

EXPLORING THE CHALLENGES OF SPECIAL REMEDIAL TEACHERS IN IMPLEMENTING MATHEMATICS TEACHING STRATEGIES

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ABSTRACT

The Special Remedial Programme in Malaysia was introduced in the 1960s by the Ministry of Education Malaysia to assist primary school students who face difficulties in mastering basic literacy and numeracy skills (3M). This initiative continues to be strengthened through Programme such as LINUS and Primary Literacy and Numeracy (PLaN). However, various challenges are faced by teachers in implementing Mathematics instruction, especially for students with special needs. This study aims to explore the challenges faced by special education teachers in teaching Mathematics and their strategies for overcoming them. It uses a phenomenological design with five special education teachers from Sepang as the sample, selected using purposive sampling techniques. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analysed using a thematic analysis approach. Research findings indicate that teachers face challenges such as the diversity of students' ability levels, lack of resources and teaching aids, time constraints for concept repetition, and low student motivation. Teachers overcome these challenges with creativity in teaching, including the use of contextual learning and interactive activities. The implications of the study suggest the need for enhanced professional training, the provision of relevant teaching resources, and the integration of technology to improve the effectiveness of Mathematics teaching. This study highlights the importance of holistic support for Special Education teachers and provides guidelines to improve pedagogical practices, thereby increasing students' chances of mastering Mathematics.

Keywords: special remediation, Mathematics, special education, teacher challenges, teaching strategies

1. INTRODUCTION

The Special Remedial Program was introduced by the Ministry of Education Malaysia since the 1960s to help primary school students master basic literacy and numeracy skills, or 3M (Special Education Division, 2023; Saidin & Bukhari, 2023; Xian, 2021). The New Primary School Curriculum (KBSR) in 1983 emphasized the teachers' responsibility in identifying and assisting students who were weak in the 3M through Programmes like KIA2M and PROTIM. Although various efforts have been made, including the launch of the LINUS Programmes in 2009 and the Plan in 2020, challenges in mastering Mathematics remain a major issue (Ahmad, Razalli, & Shaffeei, 2023).

Special Remedial Teachers face various challenges in teaching Mathematics, including addressing different student ability levels, lack of teaching aids, and the need to use appropriate learning strategies (Lee & Goh, 2018; Abdullah et al., 2015). Studies in Malaysia indicate that issues such as time constraints, insufficient pedagogical resources and pressure to meet national education standards also hinder effective Mathematics teaching (Shamsuddin & Ismail, 2020; Zaini et al., 2019; Alias et al., 2021). Similar issues have also been reported internationally, such as in India and South Africa, where time constraints, professional training and cultural differences pose major challenges (Sharma et al., 2018; Naidoo & Govender, 2020).

This study focuses on the challenges of teaching Mathematics in Sepang, with attention to systemic and pedagogical issues that affect the effectiveness of Mathematics remediation Programmes. This study aims to develop practical steps based on empirical evidence to support teachers through the provision of relevant resources and differentiated teaching strategies (Omar & Karim, 2019; Smith & Brown, 2020; Zuraidah, 2017). Through this approach, it is hoped that the research findings can contribute to the improvement of Mathematics teaching effectiveness in Sepang and other areas facing similar challenges.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Mastery of basic Mathematics at primary school level is important to ensure that students can continue their learning at higher levels more easily. However, there are a small number of students who face difficulties in understanding basic Mathematics concepts, such as basic calculations, fractions and arithmetic operations (Noraini & Abdul Halim, 2019). Therefore, the Special Remedial Program was established to assist students who struggle in this subject so that they can master basic Mathematics skills (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2021). Special Remedial Teachers become the backbone to assist students who face these difficulties. To ensure the effectiveness of teaching and learning, teachers need to plan and implement appropriate and effective teaching strategies (Ali & Siti Norazlina, 2020). There are various approaches and teaching methods that can be applied by Special Education teachers to help improve the mastery of Mathematics among primary school students. Therefore, this literature review aims to examine the teaching strategies that have been used by Special Education teachers in their efforts to improve Mathematics proficiency among primary school students.

Through this review, various proven approaches and techniques in teaching Mathematics to remedial students will be discussed, including intervention approaches, the use of teaching aids and teaching techniques focused on individual learning (Rahman et al., 2020). This review will also assess the challenges faced by Special Education teachers in implementing teaching strategies and propose improvement measures that can be taken to enhance the effectiveness of Mathematics teaching among remedial students. Effective classroom management in Special Education is the key to the success of teaching and learning, especially in Mathematics and Malay Language. Systematic arrangement of the timetable helps to ensure that learning sessions run smoothly, meet the individual needs of students and align with the school's master timetable. The schedule that is arranged needs to be clear and consider the students' preferences and energy levels throughout the day, in collaboration with the School Timetable Committee to ensure alignment and support from

the school management (Special Education Division, Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2023; Saidin & Bukhari, 2023).

In addition, systematic file management plays an important role in storing student information, ranging from individual data to academic and performance records. The use of appropriate learning resources and equipment also enhances the effectiveness of teaching. Special Remedial Classes need to be equipped with tools obtained through wise financial allocation, ensuring teaching aids are available to enrich the students' learning experience (Ishak & Mohammad, 2020). Overall, good classroom management not only fosters a conducive environment but also ensures the success of students in the Special Rehabilitation program (Saidin & Bukhari, 2023). In special education, mastery of Mathematics is a crucial foundation to ensure they can overcome challenges in an increasingly technology-oriented world. Teaching Mathematics to remedial students requires an innovative and tailored approach, emphasizing the use of more visual, interactive and student-centered materials. This strategy aims to help students master basic Mathematics skills at their own level, without pressure, but with strong support (Derbala & Yasin, 2022; Ishak & Mohammad, 2020; Xian, 2021).

Without a good mastery of Mathematics, special education students may face difficulties in other academic subjects and be limited in future career opportunities. This can lead to a decrease in self-confidence and motivation to learn, which has the potential to result in social and economic isolation. Therefore, continuous efforts to strengthen Mathematics teaching for special remedial students are important not only for their academic success but also for social integration within the broader community (Saidin & Bukhari, 2023). Special education teachers around the world play a crucial role in providing educational support to students facing learning difficulties. However, they often face challenges that can hinder the effectiveness of teaching. Interestingly, these challenges may vary depending on the country's context and comparisons between Malaysia and other countries provide useful insights into how the education system can be improved.

In Malaysia, the main challenges for special education teachers include the lack of suitable teaching aids and latest technology. Although there are efforts to provide support in the form of basic equipment, many schools still lack the latest educational software and essential visual aids to help students understand abstract concepts such as Mathematics (Special Education Division, Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2023). Teachers also face the problem of having too many students in a remedial class, making it difficult to give individual attention to each student. In addition, they face heavy workload, including administrative tasks, which reduces the time to plan creative and effective learning activities (Ishak & Mohammad, 2020). On the other hand, in countries like the United States, the challenges for special education teachers include lack of specialized training and ongoing professionalism. Although the technological infrastructure in schools there is better compared to Malaysia, the biggest challenge is providing continuous training for teachers so that they can adapt teaching strategies that align with students' different needs. According to a study by Friend & Cook (2021), teachers in America often lack training to understand the complex issues faced by students with special needs, leading to difficulties in managing behaviour and planning effective learning interventions.

In Japan, the challenges faced are related to the social stigma towards students who require special education. Although there has been progress in providing special rehabilitation Programmes, societal attitudes that tend to view special education as something 'shameful' still limit the acceptance and integration of students into the broader community (Suzuki, 2022). Teachers in Japan strive hard to create an inclusive learning environment, but they often face challenges in obtaining full cooperation from parents who may not want their children to be identified as special needs students. In Australia, the main challenge is regarding the diversity of students in special recovery classes. Teachers often find themselves facing students with varying levels of learning needs, including students with language difficulties, autism and specific learning disabilities. This requires highly focused planning and various teaching approaches tailored to everyone, something that can burden teachers if adequate support is not provided (Brown & Johnson, 2020). Australia also faces the issue of a shortage of trained teachers in rural areas, which often leads to an unequal access to special education between urban and rural areas.

This study focuses on the challenges faced by Special Education teachers in implementing Mathematics teaching strategies, particularly among students with varying ability levels who require different teaching approaches. Teachers face constraints such as a lack of teaching aids, up-to-date technological tools and sufficient pedagogical resources (Ishak & Mohammad, 2020; Special Education Division, 2023). Additionally, heavy workload and pressure to meet national education standards also hinder the planning and implementation of innovative and effective teaching (Shamsuddin & Ismail, 2020; Alias et al., 2021). Comparisons with other countries show similar challenges, such as the lack of professional training in the United States (Friend & Cook, 2021) and social stigma in Japan (Suzuki, 2022). In Australia, the diversity of student needs adds pressure on teachers to provide instruction tailored to everyone (Brown & Johnson, 2020). This study emphasizes the need to enhance professional support, teaching resources and inclusive approaches to help Special Education teachers overcome challenges in ensuring the effectiveness of Mathematics instruction.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study uses a phenomenological design aimed at obtaining the subjective experiences of Special Education teachers in Mathematics instruction. This design was chosen because it focuses on the meaning of teachers' experiences in the context of the challenges and teaching practices they face. Phenomenology helps researchers explore the unique perspectives of each individual and provides an in-depth view of the phenomenon being studied, namely the challenges in implementing Mathematics teaching strategies in the Special Remedial Programme. This approach is based on semi-structured interviews that allow for flexible yet in-depth data collection. Semi-structured interviews provide participants with the space to share their views and experiences freely while allowing researchers to maintain focus on the main research questions. This technique also helps to delve into the emotional and cognitive aspects of teachers in facing certain challenges (Creswell, 2014).

3.1. Location and Sampling of the Study

The population of this study consists of all Special Education teachers who teach Mathematics in primary schools in the Sepang area. For this study, five Special Education teachers were selected as the sample. These teachers must meet criteria such as having more than five years of experience teaching the Special Rehabilitation Programme, having demonstrated success in implementing innovative Mathematics teaching strategies, and serving in schools that reflect the socio-economic and demographic diversity of the Sepang area. This study uses purposive sampling, which aims to select participants who can provide the most relevant and in-depth data to achieve the study's objectives. This technique is suitable for phenomenological design because it ensures that only individuals with direct experience of the phenomenon being studied are involved (Patton, 2002). Participant selection was made in collaboration with the Sepang District Education Department, which helped identify teachers who met the study criteria.

3.2. Research Instrument

The main instrument is an interview designed to answer the research questions. This set of interview questions has one main objective, which is to identify the challenges of teaching mathematics for Special Education students. The questions are designed to encourage teachers to share their experiences and challenges faced as mathematics teachers in the context of special education. There are 5 interview questions to analyze the study's objectives. The table below lists the interview questions planned for the study's objectives and research questions:

Table 1: Research Instruments

Objective/Research Question	Interview Question
Exploring the challenges faced by Special Education teachers in implementing mathematics teaching strategies.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. What are the main challenges you face in implementing mathematics teaching strategies for special remedial students?2. How did you overcome those challenges?3. Are there any resources or support that you feel are lacking in implementing mathematics teaching?4. How do these challenges affect your overall teaching?5. Is there a difference in facing teaching challenges between special remedial students and regular students?

This instrument is extracted and adapted from previous phenomenological studies focusing on the experiences and challenges of teachers in special education (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2014). The questions were designed with reference to the needs of phenomenological research, which aims to explore participants' subjective experiences in a structured yet flexible manner. The use of semi-structured interviews was chosen based on Creswell's (2014) suggestion, which states that this approach provides a balance between structure and freedom to delve deeper into the participants' experiences. In addition, this technique is suitable for obtaining rich and

comprehensive data in the context of phenomenology. The questions and structure of the questions are designed to ensure alignment with the study's objectives and allow participants to share their experiences in depth, including emotional and cognitive aspects in facing challenges. Through the use of this instrument, this study is expected to provide meaningful insights into the teaching of Mathematics for Special Needs students, identify the challenges faced, and propose relevant improvement strategies.

3.3. Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted to test the effectiveness of the interview instrument involving two Special Education teachers, who were not included in the main sample. The main objective is to assess the clarity, relevance, and understanding of the questions, as well as to identify the need for adjustments based on respondents' feedback and non-verbal responses. Logistical aspects such as the duration of the interview and the use of recording equipment are also evaluated. The results of this pilot study help improve the reliability and validity of the instrument by modifying, adding, or rearranging questions to ensure a more logical and effective interview flow.

3.4. Validity and Reliability

Validity and reliability in this study are maintained through various strategies. Validity is strengthened through triangulation techniques, comparing interview data with observations and relevant documents to verify accuracy and reduce bias. Reliability is enhanced through repeated analysis, in-depth reflection, and cross-examination by special education experts through 'peer debriefing'. The research procedures were meticulously documented to ensure transparency and facilitate third-party audits. The researcher also engages in self-reflection to identify any biases that may influence the study. This strategy ensures that the data obtained is authentic, reliable, and that the research is conducted with integrity.

3.5. Data Collection Procedure

Data collection in this study was conducted through semi-structured interviews to obtain in-depth information about the experiences of Special Education teachers in teaching Mathematics. Interviews were conducted individually in a private setting, starting with an orientation session to explain the purpose of the study, participants' rights, and confidentiality procedures. Each session lasts 60–90 minutes, is recorded using digital equipment, and is transcribed verbatim to ensure data accuracy. The interview location is chosen together with the participants to avoid disruptions, while a 30–45 minute follow-up session is arranged if there is information that needs clarification. After the transcription is completed, the document is shared with the participants for the member check process to confirm the accuracy of the data. All data is stored securely, and this procedure adheres to the guidelines of phenomenological research, which emphasizes the importance of in-depth interviews to produce meaningful data.

3.6. Data Analysis Procedure

The collected data were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach, a qualitative technique that identifies and analyzes the main themes in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The process begins with data coding, where meaningful text segments are identified and assigned codes before being grouped into main themes relevant to the study's objectives. These themes are analyzed to identify their connections with existing theories or literature in order to provide a deeper context about the phenomenon being studied (Nowell et al., 2017). This technique is flexible and suitable for use in various types of qualitative studies, allowing researchers to produce focused and insightful narratives about the challenges faced by special education resource teachers and Mathematics teaching strategies (Terry et al., 2017).

4. RESULTS

4.1. Study Participant Profile

A total of 5 special education teachers were selected as participants in the study. They consist of five special education teachers, namely two female teachers and three male teachers. The information of the participants who took part in this study is as shown in Table 2:

Table 2: Study Participant Profiles

Participant	Educational Background	Teaching Experience	Main Teaching Approach
1	Bachelor's Degree in Education (Special Education) - UPSI	10 years	Contextual Learning
2	Bachelor's Degree in Early Childhood Education - UiTM, Certificate in Remedial Education	7 years	Simulation and Mathematics Games
3	Special Education Degree - University of Malaya	8 years	Mastery learning and concept reinforcement
4	Bachelor's Degree in Primary Education - USM, Certificate in Remedial Education	5 years	Simulation and Mathematics Games
5	Special Education Degree - UKM	6 years	Problem-Based and Project-Based Learning

4.2. Theme 1: Diversity in Student Acceptance

One of the challenges often faced by participants is the diversity in students' levels of understanding. Teachers report that special education students have very different levels of understanding, where some students quickly grasp mathematical concepts while others require more time and repetition. Teachers have to adjust their teaching methods to meet the individual needs of the students, which requires creativity and flexibility. However, this process often takes additional time and can put pressure on teachers to ensure that all students can keep up with the lessons.

"There are students who understand quickly, but many others take a bit longer. So, every time I enter the classroom, I have to think about how to ensure all the students can follow along. Sometimes, I've taught the same concept repeatedly but the students still don't understand, so I have to change my approach" (Participant 1).

"There are students who are just starting to understand numbers, but there are also those who can already perform basic operations. So, I have to adjust my teaching methods according to the students' levels, and this takes a long time. (Participant 3).

4.3. Theme 2: Student Motivation and Focus

Another identified challenge is the motivation and focus of the students. Teachers report that Special Education students often lack motivation to learn Mathematics, especially when faced with more difficult concepts such as fractions or multiplication operations. Students also easily lose focus during learning sessions, which requires teachers to create more engaging and interactive activities to maintain their interest. Teachers report that providing encouragement and praise to students each time they successfully complete a task helps boost their self-confidence. However, this requires continuous effort from the teacher to ensure that the students do not become discouraged.

"When I teach Mathematics, I notice that many quickly lose interest, especially when the concepts I teach are a bit difficult like fractions or multiplication." So, I have to do a lot of activities that involve movement or things they can hold so they don't get bored" (Participant 2).

"Many students find Mathematics difficult, so they quickly give up when they don't understand. I have to give a lot of encouragement and praise every time they manage to answer a question, even if the question seems easy" (Participant 4).

4.4. Theme 3: Constraints of Resources and Teaching Aids

This study found that resource constraints and teaching aids also pose major challenges in the implementation of Mathematics teaching strategies. Teachers reported that they often face a lack of suitable teaching materials, such as visual aids and technology. In most cases, teachers have to

take the initiative themselves to prepare teaching materials, which requires additional costs and time. The lack of these resources makes it difficult for teachers to implement more interactive and effective teaching, especially when students need aids to understand abstract Mathematical concepts.

"Sometimes, the school doesn't have enough equipment, so I have to be creative with what I have." For example, if there are no math blocks, I use other things that are around, like stones or folded paper" (Participant 4).

"Support in terms of teaching aids is sometimes insufficient." Many of the tools I use now are from my own initiative, not from the school. Sometimes, I have to buy teaching materials myself. (Participant 1).

4.5. Theme 4: Time and Repetition in Teaching

Time constraints and the need for repetition are also major challenges faced by teachers. Special Needs students require more frequent repetition to understand Mathematical concepts, but the short class duration limits the teachers' ability to provide adequate instruction. Teachers report that they often need to repeat the same concept several times until the students truly understand it, which makes the teaching process longer and more difficult to complete the syllabus within the designated time.

"This special remedial class is usually shorter compared to regular classes, so I have to cram a lot of things into a short time." Sometimes, I don't have time to go over what I taught. (Participant 2)

"They might understand when I teach, but when they move on to the next class, they forget again." So, I have to repeat many times until they really understand and remember. (Participant 5)

5. DISCUSSION

The teacher faces difficulties in adjusting the teaching approach to meet the varying levels of student comprehension. Special remedial students show an uneven rate of understanding of mathematical concepts, which requires teachers to adjust their teaching individually. This requires additional time to repeat concepts to ensure that each student understands (Saidin & Bukhari, 2023). For example, Participant 1 stated that some students quickly understand mathematical concepts, but there are also those who require repeated revisions (Ni & Hassan, 2023). The need to repeat lessons often disrupts the planned learning schedule, making flexibility and creativity important elements in the teacher's teaching approach (Ishak & Mohammad, 2020).

Special remedial students often face difficulties in maintaining their motivation and focus in class, especially when dealing with challenging Mathematics concepts. Participant 2 stated that students tend to lose interest when they do not understand a concept, causing teachers to resort to more engaging approaches such as Math games or physical activities (Saidin & Bukhari, 2023).

Additionally, the low level of student focus requires teachers to create interactive and visual activities to maintain students' attention. Participant 2 shared their experience using practical activities to help students focus on learning (Ni & Hassan, 2023). This challenge requires teachers to always be creative and innovative, even though these efforts often take extra time.

The lack of appropriate teaching resources is a significant challenge faced by Special Education teachers. Teachers often have to take the initiative themselves to provide teaching aids such as Math blocks and number cards because the school does not supply sufficient materials (Ishak & Mohammad, 2020). In addition, the use of technology in Mathematics teaching is still limited due to a lack of equipment and training (Special Education Division, Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2023). Although technology can help students understand abstract concepts, the use of resources such as videos or basic Mathematics applications is only utilized minimally due to these constraints (Saidin & Bukhari, 2023). This shortcoming indicates the need for investment in comprehensive resources and training to enhance the effectiveness of teaching.

Special remedial students require more time to understand and master mathematical concepts. Teachers often need to repeat concepts multiple times, as stated by Participant 5, to ensure that students understand clearly (Saidin & Bukhari, 2023). However, the shorter duration of special remedial classes often becomes an obstacle to sufficient repetition, causing the syllabus to be difficult to complete on schedule (Ni & Hassan, 2023). This time constraint emphasizes the importance of a more flexible teaching schedule to enable teachers to deliver more comprehensive instruction. With sufficient support, Special Education teachers can overcome this challenge, thereby ensuring the effectiveness of Mathematics teaching for students who require special attention.

6. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study highlights various challenges faced by remedial teachers such as the diversity in students' acceptance levels, low motivation and focus, resource constraints, and time constraints. Each of these challenges requires special attention as they directly affect the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process. The findings of this study indicate an urgent need to provide more comprehensive support to teachers, including more relevant professional training, adequate teaching resources, and more extensive technology in the classroom. A more interactive, hands-on, and flexible teaching approach should also be encouraged to meet the individual needs of special education students. In addition, close collaboration between teachers, school authorities, and parents can ensure that students receive continuous support in understanding and mastering mathematical concepts. By strengthening support for teachers and implementing more effective strategies, the challenges in teaching Mathematics to Special Needs students can be addressed. This not only enhances the effectiveness of teaching but also provides better opportunities for students to reach their full potential in learning.

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