

---

## **A Study of the Roles and Duties of Remedial Teachers in the Malaysian Primary Schools**

Koh Boh Boon  
Fakulti Pendidikan  
Universiti Malaya

---

Penyelidikan ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji kecekapan dan keyakinan guru khas pemulihan dalam memenuhi peranan dan tugas mereka, serta mengenal pasti masalah-masalah yang dihadapi mereka dalam melaksanakan program pemulihan di sekolah rendah masing-masing.

Sampel kajian terdiri daripada 466 guru pemulihan di Kuala Lumpur, Selangor, Perak, Melaka dan Johor. Satu soalselidik digunakan untuk mengumpul data daripada guru pemulihan yang terlibat dalam kajian ini. Penyelidik juga melawat ke sekolah-sekolah rendah yang terpilih untuk bertemuramah dengan guru pemulihan berkenaan dan melihat keadaan pelaksanaan program pemulihan di sekolah berkenaan.

Hasil analisis data telah menunjukkan bahawa sesetengah guru pemulihan kurang berupaya memenuhi peranan dan tugas tertentu. Mereka berasa kurang cekap dan kurang yakin untuk memainkan peranan bukan pengajaran iaitu sebagai penasihat, pensyarah/petunjukcara dan penjalinhubungan. Darihal tugas pula, mereka berasa kurang cekap dan yakin dalam melakukan tugas bukan-pengajaran seperti menasihatkan guru biasa dan mendapat kerjasama guru biasa dan ibu bapa murid lambat.

Guru pemulihan menghadapi beberapa masalah. Bilik pemulihan di sesetengah sekolah adalah terlalu kecil dan sesak untuk menampung murid lambat. Sesetengah guru pemulihan merungut bahawa mereka diberi bebanan kerja yang terlalu berat dan sering diarahkan mengganti guru bercuti hinggakan program pemulihan mereka tergendala. Namun, masalah terbesar guru pemulihan adalah kerjasama dan sokongan yang tidak memuaskan daripada guru biasa. Sesetengah guru biasa menunjukkan sikap pasif terhadap program pemulihan. Guru pemulihan juga merungut bahawa mereka tidak dapat merujuk kepada siapa pun ketika mereka mengalami kesulitan dalam pengurusan program.

### **The Problem**

Since its inception in 1983, the New Primary School Curriculum or Kurikulum Baru Sekolah Rendah (KBSR) in Malaysia has placed great emphasis on the provision of remedial teaching. This emphasis is based on the philosophy that children are individuals who differ in experience, behaviour, disposition, aptitude and ability and that these individual

differences among pupils must be taken into consideration when planning for classroom teaching-learning.

Remedial in KBSR has been officially defined as follows :

... the special teaching-learning process specifically for pupils who encounter learning problems or difficulties in mastering a particular reading, writing and computational skill. After a pupil has followed learning activities carried out in the normal programme and is found to have failed to learn the skill, then the teacher can refer to alternative activities as substitutes to normal activities so that the skill can be mastered. The alternative activities that are prepared are specifically in the problem areas which are usually found in the reading, writing and computational skills.

[Buku Panduan Am KBSR, 1982, p. 3]

Thus, the KBSR remedial teaching programme is a special teaching-learning programme aimed specifically at assisting pupils with learning difficulties of the slow learners to master specific reading, writing and computational skills which these pupils have failed to learn in the normal programme.

Remedial teaching is a complicated process requiring the remedial teacher to carry out various activities related to helping the slow learners, including, identification of the slow learners, diagnosis of individual learning difficulties, construction of remedial materials and tools, organising and conducting small group teaching and evaluation of learning outcome. It also requires the remedial teacher to possess certain attitudinal characteristics related to dealing with the affective aspects of the slow learners. As such, the organisation and management of the remedial programme in the primary schools require the service of specially trained teachers with adequate knowledge and competence in the many aspects related to the teaching of the slow learners.

To meet this need for remedial teachers, the Ministry of Education has been conducting in-service remedial training programmes for trained teachers. One form of such in-service programmes is the full-time one year course currently being offered at the Specialist Teachers' Training Institute, Kuala Lumpur. The other kind of in-service remedial teachers' training programme is an eight-week holiday course. There is also a further topping-up programme of six months at the Specialist Teachers' Training Institute offered only for those who obtain distinction or credit passes in the final examination of the eight-week holiday course. By 1987, over 4,000 teachers have attended such courses for remedial teachers in the primary schools (Teacher Education Division, Ministry of Education Malaysia, 1987, p. 57).

On completion of their training, these remedial teachers are posted to the various primary schools to organise and manage remedial programmes in their respective schools. The remedial teacher is required to identify pupils with learning difficulties in Bahasa Malaysia and Mathematics, and conduct remedial activities to help them to overcome their learning problems. In this respect, he is different from the ordinary class teacher, and plays the roles and fulfills the duties of a specialist teacher.

Undoubtedly, the remedial teacher is the key factor in the implementation of the remedial programme in the primary schools: the success or failure of the programme depends to a large extent on his ability to fulfill his roles and duties. However, his ability in implementing the remedial programme in his school does not depend entirely on his knowledge and skill in remedial education. It is also affected by various other factors including the school learning environment, cooperation from ordinary teachers, parents of slow learners and support from the headmaster/headmistress of the school in which he teaches. As a pedagogical innovation in KBSR, remedial teaching undeniably poses challenges to the remedial teacher. It is felt that some sort of study should be conducted to find out how effectively the remedial teachers are taking on the challenges.

### **Aims of the Study**

This research study is aimed at investigating the performance of remedial teachers in our primary schools in carrying out their roles and duties, as well as identifying the difficulties they encounter in fulfilling them. Specifically, the study attempts to answer the following research questions :

- (1) To what extent do the remedial teachers feel they have fulfilled the roles and duties expected of them?
- (2) What extent do they feel confident and competent in carrying out the expected roles and duties?
- (3) What are the difficulties they encounter in terms of :
  - (a) physical facilities;
  - (b) work load;
  - (c) cooperation from ordinary teachers; and
  - (d) Support from headmasters/headmistress, parents and education officers

### **Research Design and Procedure**

#### **Selection of Sample**

As there are several thousand remedial teachers in primary schools all over the country, it was felt impractical to cover the whole population of remedial teachers. Instead it was decided that the study would only cover remedial teachers in several states namely, Kuala Lumpur, Selangor, Perak, Melaka and Johor. The total number of remedial teachers in these states is adequately large and these states are conveniently located for visits to selected schools later on.

Based on the official lists of names of schools that have remedial teachers in these five states in 1987, the original sample consisted of about 800 schools (with one teacher per school) was selected. Each school was sent a copy of a questionnaire which was the main instrument for data collection. A total of 466 completed questionnaires (56 per cent) were returned.

The distribution of the remedial teachers in the study according to states is shown in Table 1.

**TABLE 1: Distribution of Sample of Remedial Teachers According to State**

State	Number of Teachers	Percent
Kuala Lumpur	36	7.7
Selangor	82	17.6
Perak	128	27.5
Melaka	81	17.4
Johor	139	29.8
Total	466	100.0

The biggest number of remedial teachers is from Johor, and the smallest from Kuala Lumpur. There are more male remedial teachers than female remedial teachers in the study of the 466 teachers, 261 or 56 percent were males and 205 or 44 percent were females.

### Data Collection

The main instrument for data collection was the teachers' questionnaire which contains both open-ended and close-ended questions. The questionnaire was used to gather information about the current state of the remedial programme in the respondent's school for the year 1988, to solicit the views of the respondent regarding his work and the expected roles and duties, and also to obtain information about the kinds of problems encountered by him in the organisation and management of the remedial programme.

The questionnaire was sent by post to the sample of schools that had been identified. It was distributed to and collected from the remedial teacher through the headmaster/headmistress who was requested to return the completed questionnaire in the enclosed self-addressed and stamped envelop to the researcher.

One difficulty experienced by the researcher in the administration of the questionnaire was the slowness of certain state education departments in granting approval to carry out the study in the schools identified, although official permission had already been granted by the EPRD (Educational Planning and Research Division), Ministry of Education. Another matter was the returning of about 35 unanswered questionnaires by the headmasters/headmistresses concerned with a note that the remedial teacher had already been transferred or promoted and the school had no remedial teacher at the moment.

Besides the questionnaire, the researcher also made visits to some of the primary schools in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor to interview the remedial teachers and to obtain additional

information about the remedial programmes in the schools. Altogether the researcher visited 14 schools in several districts in Selangor namely, Petaling Jaya, Klang, Port Klang, Kuala Selangor, Sabak Bernam and Batang Berjuntai; and also two schools in Kuala Lumpur. Before making a visit the researcher tried as far as possible to contact the headmaster/headmistress concerned by telephone to obtain his/her permission. However, in several cases this was not possible because the schools did not have telephones. During each visit the researcher would first meet the headmaster/headmistress before interviewing the remedial teacher. The interview was carried out informally. The researcher also looked at the condition of the remedial room. The administration of the questionnaire began in February 1988 and ended in June/July 1988, while the visits were conducted in July, August and September, 1988.

## Some Important Findings

### State of the Remedial Programmes

The responses in the questionnaires show that half the schools involve in the study limit remedial teaching to only pupils in Level 1 (years 1-3), while the other half cover pupils in Levels 1 & 2 (years 1-6) [Please refer to Table 2].

**TABLE 2: Distribution of Schools According to Coverage of Remedial Teaching**

Pupils in Year	Number of Schools	Percent
1-3 (Level 1)	225	48.3
1-6 (Level 1 + 2)	224	48.1
No response	17	3.6
	466	100.0

The data collected in the questionnaires also show that more schools conduct remedial teaching sessions for slow learners from one particular year compared to schools that conduct remedial teaching sessions for slow learners from two different years. (Please refer to Table 3).

**TABLE 3: Distribution of Schools According to Composition of Remedial Teaching Sessions**

Slow Learners From	Number of Schools	Percent
The same year	285	61.2
Two different years	162	34.7
No difference	19	4.1
	466	100.0

Table 4 shows that most schools (53.3 per cent) have remedial teaching sessions that consist of between six to ten slow learners per session. But slightly more than a quarter (26.2 per cent) of the schools have sessions consisting between 11 to 15 slow learners.

**TABLE 4: Distribution of Schools According to Number of Pupils Per Remedial Teaching Session**

Number of Pupils Per Session	Number of Schools	Percent
1-5	72	15.5
6-10	249	53.3
11-15	122	26.2
More than 15	11	2.4
No response	12	2.6
	466	100.0

### Perceptions On Expected Roles

The remedial teacher is expected to play two kinds of roles: teaching roles and non-teaching roles. The teaching roles are as planner, teacher and evaluator in the remedial teaching programme. The non-teaching roles are as adviser, public relation officer and lecturer/demonstrator in his relationship with the headmaster/head-mistress and other teachers in the school (Schools Division, Ministry of Education, 1986).

**TABLE 5: Perceptions on Competence in Playing Roles (N = 466)**

Role	Percent				Ranking*
	Comp.	N.S. Comp.	N.Comp	N.R.	
1. Planner	53.6	43.3	2.6	0.4	3
2. Teacher	69.1	30.0	0.6	0.2	1
3. Evaluator	63.1	34.8	1.7	0.4	2
4. Adviser	40.1	50.2	8.6	1.1	4
5. Pub. Relations Officer	38.0	54.1	7.1	0.9	5
6. Lecturer/Demonster	19.3	44.2	34.2	1.9	6

Comp. = Competent; N.S. Comp. = Not So Competent; N. Comp. = Not Competent At All; N.R. = No Response.

\* Ranking is based on the Percentage in the Competence column.

The remedial teacher feels more competent in playing the teaching roles compared to the non-teaching roles. he feels most competent in his role as teacher, followed by evaluator and planner. He feels much less competent in his non-teaching roles as adviser (4th position), public relation officer (5th position) and lecturer/demonstrator (6th position).

**TABLE 6: Perceptions on Confidence in Playing Roles (N = 466)**

Role	Percent				Ranking
	Comp.	N.S. Comp.	N. Comp.	N.R.	
Planner	76.4	21.5	1.5	0.6	3
Teacher	89.5	9.7	0.9	0.0	1
Evaluator	77.7	20.6	1.3	0.4	2
Adviser	53.2	41.0	4.9	0.9	4
Pub. Relations Officer	49.6	44.8	4.3	0.9	5
	26.4	44.0	27.7	0.9	6

Comp. = Competent; N.S. Comp. = Not So Competent; N. Comp. = Not Competent At All; N.R. = No Response

\* Ranking is based on the Percentage in the Competence column.

The views of the remedial teachers on their confidence (Table 6) are quite similar to those on their competence in fulfilling their roles. They are more confident in their teaching roles than their non-teaching roles. They are most confident as teachers and least confident as lecturers/demonstrators. The ranking orders are similar in both the views on their confidence and their competence in fulfilling the expected roles.

These feelings of competence and confidence are to a great extent affected by the teachers' perceptions on the difficulties of the respective roles. Table 7 shows that the remedial teachers find it comparatively more difficult to play those roles that involve the acceptance of his status and expertise as specialist teachers by other people. These roles are as advisers to the headmasters/headmistresses and the other teachers, as lecturers/demonstrators in courses related to remedial teaching, and as public relations officers wooing the support of the ordinary teachers and parents of slow learners.

**TABLE 7: Perceptions on Difficulty of Expected Roles N = (466)**

	Percentage	of	Teacher's	Response	
Role	V. Difficult	Difficult	Not Difficult	No Response	Ranking*
1. Planner	7.9	33.3	58.4	0.4	4
2. Teacher	5.4	24.2	70.2	0.2	5
3. Evaluator	1.3	23.2	74.9	0.6	6
4. Adviser	8.8	42.9	47.2	1.1	3
5. Pub. Relations Officer	9.7	44.4	45.3	0.6	2
6. Lecturer/Demonstrator	26.4	46.8	28.8	1.1	1

\* Ranking is based on the Percentage in the Difficult column.

The non-teaching roles are ranked 1st, 2nd and 3rd in difficulty, whilst the teaching roles are ranked 4th, 5th and 6th. The most difficult role is as lecturer/demonstrator and the least difficult role is as evaluator.

### Perceptions on Duties

The remedial teachers were asked to give their perceptions on how they had carried out 14 duties that are expected of them. Among these 14 duties, nine are teaching duties and five are non-teaching duties. The teaching duties are divided into four preparation duties and five real teaching duties.

**TABLE8: Perceptions on the Fulfilment of Preparation Duties (N = 466)**

Duty	Percentages		Teachers' N.R.	Response Ranking*
	Sat.	Not Sat.		
1.Identity slow learners	90.8	9.2	0.0	1
2.Arrange time-table	87.1	12.7	0.2	2
3.Diagnose Learning Difficulties	69.1	30.0	0.9	3
4.Prepare Materials/ tools	64.6	35.0	0.2	4

Sat. = Satisfactory; Not Sat. = Not Satisfactory; N.R. No Response

\* Ranking in based on Percentage in the Satisfactory column.

The duties of identifying slow learners and arranging the time-table for remedial teaching are carried out satisfactorily by 90.8 per cent and 87.1 per cent respectively. In contrast, only 69.1 per cent and 64.6 per cent feel that they have carried out satisfactorily the duties of diagnosing learning difficulties of the slow learners and preparing teaching materials and tools respectively (Please see Table 9).

**TABLE 9: Perception on the Fulfilment of Real Teaching Duties (N=466)**

Duty	Percentage		Teachers' N.R.	Response Ranking*
	Sat.	Not Sat.		
1.Create a conducive classroom atmosphere	59.6	39.9	0.4	5
2.Conduct remedial activities	73.3	26.0	0.6	1
3.Capture interest of slower learner	72.5	27.3	0.2	2
4.Conduct continuous test	64.0	35.4	0.6	4
5.Keep records	66.7	33.3	0.0	3

Sat.= satisfactory; Not Sat. = Not Satisfactory; N. R = No Response

\* Ranking is based on the Percentage in the Satisfactory column.

About three-quarters of the remedial teachers feel that they have fulfilled satisfactorily the duties of conducting remedial activities and capturing the interest of the slow learners. More than 60 per cent feel they have fulfilled satisfactorily the duties of conducting continuous tests and keeping records. However, less than 60 per cent of them feel that they have fulfilled the duty of creating a conducive classroom atmosphere (Please see Table 10).

**TABLE 10: Perceptions on Success of Carrying Out Non-Teaching Duties (N = 466)**

	Percentage	of	Teachers'	Response	
Duties	Successful	N.S.S	N.S	N.R	Ranking*
1 Adversing the ordinary teachers	33.9	56.4	8.2	1.5	3
2.Obtaining cooperation of ordinary teachers	64.2	33.0	2.1	0.7	2
3.Obtaining cooperation principals	81.3	16.7	0.9	1.1	1
4. Conducting workshops	12.2	41.6	36.9	9.2	4

N.S.S. = Not So Successful; N.S. = Not Successful; N.R. = No Response

\* Ranking is based on the percentage on the Successful column.

Table 10 shows that 81.3 per cent of the remedial teachers feel that they are successful in getting the support of the principals, and this percentage is high compared to the percentages for other non-teaching duties. However, the researcher thinks that this high percentage might have been affected by the "fear" of some remedial teachers who did not dare put down negative responses because their questionnaire was to be returned to the researcher through the principal of his school.

The remedial teachers are more successful in getting the cooperation of the ordinary teachers: 64.2 per cent say they are successful. They are less successful in obtaining the cooperation of the parents of slow learners: only 23.4 per cent feel they are successful. The remedial teachers feel least successful in conducting workshops for other teachers: only 12.2 per cent feel they have succeeded.

## **Difficulties Encountered by the Remedial Teachers**

Lack of cooperation from other teachers seems a serious problem faced by the remedial teachers. As much as 43.6 per cent of the teachers state that they are unable to obtain adequate information about the individual slow learners from the ordinary teachers; and 38.6 per cent claim that most ordinary teachers give only passive cooperation.

More than half (50.2 per cent) the remedial teachers complain that they have nobody to turn to when they face difficulties in their work; and 53.4 per cent say that sometimes they feel lost because they have nowhere to seek professional advice.

The remedial teachers also complain of too heavy work load: 43.6 per cent say that they do not have sufficient time to make preparations, and 55.4 per cent say they do not have time to mix with and know each slow learner. More than one-third of them (36.1 per cent) state that their non-remedial duties are too heavy; 43.1 per cent state that they have been too frequently asked to be "relief teachers".

The remedial teachers also complain of overcrowded remedial rooms: 47.4 per cent say their remedial rooms are too small and 30.7 per cent say there are too many slow learners in a remedial session.

Lastly, the remedial teachers also encounter problems with the slow learners themselves. More than half the teachers (55.2 per cent) complain that the slow learners are not interested at all in their work; 56.0 per cent state that the slow learners are often late for their remedial sessions; and 67.6 per cent find that some slow learners do not show any sign of improvement because they are too weak.

## **Conclusions**

The results of the study indicate that generally the remedial teachers feel they perform their teaching roles and duties more successfully than their non-teaching roles and duties. The remedial teachers feel that they are not competent and confident in playing the roles as lecturers/demonstrators and trying to teach other teachers. There are some remedial teachers who feel not so competent and confident in performing their teaching roles and duties. Further in-service training courses in such areas like diagnosing learning difficulties and developing teaching materials and tools should be conducted to help these teachers. The problems faced by the remedial teachers should be given serious attention by the relevant authorities. Of particular importance is the lack of cooperation from the ordinary teachers because the remedial teacher has to rely on the support of the ordinary teachers for a lot of information about the individual slow learners. Likewise, the problem of too heavy work load and too frequent "relief teaching" should be given due attention. Of equal importance is the problem of overcrowded remedial sessions. The primary school remedial programme is experiencing some teething problems, and the remedial teachers should be given help to overcome these problems.

### References

Ministry of Education Malaysia, *Buku Panduan Am, KBSR*, Kuala Lumpur, 1982.

Schools Division, Ministry of Education Malaysia, *Kelas Khas Pemulihan Di Sekolah-Sekolah Rendah*, Pekeliling: KP/(BS8052/2/PK/Jld V/(26), Januari 1986.

Teacher Education Division, Ministry of Education Malaysia, *National Training Workshop on Teaching in Difficult Education Contexts*, 1987.