IMPROVING UPON REMEDIAL TEACHING IN SOCIAL STUDIES: A COLLABORATIVE ACTION RESEARCH

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Abstract

Collaborative Action Research is a research activity that enables two players, viz. the university based researcher and the school based teacher to collaborate by making their expertise and experiences come to bear upon a practical problem that is faced or ideated primarily by the teacher. The present article reports the collaborative study conducted in a social science classroom in a school context with remedial teaching as the main phenomenon of interest. The study helped the teacher as a collaborator in the study to benefit through enhancing his professional expertise whereas the researcher as the collaborator was able to enrich his knowledge regarding the practical problems that the teachers faces with respect to remedial teaching and how they go about solving such problems.

Keywords: *Collaborative Action Research, Remedial Teaching, Modified Remedial Teaching.*

Introduction

Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas (JNVs) run by Navodaya Vidyalaya Samiti, an autonomous organisation under the ministry of Human Resource Development, Department of School Education & Literacy, Government of India following a three language formula and adopting the curriculum of Central Board of Secondary Education India. JNV is a unique educational innovation guided by the goal of fostering rural talents in the country and the policy of supporting slow learners in the class to help them perform at level with their peers.

Improving upon instruction to help students enhance their learning has been a central focus of education systems at all levels. identifying slow learners and helping them improve in their learning

through diagnosis and remedial teaching has been an educational focus in th ecountry as is evident form several of the educational reports, commissions and curriculum, socumemnts (NCF, 2005). The policy is a inherent in the educational practices of JNVs as well. Through its ordinance it has been made mandatory for all teachers in JNV to identify slow learners in their classes and devote extra hours per week for remediual teahing for such group of students. it is binding on the teachers.

Slow learners over here specifically refer to those students in a given class who are not mentally retarded and yet whose performance is unexceptionally poorer than their peers in a particular subject (Griffin, 1978). Shaw, Grimes & Bulman (2005) defined slow learners as "children who are doing poorly in school, yet are not eligible for special education" (p.11). A website called 'Helping slow learners' (*www. foundationosa.org/slow.htm*) lists ten characteristics of a slow learners viz. Functions at ability but significantly below grade level, Is prone to immature interpersonal relationships, has difficulty following multi-step directions, lives in the present and does not have long range goals, has few internal strategies (i.e. organisational skills, difficulty transferring, and generalizing information.), scores consistently low on achievement tests, works well with "hands-on" material (i.e. labs, manipulative, activities) has a poor self-image, works on all tasks slowly, masters skills slowly and some skills may not be mastered at all.

Slow learners are defined differently by different researchers. In the context of JNVs, slow learners are identified as those students who somehow fail to exhibit performance expected of their age group although they are not classified as mentally retarded. Remedial Teaching associated with slow learners is a corrective form of teaching aimed at helping such slow learners ameliorate their status parallel to their peers. Such remedial teaching connotes a specified period in school schedule during which the teacher presents corrective teaching for slow students to help them overcome their cognitive difficulty and perform similar to the group to which they belong. In other words it is meant to compensate for learning missed by the slow learners in their regular classrooms poor performance.

There are many suggestions available in the literature both speculative as well as evidence based regarding means to make the remedial teaching more effective (Harmer, 2001; Lescano,1995). Lescano suggested that daily evaluations, multisensory teaching and breaking the learning tasks into simpler units are effective in helping the slow learners on their task. Similarly harmer suggests use of such teaching strategies that is congruent with the learners learning styles.

As a teacher of social studies the second author had been in the practice of providing remedial instruction for the students in social studies. The general procedure followed initially involves identification of slow learners in a particular class. The students' performance in social studies in a given semester is the primary source of information for identification of slow learners. The students' performance on their Formative Assessment or Summative Assessment FA or SA, are primary source of information for identification of slow learners. A cut-off score is decided and the students scoring below the cut-off scores were identified as slow learners.

The detailed analysis of students' response on each question, in the FA or SA test, which is also commonly termed as error analysis is performed to identify the specific difficulty of the student and its nature. Such error analysis helps the teacher to design and plan for remedial teaching. The

students are next post tested to ensure that they have improved upon their learning and has been able to enhance their performance. This is the general procedure followed in the JNVs and as a teacher of such institution by the second author of the article.

However as a teacher the author felt some dissatisfaction with the Remedial Teaching in its form and structure in helping the students. As a teacher the author was committed to bring about some positive changes so as to further improve upon the remedial teaching. The commitment motivated the second author to undertake the action research since the goal was to improve upon the professional skills. The author was also well aware that realisation and improvement of instructional strategy and for that matter the remedial instructional strategy is not improved upon in one shot and that it is an ongoing process. The best means to improve upon systematically and incrementally, action research is the best choice.

Action research is a methodology that is considered to be a valuable problem solving tool for professionals in different field of students. It provides opportunities for reflection and improvement for the professionals in their professional context and contributes to their professional development. It can be considered as a reflective practice embedded in professional's epistemological position that knowledge and action are not separated and rather the two depends upon and influences each other in a praxis. Thus action research is a personal transformational tool for a teachers' professional practice designed for practitioners to improve their own practice. Teaching is a profession and teachers are professional. Thus action research is applicable for teachers as well. The present study capitalizes on this notion of action research and used it as a means to develop the professional competencies of the researcher as a teacher.

However, since the teacher and the second author of the article was himself busy with the teaching tasks and other professional responsibilities, that initially it was assumed that undertaking such a plan is not practical. Nevertheless the willingness of the teacher motivated him and the first author to engage in a variant of action research, viz., Collaborative Action Research. Collaborative Action Research is defined as "the research activity carried out in partnership by the educational researcher along with the teacher(s)" (Rai, 2012, p. 7). Thus there are two players in such a research activity. The teacher player is responsible for ideation of the problem that is to a large extent derived from their personal experiences and professional problems. The university researcher is responsible for bringing in their theoretical expertise on the problem and guiding the conceptual framework and methodical inputs. The outcome is thus a joint effort on part of the teacher and the researcher in clarifying the problem, arriving at the possible solutions, testing the same and deriving conclusions. This inside-outside approach benefits the teacher directly in his or her professional practices.

Thus the present study used the collaborative action research to find answer th the research question. the collaboration was between a univerity based teacher educator, i.e. the first author of the study. For the present study the action research process outlined by Eileen Ferrance (2000) was used. The procedure included the steps as follows: identification of problem area, collection and organization of data, interpretation of data, action based on data and reflection.

Statement of the Problem

The study was conducted to improve the effectiveness of the remedial teaching for students of social studies using an action research approach. The researcher aimed to bring about some structural change in the remedial teaching strategy followed so as to make his professional acts more effective and efficient. The study was thereupon conceptualized as an action research to check the outcome of the structural change ideated by the researchers in remedial teaching.

Research Questions

The research questions that guided the present study were as follows:

How effective is the modified remedial plan for slow learners of class VIII in social studies?

Context of the Study

The present study is contextualised in JNV, Nainital in Uttarakhand state of India. There are a total of 320 boys and 160 girls all belonging to the rural background with a middle socio-economic status and the entire student population is Hindi speaking. Thus Hindi is the preferred medium of instruction of the students. The researcher As a teacher appointed in the school to teach social studies the teacher researcher is assigned five periods per week. There are a total of 34 students in class 8 comprising of 23 boys and 11 girls. All the students of class 8 study Social Studies from the prescribed book published by National Council of Educational Research and Teaching. As a teacher of JNV the researcher has been in the practice of identifying the slow learners in social studies and providing them with corrective teaching as a part of his routine teaching responsibility.

Participants

The participants for the present study involved a set of purposively identified eight slow learners from class VIII of JNV, Nainital during the session 2013-14. All the participants were qualified as slow learners based on their grade points in social studies in their Formative Assessment 2 test. The cut-off score used to classify the students into slow learners and not slow learners was 7. Those scoring ≥7 grade point were not included as slow learners.

Plan of Action

The plan for action included the plan of intervention, action schedeule, decision on data collection tools, decision regarding schedule for data collection.

Intervention

The intervention in the presented action research was a structurally modified version of remedial lessons. The Modified Remedial Lessons (MRL) were different form those developed earlier for various topics in social studies in two respects:

i. The input from error analysis that was done of students response pattern on FA1 basically in form of the type and level of questions that the students mostly failed on was used to design the corrective lessons. However the same inputs were also used to create home assignments for the students based on the topic of the lesson. This component of home assignment was missing from the remedial lesson for same grade in the previous session.

ii. Second, the initial interaction session was included before the new lesson begins. in this interaction session th e teacher and the students interacted on the home assignments, any difficulty that the students faced in completing the same and thus generating a feedback in general for all the slow learners.

Both these components were structural modifications in the remedial lessons as compared to those used in the previous session. Thirteen such lessons were developed for different topics of social studies included in the syllabus for FA2. All the topics included were those identified after the error analysis of students response on FA2 test in social studies.

Action Schedule

All the thirteen MRL were scheduled to be taught on three days at the end of the daily school session in the month of September.

Tools

The researcher used two parallel form self-made achievement test in social studies based on the syllabus for FA2 as prescribed by the school for students for Class VIII. Each test comprised of 20 tests items written both in Hindi as well as English. The face validity and content validity of the test was pre-established using tow expert's opinion. The split half reliability of Form A of the test based on data collected from all the xx students in class VIII was found to be 0.74.

A checklist was prepared that was to be filled in by the students to get data on their opinion regarding the attitude towards the modified remedial *lessons.*

Data Collection Schedule

The form A of the test was scheduled to be administered as FA2 test for all the students in Class VIII. Form B of the test was scheduled at the end of the MRLs. the checklist was scheduled the next day after administration of Form B of test. Form A was supposed to yield pre-test data whereas Form B was supposed to yield post-test data. Checklist was supposed to yield data regarding students opinion on MRLs.

Process

The presented action research plan implemented a one group pre-test post-test experimental research design. Since the research was based on pre-test-posttest design, the slow learners scores on the achievement test (Form A) was taken as the pre-test scores (see appendix). the students were then subjected to remedial lesson in the month of July 2014 that lasted for two weeks including 13 remedial lessons in the modified form during the moth of September.

The action plan was implemented by the second author in September, 2014.

At the end of the remedial lessons, the parallel form of achievement test (Form B) was administered to the students. The students scores were tabulated and considered as the post-test score. The checklist was also administered and students' data collected.

Collection of Data and Analysis Findings

1. Analysis of pre-test & post-test scores

The pre-test and post-test scores of the eight slow learners is given in Table 1 shows that the students improved in their learning through the use of remedial lessons.

Table 1: Comparison of Pre-test & Post-test Scores on Achievement Test (n = 8)

Student Code	Pre-intervention Score	Post-intervention Score	Remark
SL1	49	67	Shows positive impact
SL2	28	46	Shows positive impact
SL3	45	53	Shows positive impact
SL4	49	62	Shows positive impact
SL5	49	54	Shows positive impact
SL6	50	56	Shows positive impact
SL7	53	64	Shows positive impact
SL8	51	59	Shows positive impact
	46.75	57.63	

Data shown in the Table 1 reflect the positive impact of modified remedial teaching plan. the pretest-posttest score for each individual studnet identified as slow learner showed improvement.

2. Analysis of pre-test & post-test scores for significant of difference between means

Further the t-test value (in Table 2) for difference between mean score was computed.

Table 2: Comparison of Pre-test Mean Score and Post-test Mean Score

S. No.	Sampling	Mean	t- value	Level of Significance (0.05)
Pre remedial test (intervention)	08	46.75	2.95	Significant
Post remedial test (intervention)	08	57.625		

The table value shows that the mean difference between pre-test and post-test scores was significant (t = 2.95 for df = 14) at 0.05 level of significance. It was therefore interpreted that the students gained in their test-scores through the use of modified remedial lessons as designed by the teacher.

3. Analysis of pre-test & post-test response pattern

The pretest post-test response pattern of the slow learners was analyzed as presented in Table 2. This analysis helped the researchers to get an idea about the nature of improvement among the students.

Table 3: Response Pattern of Slow Learners on Pre-test and Post-test

S. No.	Pre-test Response						Post-test Response						Remark
	MCQS.		Short ans. type ques.		Long ans. type ques.		MCQS.		Short ans. type ques.		Long ans. type ques.		
	Attempted	correct responses	Attempted	correct responses	Attempted	correct responses	Attempted	correct responses	Attempted	correct responses	Attempted	correct responses	
SL1	10	6	5	4	4	3	10	8	5	5	4	4	Shows improvement
SL2	10	3	4	2	3	1	8	8	5	4	4	3	Shows improvement
SL3	10	5	5	3	4	3	10	7	5	4	4	3	Shows improvement
SL4	10	7	4	4	5	4	10	8	5	5	4	4	Shows improvement
SL5	10	7	4	3	5	3	10	9	5	5	4	4	Shows improvement
SL6	10	8	4	3	5	3	10	9	4	4	5	4	Shows improvement
SL8	10	9	5	4	4	4	10	10	5	5	5	5	Shows improvement

The response pattern on pre and post-intervention achievement test was carried out. A comparison which is made in the table between pre-intervention response and Post intervention response pattern shows an improvement with respect to all types of questions.

The error analysis have revealed that the slow learners were poorest in attempting the essay questions. However the response pattern for the post-test score revealed that the slow learners have significantly gained on their weaknesses.

4. Analysis for students opinion

The students were also administered with an open ended questionnaire to gather information regarding their attitude towards the structural change in the remedial lessons. Data was obtained form 6 of the students.

Table 4: Analysis of Data from Interview Schedule

S. No.	Item	Frequency
1.	Rating of Modified Remedial Lesson above 03.	06
2.	Remedial Lessons were comparatively better than the lessons used earlier during remedial lessons.	06
3.	Regular feedback on Home Assignment was important.	06
4.	Free and open environment helped to asked Questions.	05
5.	MRTP should continue in future.	06

The response of students in the checklist shows a positive sign in the favour of new remedial teaching process and established tha the modified remedial lessons were acceptable to the students. Students feel that the homework checking mechanism is so effective to evaluate the learning of concern topic. They are enjoying their learning in the new remedial teaching pattern.

Reflections

Looking back at the problem originally conceived by the teacher researcher, it was felt that the small bit of change initiated in the remedial lessons were satisfying for the researcher as well as the students. Although the findings did not establish a perfect remedial lesson structure nevertheless the researchers were convinced that it did caused an incremental improvement. Further, the teacher researcher was able to get insight into the significance end motivational effect of carrying out the research that was centred around solving the professional problem of the teacher researcher. The observations made by the researcher during implementation of the remedial lessons established the relevance of his dissatisfaction as established by students improvement on the test as well as their response on the checklist.

The researcher's personal experiences in implementing the MRLs, student›s achievement scores and their response on the interviews all provided the needed stuff for reflecting on the projects outcome and what it means for the researcher as a professional. The empirical sources were

used to think over the relevance and usefulness of the MRLs and arrive at conclusions regarding future course of action.

The finding of the study was as per the researcher's expectation. It helped the researcher to boost confidence in his hypothesis that a free environment for students to raise question and regular feedback on their home assignment will help them to improve their achievement in social studies. At the same time the acceptance of home assignment helped the researcher in improving his professional skills. The teacher researcher found himself enriched in his competency to design and implement more improved version of Remedial Teaching Plan. Reflecting back on the study, as a whole indeed provide clues for the researchers regarding the usefulness and relevance of Action Research for the teachers as professionals.

Finally the study was considered as unique by both the authors of the article. It was the first time that the two authors were engaged in a collaborative action research involving a university based teacher and a school teacher. Whereas the first author benefitted from the experience as he had an opportunity to extend his own knowledge, the second author was motivated by the small bit of increment in his professional expertise.

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