons each week.

Justifying the remedial programme, CEO circular minute number 12 of 1987 notes that there are large numbers of pupils who cannot read and calculate at Grade 7 level, therefore early detection and assistance are required if pupils are to be given a chance to develop their potentialities and also if the large sums of money spent on education are to be cost effective. In this regard, Selvarajan and Asanthagumar (2012) aver that remedial teaching acts as a safety valve for the students who are behind the expected level of achievement and involves diagnosis of specific difficulties, provides suitable remedial measures and provides support to prevent reoccurring of these difficulties again in future. The issue of poor student literacy levels is also noted by Eleene, (2010: v) who writes that, "Educators and researchers in Jamaica have observed and examined the less-than-desired student performance in English literacy exams over several decades". Similarly, writing about Nigeria, Okebukola et al. (2013) state that Nigerian youths fail examinations not only because they do not read their schoolbooks, but also because they lack mastery in reading as a result of the deficiency carried over from primary school.

Justifying the use of remedial programmes in Wales, Brooks (2009: 4) argues that, in gener-

al, normal classroom teaching does not enable children with significant literacy difficulties to catch up and that although good classroom teaching is the bedrock of effective practice, most research suggests that children falling behind their peers need more help than the classroom normally provides. Children who are eligible to participate in the programme are selected through specially designed standardized diagnostic tests supplied as appendices to the CEO Minute number 12 of 1987 at the end of their third year in the primary school. The English test is divided into four sections covering synonyms, use of phrases, use of prepositions and a comprehension passage involving punctuation and the use of tenses. A department of Schools Psychological Services (SPS) was established within the Ministry of Education and Culture to monitor and assist on matters pertaining to remedial education. The third year in the primary school in Zimbabwe is the transitional year from the infants to junior grades. It is during this year that main concepts in the junior grades are introduced and once children miss out during this stage then remedial work must be provided to avoid total failure or grade repetitions. According to Abeberese et al. (2013), in the Philippines the program also targets fourth grade students because the school system expects students to have developed sufficient reading fluency to enjoy reading independently by the fourth grade. Allington and Johnston (2002: 15) note that it is during fourth grade that the “linguistic, cognitive, and conceptual demands of reading increase somewhat dramatically; there is a heavier use of textbooks and an expectation of greater independence in using reading and writing as tools for learning”. Meanwhile, Sana-core and Palumbo (2009) add that though some children transition smoothly to fourth grade, other pupils struggle with content area material.

### **Conditions for Remedial Teachers**

Newly appointed remedial teachers have to undergo training by the old remedial teachers. Later they visit the District Remedial Tutor for all guidance on remedial matters. CEO Circular Minute Number 12 of 1987 expects remedial teachers to attend in-service courses run by School Psychological Services staff and in turn brief other teachers on the techniques learnt. The issue of training is also fore grounded in

the Philippines, where according to Abeberese et al. (2013) prior to receiving the materials, fourth-grade teachers from each school attend a two-day training session in which they are taught to implement the programme and are given ideas for various reading lessons that incorporate reading in an engaging way. In consultation with heads of schools the remedial teachers in the Zimbabwean programme decide on days feasible for them to conduct remedial education. Lessons must be done at least twice a week for a duration of thirty minutes. Time for remediation lessons must appear on the master timetable in the school head’s office and remedial teachers have to be exempted from some if not all extra-curricular activities. The responsibility of the remedial teacher is to form an individual instruction programme that is suitable for the under achiever and to keep records of an individual child’s area of need and performance and assistance given. Children are kept in the remedial programme for six months to two years. The remedial teacher in liaison with the class teacher should be satisfied that the child has overcome his or her difficulties. For a child who does not show improvement over a period of two years a referral form or note is written for a School Psychologist’s attention.

CEO Circular Minute Number 12 of 1987 requires each school to keep a remedial file in which all information pertaining to remedial education in the school is kept. Termly reports by both remedial teachers and heads of schools are to be submitted to the District Remedial Tutor before the end of each term who in turn submits them to the Principal Educational Psychologist. Each remedial teacher must keep remedial record books, children’s exercise books and a register of attendance. End of year returns in the form of visual plot sheets and lists of selected pupils for the following year are also a pre-requisite. The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of teachers and School Heads on the effectiveness of this national remedial education programme offered to grade four pupils in West Circuit in Zimbabwe.

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### *Academic Literacies Theory*

This study is premised on the academic literacies theory, specifically the new literacy stud-

ies perspective (Lea and Street 1998; Boughey 2000; Gee 2005, 2008; Jacobs 2010). Academic literacy involves the ability to think/act, behave, read, write and participate meaningfully in a particular academic context. According to Boughey (2000: 281), "Academic literacy involves knowing how to speak and act in academic discourses. People become literate by observing and interacting with other members of the discourse community until the ways of speaking, acting, thinking, feeling and valuing common to that discourse become natural to them." Academic literacy practices-reading and writing within disciplines-constitute central processes through which students learn new subjects and develop their knowledge about new areas of study. Three approaches to academic literacy acquisition have evolved over time (Lea and Street 1998) and these include the study skills, academic socialization, and the new literacy studies perspective.

The study skills perspective is a deficit model that sees academic literacy as a set of skills which students can learn in isolation from the disciplines that they will then later study. The theory of language on which it is based according to Lea and Street (1998) emphasises surface features, grammar and spelling. According to Picard (2006: 98), "It suggests that the students suffer from some kind of "pathology" or deficit, which teachers need to remediate by focusing on "the basics". McKellar (2007) criticizes this approach for its narrow and superficial view of literacy as a skill which can be taught unrelated to context of application. Ugwuanyi et al. (2014: 119) actually advise that, "Remedial services should not be considered unless the classroom teacher has first attempted corrective instruction (that is, an instruction offered by classroom teachers to children needing extra opportunities to progress)". The remedial education programme in Zimbabwe seems to be grounded in this perspective as those grade four learners identified for the programme are taken away from their classroom context to a separate teacher for remedy.

From the academic socialisation perspective, the task of the teacher is to induct students into a new 'culture', that of the academy. The perspective sees academic literacy acquisition as being socialised into a particular set of practices and conventions which must happen in an authentic context. An authentic context would be one in which students work on formative tasks

designed specifically to provide support as they grapple with new academic concepts and conventions for a real purpose. Sarah et al. (2014) identify several discourses two of which seem to fall into the academic socialisation perspective, namely the genre discourse where writing is understood as a set of text types shaped by the social context and where learning to write involves learning the characteristics of those text types through explicit teaching and the social practices discourse, where writing is purpose-driven in a social context and learning to write involves real-life contexts and purposes for writing. According to this perspective, students must acquire the academic literacy as part of their main stream courses and not be sent to a separate centre for 'fixing' like is the case with the remedial programme in this study (Holtman et al. 2004).

The third perspective, the new literacy studies perspective, sees academic literacy as part of the whole person, inseparable from the person him/herself, as part of an identity. One's knowledge is an integral part of who one is, and shapes one's whole view of everything. According to Lea and Street (1998: 171), this is a critical theory approach which recognises the hidden power/ implicit ideologies that exist in all discourses and relationships. Critical theory recognizes that people are diverse rather than deficient, and looks for institutional transformation to accommodate and celebrate diversity. The focus shifts from student development to staff development to achieve curriculum reform in order to assist staff in meeting the needs of the diverse student body. As Piccard (2006) shows, teaching according to this view usually involves writing conventions taught within the disciplines. Instead of sending the grade four pupils to another teacher for language remedy, focus turns to capacitating the grade four teachers to help the grade four pupils in their normal classroom context using authentic grade four materials.

### *Enabling Participation in Academic Discourse*

The remedial education programme in this study isolates pupils performing below expected levels for special remedial assistance in the English language. But, as Jacobs (2010: 1) argues, "Conflating language proficiency and academic performance leads to a simplistic notion

that ‘solving’ surface language problems such as syntax will lead to improved academic performance in students”, and further comments that the dominant understanding of academic literacies underlying this simplistic notion is that it constitutes a list of skills (related to writing and reading and often studying) that could be taught separately in decontextualised ways and then transferred unproblematically to disciplines of study, rather than practices which were embedded within particular ways that disciplines constructed themselves through language.

Referring specifically to higher education, Holtman et al. (2004), indicate that, research suggests that academic literacy is complex, specific and contextualised so that generic “learning support” and “skills courses are unable to provide adequate preparation for the demands of higher education, but rather that the development of academic literacy needs to be integrated into disciplinary teaching. Although the authors refer to higher education, I would argue that this indeed is true of any level of education. The advantage of embedding activities into the course as opposed to separate generic courses is that the course content is the focus, rather than generic material. Therefore, students gain an understanding of the specific discipline concepts and processes in the course as they develop hand-in-hand with their academic skills. In the same vein, Zarei and Rahimi (2014) cite Russell (1995) who rejected the idea of the writing skills transfer across all genres and activities as he believed there is no generalizable set of strategies to be transferred.

Boughey (2000: 280), argues that having the discourse includes what you say, how you say it, as well as what you are and what you do while you say it - that is getting the whole role right. The members of a discourse share the same values, feelings and ways of acting and speaking. In order to be accepted, newcomers have to demonstrate that they know how to act and speak like the people who are already there, and that they share the same feelings and values. The concept of academic literacy involves knowing how to speak and act in an academic discourse. The benefits of embedding generic academic skills in courses and curricula have been acknowledged, in principle, for many years (Gunn et al. 2012). One can only become literate therefore, in my view, only in the discourse community and not through external generic courses that

do not take into account the knowledge structures of the specific disciplines.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

Designed in the descriptive survey approach, this study used a questionnaire with structured, semi-structured and open-ended questions to collect data and examine the perceptions and experiences of teachers on the remedial education programme in Zimbabwe. According to the University College of Distance Education (1995) descriptive research focuses on the systematic description or exposure of the salient aspects of a phenomenon, object or situation. Mathers et al. (2007) justify the use of the survey as a flexible research approach used to investigate a wide range of topics and that surveys are particularly useful for non-experimental descriptive designs that seek to describe reality. The survey method was found suitable for this study which sought the views of educators on the remedial programme under study.

### Population and Sampling

Education districts in Zimbabwe are divided into circuits for ease of administration. The circuit under study, referred to in this paper as West Circuit (to protect its identity) has a total of twenty nine primary schools. In all twenty nine primary schools, at least officially, remedial work is offered in reading. This circuit constituted the population for the purpose of this study. A multi-stage sampling approach was used in the study. Firstly a sample of ten schools was selected from the 29 schools using the simple random sampling technique. In simple random sampling, “Every individual in the sampling frame (that is, desired population) has an equal and independent chance of being chosen for the study” (Onwuegbuzie and Collins 2007: 285). Ten schools out of twenty- nine were considered a suitable representative sample as this number constituted over thirty percent of the population. As Gay (1987: 322) shows, for questionnaires, observations and interviews a sample of ten percent is a suitable minimum. From the ten randomly selected schools, a purposive sample of ten remedial education teachers, ten grade four teachers and ten school heads constituting 35% of the

total population were chosen for the study. In purposive sampling, sampling units are selected because they are considered information rich for a specific purpose on which the researcher decides (Holloway and Wheeler 2010). In the present study, the researcher targeted remedial education teachers, grade 4 teachers and school heads as these were considered 'information-rich' sources because of their work which involved working directly with the remedial education programme in the schools. The head of school was the remedial programme administrator, the grade four teacher was the class teacher from whose class the remedial children were chosen and the remedial teacher carried out the actual remedial instruction.

### Data Collection and Analysis

A semi structured questionnaire comprising both pre-coded and open ended questions was used. The pre-coded questions sought mainly background information on the knowledge of the respondents of remedial education while the open ended questions solicited their views and perception of the programme and its viability. For quantitative data, responses from pre-coded questions were scored and presented in tables for analysis. For the analysis of qualitative data, substantive themes were deduced and outlined from the data through content analysis.

## RESULTS

Results of the study are presented below beginning with the qualifications of the respondents in remedial education teaching. The chosen sample consisted of a total of thirty participants, composed of ten heads of schools, ten grade four teachers and ten remedial teachers. The first question sought to establish the qualifications of the respondents to determine if they

had any qualifications related to teaching students with special needs. All the heads of schools had a recognised teaching qualification (Table 1). A high percentage of fifty percent of the grade four teachers were untrained as shown on Table 1. It was interesting to note that one of the Grade four teachers had undergone training in special education but surprisingly this teacher did not take remedial classes. The sample of remedial education teachers consisted of 20% untrained teachers and 80% trained teachers (see Table1). None of the remedial teachers however had any training in the teaching of children with special needs. Any knowledge they had was from workshops. It is a wonder whether in the 20% of the schools that allocated remedial education to untrained teachers there were no qualified teachers at all who had at least done some child psychology. Putting untrained teachers to handle pupils perceived to have special education needs is in my view inappropriate.

Another closed question sought to find out if participants had any working knowledge of remedial education. On whether the heads of schools had received any training or orientation on remedial work in reading 90% had attended workshops organized by the Schools Psychological Services with 10% having never attended such workshops and therefore operating blindly in this field. While the number that had attended relevant workshops is quite satisfactory, the other 10% is cause for concern as children from those schools are being disadvantaged. Information on attendance of relevant workshops by remedial teachers who are the implementers of the programme indicated that 80% of the remedial teachers in the sample had been sent for orientation workshops organized by Schools Psychological Services. Twenty percent had not received any training but were expected to produce results.

There was a question which sought to find out if enough materials for use by remedial pu-

**Table 1: Qualifications of respondents in special needs education**

| <i>Qualifications</i>                         | <i>Number School heads</i> | <i>Number grade four teachers</i> | <i>Number remedial teachers</i> |
|---|----------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Untrained                                     | 0 (0%)                     | 5 (50%)                           | 2 (20%)                         |
| Qualified teacher                             | 10 (100%)                  | 4 (40%)                           | 8 (80%)                         |
| Qualified teacher +Special education training | 0 (0%)                     | 1 (10%)                           | 0 (0%)                          |
| Total   | 10 (100%)                  | 10 (100%)                         | 10 (100%)                       |



pils were being made available both locally and from the Schools Psychological Services. Ten percent of the heads had made some efforts to purchase appropriate material for use in the remedial department. On the same note only 10% of the schools had received any materials from the schools psychological services. The fact that 90% of the schools had not received any materials points a grim picture on the viability of the programme. Closely related to the question on the provision of materials was a question on whether the heads had ever been approached by the remedial teachers with requests for the purchase of remedial instructional materials. A meagre 30% of the remedial teachers had made such requests with a staggering 70% remaining silent. The blame, in my view, should be placed on the remedial teachers themselves for their silence conveys the message that they are not keen to ensure that the programme succeeds.

Supervision usually has an impact on the success or failure of educational programmes. Questions were included with the aim of establishing the nature and extent of the heads' supervision of remedial education. All the heads of schools conceded that they occasionally called for the exercise books of remedial education pupils to check on their progress. However, this claim is subject to further scrutiny. While all heads claimed to have checked pupils' exercise books the findings do not tally with information provided by the remedial teachers as 30% of the remedial teachers claimed that no form of supervision had been done on their work. Heads could have answered untruthfully so that they could be seen to be doing their supervisory duties sufficiently.

In addition to checking exercise books another form of supervision would be to observe the remedial teachers actually teaching. On the observation delivery of remedial instruction, as shown on Table 2 80% of the heads had observed their teachers deliver instruction during the course of the year, while 20% had done nothing.

**Table 2: Observing remedial teachers deliver instruction**

| <i>Class sit ins</i>            | <i>Number<br/>(N=10)</i> | <i>%</i> |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------|----------|
| Heads who had conducted sit Ins | 8                        | 80       |
| Sit ins not conducted           | 2                        | 20       |
| Total                           | 10                       | 100      |

ing. Results from remedial teachers revealed that at least 70% of the teachers had received some form of supervision from their school heads as opposed to the 80% claimed by school heads. Thirty percent of the remedial teachers claimed that they had not received any form of supervision in the year.

A question that sought to find out if any pupils had been assisted by medical personnel on the recommendations of Schools Psychological Services to determine the causes of their reading disabilities produced results on Table 3.

**Table 3: Assessment of reading problems by health personnel**

| <i>Diagnosis</i>              | <i>Number</i> | <i>%</i> |
|-------------------------------|---------------|----------|
| Examined by medical personnel | 1             | 10       |
| Not examined at all           | 9             | 90       |
| Total                         | 10            | 100      |

Only 10% of the schools in the sample had received assessments from health personnel to determine the cause of the children's reading problems according to data on Table 3. The other 90% of the pupils in the programme had not received any assessments. This translates to mean that 90% of the remedial pupils in the remedial programme could have been receiving inappropriate remedial treatment. The high percentage of schools that did not receive any remedial assessments by specialists could explain why the rate of graduation from the programme was so low as shown on Table 6. Children may have been given wrong treatment since the nature of their specific problems had not been adequately diagnosed. Remedial teachers were asked to list down the specific reading problems their children had. Problems identified included transposition of letters, replacements by other letters, omissions of letters, substitutions, reversals, mis-pronunciation, additions, repetitions and poor word attack skills. Transposition of letters was prevalent in 70% of the schools. This is where a child for example, reads the word 'GOD' as DOG. Another highly diagnosed problem was that of substitutions which was quoted by 30% of the respondents. These are children who for example will read 'big' as 'dig'. Asked how the teachers went about giving remedial treatment to the problems above most gave sketchy and vague suggestions which showed that they generally had no knowledge of han-

dling the problems. This confirms why a big number of pupils never benefited from remediation as already stated.

In addition to pre-coded questions, participants answered open ended questions on what they considered as constraining conditions in the implementation of the remedial education programme. Table 4 summarises the constraining conditions given by the participants.

Seventy percent of the school heads as shown in Table 4 indicated that their efforts to implement remedial education was being hampered by inadequate materials due to limited funding from Central Government. All the remedial teachers indicated that there was no material for use by pupils other than the test that was used to select the pupils. Since these teachers had no special training they may not necessarily be able to produce suitable materials for remedial education themselves. A small difference exists between remedial teachers and heads' responses. While 10% of the heads had said material was available, no remedial teachers from the same schools concurred. However, since 90% of the cases agree it can be concluded that materials are in short supply.

Also of interest in the questionnaire was a question on the input of the Schools Psychological Services in terms of supervision. As shown in Table 4, 50% of the remedial teachers had not had any physical consultations with the District Remedial Tutor, who is responsible for co-ordinating the programme in the District. When generalized we find that in half of the schools there was no co-ordination between the schools and the Schools Psychological Services department concerning the remedial programme. In the same vein, 50% of the school heads (Table 4) saw a poor link between the

Schools Psychological Services and schools as contributing to the lack of success. Lack of supervision and help from the School Psychological Services can be considered as one of the key problems affecting the successful implementation of the remedial programme in the circuit.

On workload (Table 4) 50% of the school heads acknowledged that teachers had fatigue by the time they went for remedial education in the afternoons since they would have been teaching the whole morning. In the same vein, 80% of the remedial education teachers felt remedial education was an extra burden as they already had their normal classes to attend to. Fifty percent of the grade four teachers felt the simultaneous operation of sports and remedial education contributed to the ineffectiveness of the programme since remedial teachers participated in sports. This meant that on certain days these teachers attended to sporting activities rather than remedial classes.

On conflicts of interests 80% of the remedial education teachers as shown on Table 4 felt it was unfair that both remedial pupils and teachers be asked to forego sports in the afternoons. Conducting remedial sessions during the afternoons was therefore found to be inconvenient by the remedial teachers. Commenting on the poor timing of the programme, one school head indicated that there were examples where a teacher who was good at co-curricular activities and was also the only teacher capable of taking remedial education. Hide and seek by pupils in preference for sport was another problem cited. Also included was the negative attitude of teachers towards the programme and the stigma attached to remedial education by both teachers and pupils. If those who are expected to help these children (and the children themselves) are

**Table 4: Problems encountered in remedial education**

| <i>Problems Identified by School Heads N=10</i>        | <i>Number</i> | <i>Total in Sample</i> | <i>%</i> |
|--|---------------|------------------------|----------|
| Lack of reading materials                              | 7             | 10                     | 70       |
| Poor communication with SPS                            | 5             | 10                     | 50       |
| Poor timing, teachers overworked                       | 5             | 10                     | 50       |
| Poor training of teachers                              | 4             | 10                     | 40       |
| <i>Problems Identified by Grade Four Teachers N=10</i> | <i>Number</i> | <i>Out of</i>          | <i>%</i> |
| Poor co-ordination: Class teacher/Remedial teachers    | 6             | 10                     | 60       |
| Timetabling  | 5             | 10                     | 50       |
| <i>Problems Identified by Remedial Teachers N=10</i>   | <i>Number</i> | <i>Out of</i>          | <i>%</i> |
| Lack of materials                                      | 10            | 10                     | 100      |
| Teacher overworked                                     | 8             | 10                     | 80       |
| Conflicts of interest                                  | 8             | 10                     | 80       |
| Poor communication with SPSS                           | 5             | 10                     | 50       |

not keen and are only carrying out the duty out of coercion then the conclusion is that they cannot offer their best.

Grade four teachers and remedial teachers were asked if they worked together to ensure the success of the remedial education programme and the results are shown on Table 5. Sixty per cent of the grade four teachers felt there was very little co-ordination between class teachers and remedial teachers as they had not been consulted by remedial teachers, while 60% of the remedial teachers also confessed not to have made any contacts with class teachers.

**Table 5: Consultations between remedial teachers and grade four teachers**

| <i>Frequency</i>             | <i>Rem trs<br/>N=10</i> | <i>Class trs<br/>N=10</i> |
|------------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| Not at all so far            | 6 (60%)                 | 6 (60%)                   |
| Once a week                  | 4                       | 1                         |
| Fortnightly                  | 0                       | 1                         |
| After every remedial session | 0                       | 2                         |
| Total                        | 10                      | 10                        |

As a result whatever was learnt in remedial education was not complemented by the class teacher and subsequently got lost yet the grade four class teacher spent the greatest amount of time with remedial children. His co-operation with the remedial teacher may therefore have impact on the performance of the remedial child. The fact, as shown in Table 5, that there were some teachers who contacted remedial teachers after every session should be commended.

As the study was conducted in November towards the end of the year, to find out if the programme was producing any results, responses to a question on the numbers that had actually graduated from the remedial programme points a grim picture on the whole project, as shown in Table 6. Only one out of the ten schools had over 50% of the remedial pupils graduating from the programme at the end of that year. In nine out of the ten schools (Table 6) students who graduated from the programme consisted of less than 30% per school. It is even appalling to note that 40% of the schools recorded not even a single graduand from remedial education during the year. The results seem to suggest that while efforts are being made to implement remedial education in the circuit the programme is largely ineffective.

**Table 6: Number of graduates from the remedial education programme**

| <i>School code</i> | <i>Number<br/>in programme</i> | <i>No.<br/>graduated</i> | <i>%</i> |
|--------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------|----------|
| School 1           | 18                             | 10                       | 56       |
| School 2           | 18                             | 5                        | 28       |
| School 3           | 16                             | 0                        | 0        |
| School 4           | 17                             | 2                        | 12       |
| School 5           | 18                             | 0                        | 0        |
| School 6           | 15                             | 2                        | 13       |
| School 7           | 18                             | 3                        | 18       |
| School 8           | 18                             | 0                        | 0        |
| School 9           | 16                             | 0                        | 0        |
| School 10          | 18                             | 2                        | 12       |

## DISCUSSION

From the results, the major problems encountered in the implementation of remedial education are discussed below. It was found in the study that none of the heads of schools and remedial teachers had any training on the teaching of children with special needs. Some school heads even went to the extreme and allocated remedial classes to unqualified teachers. This is highly deplorable. Remedial teachers were asked to describe how they gave remedial treatment to pupils with specific problems. The descriptions given were sketchy and the impression was that they did not have the craft competence to administer remedial treatment. In this regard Jacobs (2011) cited in Black and Yasukawa (2011) is against the use of external academic literacies teachers (in this study remedial teachers) as they are outsiders to the grade four class; meaning that grade four teachers who are the insiders of the grade four discourse are better placed to help the pupils. She explains that, "students and academic literacies teachers are 'outsiders' and discipline experts are the 'insiders' of the academic discipline (discourse) to be mastered" (Jacobs 2011: 5). Ugwuanyi (2014) actually advise that, remedial services should not be considered unless the classroom teacher has first unsuccessfully attempted corrective instruction. To further compound the problem of poor qualifications, materials for use by both teachers and pupils were not available. An under qualified workforce operating without the necessary resources could not be expected to produce any tangible results. In this regard, Pang and Richey (2005: 123) state that, "Zimbabwe, like other African countries, is partly or entirely not able to carry out their well-intended plans to teach pu-



pils with special needs because of insufficient funding.”

The School Psychological Services input into the programme was found to be highly inadequate. Very few workshops (if any) were ever organized to induct new remedial teachers. Any consultations between remedial teachers and School Psychological Services personnel were found to be mainly on the initiative of the teachers themselves. In a study on early intervention (EI) issues in five countries including Zimbabwe, Pang and Richey (2005: 125) note, “... the Ministry of Education’s lack of involvement has caused the lack of coordination in special education and EI services available in the country”. It is the responsibility of the custodians of the programme to ensure the success of the programme. It will be irresponsible of them to expect uninterested and untrained teachers to produce positive results.

Co-ordination between the class teacher and the remedial teacher was found to be missing in schools. What the child encounters in the remedial clinic has to be complemented by the class teacher when the child gets back to class. When this is not done, continuity is lost and by the time the child gets to the next remedial session everything has been forgotten. The issue of team work between the class teacher and the remedial teacher is underscored by Radiæ-Šestiæ et al. (2013) who explain that the efficiency of teamwork depends on the extent to which general and special education teachers believe that they have the necessary competencies and how they perceive the effects of teamwork and further reiterate that those who look upon teamwork as a valuable endeavour invest more effort to support their team than those who look upon teamwork with negativity. In this regard, Cleland and Wilson (1985: 36) contend that remediation must provide for transfer of learning to actual reading situations and that drill activities should always come from contextual reading material and in the researcher’s view this can only happen when there is team work between the class teacher and the remedial teacher. In the same vein, Gutierrez (1995) shows that studies of the social contexts of literacy learning in school contexts suggest that literacy development cannot be understood apart from the context in which it occurs. Gutierrez (1995: 22), urges us to challenge the deficit model explanations of student achievement warning that, “quick fix programmes that

focus on helping linguistically and culturally diverse students make up deficiencies have become the predominant educational intervention”. Yet as already shown, this does not seem to have resulted in any improvement in performance.

Another issue from the results is that because there had been no assessment of student special learning needs by experts, pupils could have been inappropriately diagnosed. As Cleland and Wilson (1985: 184), show, “Remediation should be in direct response to diagnostic findings, necessitating the use of the most suitable educational techniques as solutions to the diagnostic findings”.

One major finding from the study was that the programme was poorly slotted into the primary school timetable. Remedial instruction was offered in the afternoon while other pupils were engaged in co-curricular activities. The remedial teachers have to provide individualized lesson plans for each of the eighteen pupils and to keep records of each child’s progress. The teachers felt that it was unfair that they be excluded from the more exciting and less taxing sporting activities, which were in fact a form of relief after spending the whole morning delivering instruction. To resolve this dilemma the only plausible solution is to embed remedial instruction into the normal grade four time tables by the grade four class teacher so that they can use authentic contextual material. Gutierrez (1995) argues that if students are not given the opportunity to participate in legitimate learning contexts from which they acquire the social and communicative knowledge needed to participate, they may learn very little from classroom experiences in which they participate. Similarly, following their study, Beatty et al. (2014) conclude that embedding a program of academic socialisation into the curriculum is an ideal means of exposing a wide range of students to support measures, as well as delivering contextualised language support that takes into account the social complexities of initiation into academic discourse communities.

Taking students away from their authentic classroom may have long term adjustment effects when they have to attend ‘normal classrooms. In a study in which he unravelled the writing processes of students who had come through a remedial programme, Gutierrez (1995: 32) found that, “these students had been socia-

lised to different communicative and social norms than those of the traditional classroom, and they had appropriated skills that rendered them dysfunctional in traditional and more academic classroom activities". In the same vein, according to Duff (2010), cited in Beatty et al. (2014) support for students must acknowledge the deeply personal aspect of studying in a particular discipline, and recognise that even basic skills like reading and writing are in essence contextualized social practices.

One major general finding from the study was that the programme was not effective at all in schools. Information on students graduating from the programme showed an average of only 15% or fifteen students graduating from the programme out of every one hundred students in a year. This is enough evidence of the unsuitability of sending pupils to external generic de-contextualised remedial classes. As the results of this study have shown, the remedial teachers felt the labelling of the pupils and stigma attached to being in the remedial class served to de-motivate both pupils and the remedial teachers themselves. Such a model as Picard (2006: 98), explain, "...suggests that the students suffer from some kind of "pathology" or deficit, which teachers need to remediate by focusing on "the basics". When the teachers and students have a negative attitude towards the programme it is unlikely to succeed. In this regard, Othman and Shuqair (2013) argue that the effectiveness of the remedial courses is also influenced by the negative attitude developed by the students towards the English language with some students in their study reporting to have developed a negative attitude towards the language and therefore putting little or no effort to study it. The Zimbabwean remedial education model, thus, seems to be an, "Approach based on assumption that students lack an overt understanding of grammar rules, which would improve their academic reading and writing" (van Schalkwyk 2008: 48).

### CONCLUSION

In the light of the above results and discussion the study concludes that very few pupils were benefiting from remedial instruction. Remedial teachers were poorly trained for remedial teaching, materials for use by both teachers and pupils were grossly inadequate, while supervi-

sion and monitoring by Schools Psychological Services was virtually non-existent. The major conclusion from the study as evidenced by the poor graduation from the remedial programme is that generic external interventions outside the classroom context where the pupils are ordinarily learning do not necessarily lead to improved performance.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the findings and conclusions above, it is hereby recommended that the ministry considers as a long term strategy that remedial instruction be integrated and embedded into the children's subject-based teaching and learning in the grade. In the short term before a long term strategy can be put in place that the Ministry deploys more trained teachers. The Ministry of Education is urged to make a special allocation of funds for remedial education to each school, if there is to be any viability at all. The Schools Psychological Services Department is advised to intensify training of specialist remedial teachers and to mount staff development workshops for remedial teachers, where suggestions and discussions on how to go about diagnosing specific pupil difficulty and giving appropriate remedial instruction are exchanged. The Ministry of Education is urged to enlist the services of the Ministry of Health and Child Welfare for the assessment of pupils for specific auditory, visual and other health problems.

### POSSIBLE AREAS FOR FUTURE STUDIES

Possibilities for further research have been identified in this study. Further research could be conducted on the subject of remedial education to determine the effects of embedded reading instruction within regular classrooms versus add-on external remedial work. There is scope for research on the nature of collaboration between the remedial teachers and the grade for class teachers and the extent to which this enhances the efficacy of the programme. Finally, research could be conducted on the role of teacher training institutions in providing special education training in the regular teacher education curriculum and how this could promote embedded instruction in the grade four classrooms.

### LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Like any other study, this study was not without limitations. The sample of the study was too small for generalisation to the whole country. Notwithstanding this limitation however the purpose of the study was not generalisation, but an action research project in a particular geographic area to understand the problem in that particular context.

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