Reading Skills Among Special Remedial Children

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Abstract— This paper discusses the Malay language learning among special remedial children focusing on the basic skills of reading. The term special remedial children referred to a group of children who doing poorly in school, but not eligible for special education. In the context of education in Malaysia, these children are often labeled as the special remedial children. According to the National Society for the Study of Education, these children usually find the traditional type of school program too difficult to handle without some modifications of the program to adjust requirements to their normal capacity of achievement. The learning problem is caused by the automatic promotion system used in the school system in Malaysia. Through this system, children who have not mastered basic skills 3R (Reading, Writing, Arithmetics) will move to the next grade automatically every year. Hence, this situation caused the child to be left behind as the new syllabus will be introduced in the following year. The researchers used the Searchlights (Searchlight Model of Reading) to develop a basic reading kit for the special remedial children which focuses on four main elements, namely the recognition of letters and graphics, phonics, context, and Malay grammar. The teaching modules are divided into four learning objectives based on Bloom’s Taxonomy (1956). As for this paper, the discussion will focuses only on letter recognition and graphics only. Findings show that the ability to recognize the letters and how to associate letters with graphic symbols must be achieved prior to the understanding of the concept of letters. Preparation of teaching materials should be in accordance with the concept of easy to difficult and from the concrete to the abstract. The researchers concluded that the need for appropriate teaching aids for special remedial children, is very important to help them with learning difficulties.

Index Terms— children, Malay language, reading skills, special remedial learners

I. INTRODUCTION
Section 10 of the Malaysian Education Act 1961 in combining ministerial effort and medical professionals define “the several categories of pupils requiring special educational treatment and the method appropriate for the education of pupils in each category in special schools or otherwise”. The Ministry of Education (MOE) introduced the Education Rules (Special Education) in 1997. The rules defined three education programs that were implemented in Malaysian schools: (1) the special schools, (2) the integration program, (3) the inclusive programs. Special Education Department, Ministry of Education in 2008 has defined the special remedial program as an educational program provided to students who are struggling with mastering the 3R caused by environmental factors. Moving Forward (2011-2020) is the new aspiration adopted by the Malaysian Special Education Department, aiming at reducing the academic gap, improving inclusiveness and multi-agency coordination within support provision as well as harnessing employability and marketability of children with disabilities.

The Education (Special Education) Regulations, 2013 (Government of Malaysia, 2013), were implemented in July in order to replace the 1997 regulations. There are improvement in quality, commitment to moving students with special needs towards the inclusive education model. However, the integration program, is still built on the principle of segregation. Approximately six students with learning difficulties are placed in a special class in a mainstream school attended to by special educators. Some of these students are the special remedial children who needed extra attention to help them in their learning process. Both special and remedial education is specialised. The programs are designed to help students who need extra attention. The students in the remedial class will be mainstreamed into a small class and the programs offered will structured to fulfill their needs. Remedial program, teachers will spend more time with the students and the students get extra attention from the teachers that they need to develop their skills.

This paper discusses the Malay language learning among children in the special remedial program. Special remedial children are students who face difficulties in mastering basic skills 3R (Writing, Reading, Arithmetics) caused by the environmental factors. These weaknesses are not caused by cognitive factors. They are often labeled as slow learners because their have lower achievement compare to their peers in the class. However, these do not mean that the children are weak in all the subjects. The weaknesses in the children may involve one or two lessons and certain basic skills such as reading or writing or arithmetic. Therefore, a special remedial program is carried out in special classes, aimed at improving the student’s achievement. These children are categorised as the special remedial children.

The basic right to education is implicit in reading, writing, and arithmetic. It is quite impossible for the students without these abilities to attain higher education and function in this modern society. Children who are found to demonstrate the lack of proficiency in basic skills 3R will be recommended by the class teacher or subject teachers based on their current achievements. The Literacy and Numeracy Screening (LINUS) programme is aimed at ensuring that all Malaysian children acquire basic literacy and numeracy skills over three years of mainstream
primary education. The LINUS program focuses on early intervention in the early primary years before the students enter the Year Four. Students in the year one are screened using the LINUS tests carried out three times a year, in March, June and September. For children in the year two, the assessment is based on Instruments for Determination in Mastery of Writing and Reading, and Instruments for Basic Mathematics Skills.

For students who pass the Screening Test, they will be returned to the mainstream classes. For children who are identified as having the characteristics of students with special needs and has been certified by a medical practitioner, they will be placed in the Special Education Program with Learning Disabilities.

A. Special Remedial Learners

The term referred to a group of children who doing poorly in school, but not eligible for special education. In the context of education in Malaysia, these children are often labeled as a special remedial child. According to the National Society for the Study of Education, these children usually find the traditional type of school program too difficult to handle without some modifications of the program to adjust requirements to their normal capacity of achievement. The students are removed from their regular classroom and taught in another setting.

In this study, the researchers used the special remedial learner to refer to the children who undergoes the LINUS program. This term is different from the slow learners as the latter is referred to as special needs children with severe learning abilities. The LINUS Program, initiated as part of the government’s Education National Key Result Areas, is a remedial program designed to ensure students acquire basic literacy (Bahasa Malaysia) and numeracy skills at the end of 3 years of primary education. The program is targeted at students who have difficulties in reading, writing and arithmetic. It is not, however, implemented in all schools, but only in those that selected by the MOE. The LINUS Screening Tests under the LINUS Program are another means by which children can be placed in special education classes. If a child fails the LINUS Screening Tests repeatedly after LINUS interventions, they will be given a medical assessment; if diagnosed as having learning difficulties; they will be placed in special education classes.

B. Reading Skills

Malay language learning that is focused of this study are the basic skills of reading. Literacy skills help the students to acquire other skills, but the lack of this skill will cause them to be left behind in the class activities. Proficiency in reading will help them to acquire more knowledge in other subjects.

This study will provide teaching aids for the teacher and to look into the effectiveness of the materials for reading for special remedial children in the primary schools. The development of the materials will be based on the requirement and the need to attract and motivate the children who are identified as a special remedial group by the Ministry of Education’s screening test.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A study conducted by Udosen, Udofia, Ekukinam, and Akpan in 2010, titled Empowering Primary School Pupils Through Literacy Remediation Project in Uyo Local Government Area is related to the activities of remedial in a school in Nigeria. They found that the children who do not master the basics of reading often leave school early because the environment does not allow them to continue learning in the school. Most schools in Nigeria noted that some problems exist in reading among primary school children. In the study, a total of 72 children consisting of 39 boys and 33 girls were selected to participate in the remedial program. The children are from various schools, background, and age (from three to eleven years). Activities planned for this group is to strengthen the ability of the existing and new skills for these children. This activity uses the medium of poetry that contains three to five lines and read on the subject of the study. The program takes about four weeks and post tests are carried out as soon as the programme ended. The findings of this study show that there is an increase of high achievers among subjects in the pre and post test.

Selvarajan dan Vasanthagumar (2012) in The Impact of Remedial Teaching on Improving the Competencies of Low Achievers studied the effects of special education to low achieving children in learning. The studies involved a total of four schools in Mannar, a district in Sri Lanka. It involved a total of 97 children studying from grades three and four following special remedial classes in their school. The findings of this study show that the highest factor causing low achievers because parents don’t care about their child’s learning process, poverty, and the high absenteeism of students to school. They concluded that the inconsistency of the child’s performance in the examination and background problems was affecting the effectiveness of special education.

A study conducted by Ranganathan, Kumar, and Venkatesen in 2013 entitled The Writing Instruction for Primary School Students with Difficulties in Tamil Language concentrate on the primary school children with disabilities in Tamil. The remedial phase is carried out in the study takes about 12 weeks, 36 sessions, three times a week, and 45 minutes per session. Four elements in the program, namely to identify the weaknesses in the current study, to teach writing generic structures such as semantics, grammar, and organisations in writing, self-management strategies when writing, and the use of computer-aided writing procedures. These researchers found that teaching techniques, tools, and activities such as demonstration by teachers, team work, discussions, and structured training helps to increase the standards in writing program. The effectiveness of the remedial program, depends on age, stage of language development, etc. The teaching effectiveness and the emphasis on training are fundamental to an effective remedial program.
The findings of this review show that mostly focused on problems faced by special remedial children. Therefore, the need to have a study on the development, teaching materials in which will help to enhance to strengthen the learning skills in special remedial children.

III. PROBLEM STATEMENT

This study focuses on the basic reading skills. Issues related to mastering the basic skills of reading, writing, and arithmetic (3R) are still being discussed every year. The learning problem is caused by the automatic promotion system used in the school system in Malaysia. Through this system, children who have not mastered basic skills 3 R (Reading, Writing, Arithmetic) will move to the next grade automatically every year. Hence, this situation caused the child to be left behind as the new syllabus will introduced in the following year. Furthermore, a large class with 30 to 40 students and the urgency to finish the syllabus makes the learning more difficult for these children.

The researchers found that students who attend a special remedial LINUS program were only equipped with two modules for T & L process, namely for teachers and students. As for teaching aids, the teacher must prepare and use the material to suit the students. At the same time, the need for teaching aids in language learning is very high in order to facilitate the children to remember and understand the special remedial learning content.

IV. METHODOLOGY

This study used a qualitative approach involving observation, and interviews. The study involved five children studying Malay language intensive remedial classes as a subject of study in an intergrative school in Selangor, Malaysia. These children have to sit the Screening Diagnostic and those who scored between 50 and 60 points are selected. The researcher also used rubric as an assessment tool, that is a set of criteria and standards related to the learning objectives. The observation covered for a period of three months.

The data for this study were obtained from the fieldwork. These data are collected through instruments such as the Reading Skills Assessment Test, Reading Enrichment Activities, Reading Skills Checklist, interviews and observation. This study had combined three main principles in developing the Basic Reading Kit for special remedial children. The first principle is to apply the Social Constructivism Theory Vygotsky (1978) as a method of teaching reading to special remedial children. This theory focuses on five elements, namely social interaction, social environment, past experience and existing experience, scaffolding, and the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) in shaping individual development and learning.

The second principle is to apply Searchlight Model of Reading (Rumelhart & McClelland, 1986; Adams & Bruck, 1993) as learning modules for the Basic Reading Kit. The reading module is divided into four stages, namely the recognition of letters and graphics (visual), phonics (sound and spelling), meaning (semantics) context, and knowledge of grammar and sentences (syntax). In this paper, only one stage, namely the recognition of letters and graphics knowledge (visual) were analysed.

The third principle, the researcher applies the Bloom’s Taxonomy which is represented by three main domains, namely cognitive (C), affective (A) and psychomotor (P). For the cognitive domain, the researcher uses the lowest two levels, namely knowledge (C1) and understanding (C2). For affective and psychomotor domains were only two lower level are used, the Receiving Phenomena (A1), Responding to Phenomena (A2), Imitation (P1), and Manipulation (P2).

The process of remedial teaching can be outlined as the flow chart below:

![Flow Chart](image)

The effectiveness of learning depends on the measurement of the achievement of learning objectives outlined.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LO</th>
<th>Bloom’s Taxonomy</th>
<th>Teaching Methods</th>
<th>Evaluation Methods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C1</td>
<td>C2</td>
<td>C3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Identify uppercase and lowercase sequentially</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Distinguish uppercase letters and</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>V</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Learning Modules for Recognition of Letters and Graphic Knowledge
V. FINDINGS

S1 (Table 2) has attained the highest percentage of 64% as compared to other children, while the S4 obtained the lowest percentage, i.e. 36%. Based on the evaluation criteria-based concept mapping in Bloom’s Taxonomy, the subjects passes with a score of ≥ 50% is 50% of the total subject.

Table 2 : Overall Achievement of Subjects In Reading Skills Assessment Test Modules For Recognition of Letters and Graphics Knowledge.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S</th>
<th>LO1 (100%)</th>
<th>LO2 (100%)</th>
<th>LO3 (100%)</th>
<th>LO4 (100%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S1</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S2</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S3</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S4</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S5</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

S = Subjects  LO=Learning Objectives

A. Analysis of the Findings of the Learning Objective 1 and 2

In LO1 (Table 3), the researcher finds the ability to identify uppercase and lowercase letters is low because some of the subjects can’t identify the letter successfully. This is so because the subjects still made a mistake to mention and recognise letters, even if the letter is read sequentially. For example, S1, S2, and S4 cannot read the letters correctly even if the letters read were placed in sequently. S4 scored the lowest 36% and did not recognised the letters F, G, H, I, M, and X even though the subject is able to sing the ABCs fluently. The researcher finds the subject having problems with reading the letters quickly when the subject was requested to read and at the same time pointing to letters. The reading is smooth at the beginning but when approaching the uppercase F, the subject could not recognise the letters.

Table 3: Achievement of Subjects In Reading Skills Assessment Test

Table: Achievement of Subjects In Reading Skills Assessment Test Modules For Recognition of Letters and Graphics Knowledge.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S</th>
<th>LO3</th>
<th>LO4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>X1</td>
<td>X2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S1</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S3</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S4</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S5</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

S = Subjects  LO=Learning Objectives  X = Score in %

B. Analysis of the Findings of the Learning Objective 3 and 4

S1 (Table 4) achieve the highest percentage of 57% compared to the other subjects, while S2 earned the lowest percentage, that is 27%. Based on the evaluation criteria-based concept mapping in Bloom’s Taxonomy, the subjects passed with a score of ≥ 50% is 50% of the total. However, only S1 only achieved the criteria with a score of 61%. In LO3, the matching of upper case with lower case, the ability some of the subjects are still low. Some of the subjects such as S2, S4, and S5 often confused when asked to match the upper case with lower case letters such as the letter D with d, G with g, H with h, and so on. This is because the subjects do not recognise the upper case with the lower case when asked to match the pairs. The upper case and the lower case mentioned above have a different formation in comparison to other characters. Therefore, this study shows that the subjects were not able to review, select, and organise their thoughts. S3 have problems with identifying and matching the upper case Q with the lower case q and R with r. The researcher found that S3 having difficulties with understanding and translating the oral aspect of the nonverbal form.

Table 4: Achievement of Subjects In Reading Skills Assessment Test Modules For Recognition of Letters and Graphics Knowledge.
In LO4 (Table 4) S1 has attained the highest percentage of 57% compared to other subjects, while S2, i.e. 36%. Based on the assessment criteria in Bloom’s taxonomy, based concept mapping, the subjects passed with a score of ≥ 50%, is 50% of the total subjects. However, the subjects failed to achieve the criteria, only S1 only achieved the criteria with a score of 57%. In LO4, the subjects have to apply the formation of upper case and lower case letters. In this test, the subjects listen to the instructions from the teacher to form letters using plasticine provided. The findings of this study show that S2 and S3 scored the lowest points of 36%. The subjects have difficulties forming the correct case with plasticine for the uppercase letters G, C, and d, while the lower case letters are g, r, and q. Furthermore, the subjects have difficulties remembering the characters in previous tests so they cannot link the existing knowledge with previous knowledge.

VI. DISCUSSIONS

Some of the problems faced by special remedial children in reading can be identified. The findings of this study show that they do not recognised the letters in the alphabet is the main cause of their failure in reading. When they do not recognise the letters well, they will name the letters just the way they please whenever they were pushed to give an answer. This situation resulted lacked of competency in recognising the actual letters, although in principle they can read the full alphabet, if asked. It is recommended the teachers should set that the teaching objectives which are easy to help the students acquire the knowledge as desired after the completion of each module.

These children are found to be problematic given the each letter displayed, either sequentially or randomly. The researcher finds that the self-confidence of the subjects was very low, especially when answering questions. When they are questioned, they will take a long time to answer the questions asked. In addition, the children also found having difficulties to differentiate between the form of one letter with the others. These children do not have the ability to understand and translate the verbal aspect to writing. It is recommended that the teachers should not rush to finish the syllabus or all the teaching contents. The teaching contents can be classified into the core and non-core learning according to the learning objectives. The core learning aspects require in-depth studies, whereas the non-core learning aspects can be streamlined appropriately according to the children need. The problem of remembering is also a problem in special remedial children because they are easy to forget about the things that have been taught, especially when the upper case and the lower case are familiar such as the letter C, W, Z, and so forth.

VII. CONCLUSION

Generally, it can be concluded there is a need for the use of teaching aids that contains modules to help the special remedial children able to learn more effectively. Based on the findings of the study, the researcher found that reading problems shown by children special remedial requires teaching aids that can overcome their various reading problems. The teachers should design, materials of different standards and enjoyable activities to stimulate the students’ interest and effectiveness of learning.

REFERENCES