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Remedial Education: models and approaches for successful impact on student achievement

Technical Brief

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Remedial Education: models and approaches for successful impact on student achievement

Technical Brief

There is a myriad of reasons why students' performance falls short of the expected competencies specified in their curriculum. Similarly, there are multiple ways to help students close the gap between the current knowledge and skills they possess and the ones that are expected from them. A proven approach is to help learners catch up by providing targeted remediation opportunities. **Remediation is an instructional program designed to support struggling students who have not developed expected curricular competencies and to help them strengthen their basic skills so they can succeed in school.** Why is remediation an intervention of choice? Is remediation the single key for attaining the desired results? This technical brief expands on a recent analysis of remediation and foundational skills conducted by FHI 360, identifies the latest recommendations from state-of-the-art literature and programming practices, and points to the successful models and approaches of current remediation programs.



**CLOSURE OF SCHOOLS
WORLDWIDE FOR APPROXIMATELY**

79 *instructional
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has caused short-term learning losses and exacerbated inequities, prompting education stakeholders to consider their options for ensuring outcomes for all students

WHY IS REMEDIATION AN INTERVENTION OF CHOICE?

When children have trouble learning the basics, such as the literacy skill of word reading, action must be taken. Remediation programs can compensate for difficulties stemming from inequities in schooling, in children's home environments and certain individual differences. Children may struggle with basic skills for multiple reasons, which can be compounded by others, including inadequate time for learning, weak instruction, lack of appropriate learning materials at school, a lack of books or caregiver support at home, lost learning time due to school closures, or students' physical or intellectual challenges. The need for remediation is found in all school systems.² In most programs, remediation aims to improve students' basic literacy and numeracy skills, to increase their ability to pursue higher-level education, and to strengthen their social and economic success in the future.³ Recently, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the closure of schools worldwide for approximately 79 instructional days on average, has caused short-term learning losses and exacerbated inequities, prompting education stakeholders to consider their options for ensuring outcomes for all students. As a result, schools, governments and education programs across the globe have chosen to incorporate and streamline contextually-adapted remediation opportunities for students both in and outside of the classroom.

IS REMEDIATION A SINGLE PATHWAY TO LEARNING?

No. Delivering remediation programs well requires an understanding of learners' specific instructional and social and emotional needs. Remediation is designed to help struggling students receive more individualized attention to build their skills

as well as their confidence, so they can live up to their academic potential. Remediation modalities look different across contexts: some models are provided by teachers at school during class hours, while others are offered outside of school by community-identified facilitators, youth volunteers or teachers as tutoring or catch-up classes. Remediation can be complex because it must target the specific needs of individual learners. In countries with low resources and few trained teachers, guidelines for teaching staff have to be contextualized and closely followed for students to receive quality supplementary help. Notwithstanding the context, there are some core principles to successful remediation programs:



WHAT GUIDING PRINCIPLES LEAD TO SUCCESSFUL REMEDIATION MODELS?



Grouping students by ability rather than grade-level.

This is essential to customize remedial learning activities to children's instructional needs and within their *zone of proximal development*.⁴ To do this, programs have used simple tests such as the ASER, to group children by ability level in reading and/or math. Once children are grouped, their progress should continue to be tracked to assure children remain appropriately challenged and continue to advance.



Maintaining small groups.

Remediation is more successful when students receive individual attention. When remedial learning opportunities are maintained in a small group setting, children receive the support they need to improve their skills. Depending on the context and the number of remediation facilitators or tutors, groups of no more than 10–15 children are recommended per facilitator.



Focusing on specific skills.

Successful remediation programs focus on the very skills that children are missing or struggling with. They do not simply reteach a skill or knowledge content in the same way that it was initially taught. For example, research on technology-based programs that are programmed to identify specific skills for children to practice have shown promising results.⁵ These programs are especially promising when in-person contact is limited, as during school closure.⁶ In technology-limited contexts, highly interactive and competency specific learning games as well as structured reading time in pairs can be effective. In this case a range of activities can be adapted to the local context and included in remedial instruction facilitator's guides.



Promoting motivation to learn.

Students who struggle to learn basic skills often become de-motivated at school. Research shows that motivation, especially self-determined motivation, is associated with higher academic well-being, persistence, and achievement in school.⁷ Models have shown that youth volunteers as

remediation providers could contribute to children's success through helping them better understand the learning materials and motivating them to better perform in class.⁸



Creating time and support for teachers or facilitators delivering remediation.

Teachers or facilitators who deliver remediation programs need time and support to conduct remediation regularly. Some strategies include emphasizing support to teachers via coaching or guides to help them engage in reflective inquiry,⁹ a process whereby the teacher reflects on how their students' performance levels compare with the learning target, and how they can help their students meet that goal. Another model's success is due to school leaders and policymakers who explicitly dedicate certain hours for remediation during school days.¹⁰ When schools are open, and classrooms are used as spaces for catch-up classes, school administrators can be on call to support facilitators in remediation delivery.



Developing simple accountability strategies for teachers and facilitators.

Remediation is often perceived as added work and not a priority for teachers who already have loaded timetables. When facilitators from outside the community or the school are recruited to provide remediation services, there may be a lack of personal motivation which can impact the quality of the remediation. To account for this, the remediation program can include accountability structures and incentives, whether monetary or non-monetary. As Ghana's *Learning* program demonstrates, teachers can be held accountable for conducting regular assessments through official school data collection and review processes; school leaders can set school-owned targets for student growth and hold regular meetings on progress toward targets.

What does successful remediation look like?

Three case studies derived from FHI 360 education programs below illustrate some of the principles and models articulated in this brief. In Ghana, teachers and school principals adopted a whole school approach to deliver remediation. In Senegal, students engaged in a combination of socio-emotional and reading and numeracy games. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, youth volunteers from the community who spoke the same language as the learners were recruited to help students catch up. There is no one size fits all, and there is no silver bullet. But schools can be challenged and supported to adapt the solutions offered by successful remediation programs to ensure that learning is not interrupted, no matter what global or local disruptions affect education systems and services.



Supporting instructors' positive perspective on remediation.

There is a perception that low student performance is a criticism of teachers' or instructors' pedagogical abilities. It is important that all instructors receive positive reinforcement, verbal support and supportive actions so that they may view remedial learning activities as a part of their responsibilities toward every learner rather than a negative reflection on their capability as instructors. For instance, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo *Elimu ni Jibu ya USAID* program, instructors are locally recruited facilitators and as such receive appreciation from their local community.

FOCUS ON

Ghana Partnership for Education: Learning



Create time and support for teachers or facilitators delivering remediation



Accountability and motivation



Targeted interventions



Promote motivation to learn



Changing teachers' perspective on remediation

DESCRIPTION OF THE REMEDIATION PROGRAM

This nationwide *Learning* program relies on Grade 1 and Grade 2 teachers to administer the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) assessment to evaluate their students' reading levels to identify those who are struggling and to group students by reading level. Using *Teacher Resource Packets*, teachers access the suggested remedial learning activities associated with each level and develop action plans for group learning. They deliver remediation activities for struggling students 30 minutes per day outside of normal school hours as scheduled by school leaders in consultation with parents. Teachers continue to provide remedial instruction to these students and review student progress each month to assess whether they continue to require remedial support. As part of a school-based Professional Learning Community, teachers support one another in the application of remedial learning activities. Districts can monitor the remediation records to ensure teachers are providing remediation to learners.

With recent school re-openings, the program has also added a radio-based component focused on providing

students with “catch up” practice for those skills and content they missed during Covid-19 induced school closures. The radio programs are accompanied by worksheets used to practice reading skills.

CHALLENGES:

- **Loaded daily timetable and extra burden:** Some teachers struggle to find time for remediation activities since they were not part of regular classes. The program gives advice to teachers on how to search for the appropriate time, for example, 30 mins before school starts, 30 mins after school ends, or during children's break times.
- **ASER results might not be accurate in some cases:** Some teachers worry that poor ASER scores reflect poorly on their own teaching. Some teachers would therefore prep their students to take the ASER rendering the exercise inconclusive. To mitigate this, the program monitors reiterate that scores are only to be used for the purpose of improving their students' reading skills.

WHAT MAKES THIS PROGRAM SUCCESSFUL?

- 1 **Strong school leadership:** Proactive head teachers make a difference in terms of motivating the whole school in delivering remediation activities.
- 2 **School competition and parents' willingness:** Schools compete with one another on children's test scores. Given this, parents of children identified for remedial activities were motivated to ensure their child's attendance to these 30-minutes of extra learning sessions.
- 3 **ASER assessment.** Periodic assessments embedded in teacher guides were often skipped by teachers, and data were not used to modify lessons or differentiate instruction. By contrast, the ASER tool has consistent sections and directions that facilitate their use, and the data are actionable, especially when paired with remediation activities that correspond with each assessment level.

FOCUS ON

Democratic Republic of the Congo: DR Congo *Elimu ni Jibu ya USAID* (Education is the answer)



Grouping students by ability rather than grade-level.



Maintain small groups



Targeted interventions



Promote motivation to learn



Accountability and motivation

DESCRIPTION OF THE REMEDIATION PROGRAM

Elimu ni Jibu ya USAID (ENJ) is an education in emergencies project with an aim of delivering education services to a range of children in various learning settings. ENJ employs two extracurricular support-to-learning modalities to meet children's instructional needs. The first modality is an after-school tutoring program targeting formal school Grade 1–6 students and non-formal levels 1, 2, and 3 learners who have been identified as “struggling” by their teachers. Facilitators selected from local NGOs obtain lists of these learners and administer the ASER in order to group learners into 3 tutoring group levels: elementary, beginner, and advanced. Each group of learners participates in three 45-minute tutoring sessions per week with their facilitator. Groups are limited to no more than 20 students per group in part to respect COVID-rules but also because it allows facilitators to better cater to the needs of each student.

The second modality is delivered in Safe and Healing Learning Spaces (SHLS) and targets students aged 6–12 who are out of school due to displacement or conflict. SHLS facilitators follow the same protocol to group learners into levels and deliver 5 two-hour sessions per week with each group of 15 learners.

Both modalities focus on reading and writing in French and Kiswahili, math, and socio-emotional learning (SEL). Facilitators deliver math and reading instruction using Interactive Audio Instruction (IAI) programs and the [SHLS toolkit resource for SEL instruction](#). ENJ supports facilitators through face-to-face trainings and ongoing support visits. Facilitators from the tutoring program also liaise with school directors and teachers to provide updates on participating learner progress.

CHALLENGES:

- **Facilitator turnover is high.** When a facilitator finds a more profitable opportunity, they will leave their role. This results in ENJ needing to replicate the training frequently and interrupts program continuity for learners. As such, the project has built in a small stipend to motivate them to stay.
- **Trust in local NGOs by formal schools is low.** There is a perception that facilitators provided by local NGOs are not of high quality. ENJ is working with the education system to address this perception as local solutions are more sustainable.
- **Logistics:** Finding space to hold extracurricular support sessions is challenging in DRC, given that schools are often double shift. Facilitators resolved this by negotiating with communities that then allowed them to use churches or other community gathering places for the sessions.
- **Attendance:** Raising parents/caregivers' awareness to ensure children's regular attendance at tutoring sessions, especially for girls who are expected to support their mothers' domestic workload
- **Monitoring and evaluation:** Assessing students' performance after tutoring sessions through collaboration between teachers and facilitators. Teachers are able to report the impact of the tutoring activity on the students' performance after a number of well-conducted sessions by the facilitator.

WHAT MAKES THIS PROGRAM SUCCESSFUL?

- 1 **Grouping students** using ASER is effective and easy for non-educator facilitators.
- 2 **Tutoring** gives students more opportunity to express themselves, especially in short sessions of 45–60 minutes and through games.
- 3 The IAI programs being applied are successful for multiple reasons: 1) they are **administered in local languages**, which are easily understood by the learners. 2) they **provide guidance** to facilitators to ensure quality standards for session delivery across groups of learners, 3) they were **piloted intensively** in past projects to ensure their quality and errors corrected, 4) they **include characters and storylines**, activities, and games, which are motivating and fun

to children, and 5) they **move activities along** so that facilitators can cover all of the skills and content of the lesson while maintaining learner interest.

- 4 **Low-cost.** It only requires an mp3 player, a facilitators' guide, locally available materials, and notebooks/pens for students.
- 5 The choice of **community-based facilitators.**
 - 1) They are chosen and trained by local NGOs, which makes the program more sustainable long-term.
 - 2) The facilitators are not teachers but youth volunteers from their area who speak the same language as the learners.
 - 3) Facilitators are motivated on their end because learners enjoy the sessions and they are recognized by their communities for the service they are providing.



→ FOCUS ON

USAID Senegal Passerelles’ “remediation 360”



Grouping students by ability rather than grade-level.



Maintain small groups



Targeted interventions



Create time and support for teachers or facilitators delivering remediation



Accountability and motivation

DESCRIPTION OF THE REMEDIATION PROGRAM

Remediation 360 targets Grade 3, 4 and 5 learners struggling in French and mathematics in order to increase their chances of successfully completing primary school and transitioning into secondary. Remediation 360 capitalizes on school management committees to select and motivate community-based facilitators to deliver one-hour after-school remedial sessions twice per week during the school year and two-hour sessions four times per week during school breaks. Education system inspectors validate the community’s choice of facilitators to make sure they are qualified to deliver these sessions. School directors and teachers assist the facilitators in selecting 25 students in need of remediation in French and math and serve as pedagogical aids to orient and support them. School directors train facilitators on the effective use of a “remediation activity guide” with lesson plan templates and guidance on how to plan for, conduct, and monitor the remediation sessions. In addition, they employ a toolkit that offers differentiated activities to conduct with students at different ability levels to boost their French

reading-writing, math and social and emotional learning skills. Facilitators also receive a support guide on the basics of remediation, on how to effectively use the materials, and how to comport themselves as facilitators. Learners receive notebooks to practice their math and writing skills and to complete some of the social and emotional learning activities. They are also provided leveled texts to practice their reading during the French sessions. Finally, facilitators conduct home-visits with students who they perceive to be struggling more than the others.

CHALLENGES:

- **Facilitator motivation.** Though these facilitators are selected and motivated by their community, it is still difficult to ensure they are motivated to deliver these after-school remediation sessions on a regular basis. As such, the project is working on leveraging community support to make a small monetary contribution for facilitators.
- **Wide variance of student skills within the group.** Some students lacked French skills while others lacked math skills and the student skills levels in each subject ranged dramatically within groups. To mitigate this, the “remediation activity guide” and toolkit provides guidance to facilitators on how to adjust activities and content to different skill levels during a session.

WHAT MAKES THIS PROGRAM SUCCESSFUL?

- 1 **Involvement of the community** and the government inspectors’ role in vetting, selecting and supporting the facilitators implies that the approach is sustainable.
- 2 The **frequency of the remediation sessions** and the continuation of remediation sessions during school vacations.
- 3 **Limiting group size** to 25 students to help facilitators better cater to the needs of individual students.

- 4 **Extra practice in reading and math** to students outside of school, who are often marginalized. In this case, social and emotional learning is included because the most marginalized are often the most stressed and need the tools and skills to be resilient and motivated to learn.
- 5 The **partnership between the school and the community-chosen facilitators**. The director receives training from the project and then they train the facilitators. This improves the pedagogical leadership of the school director and allows him/her to monitor and support the facilitator as he/she conducts the remediation sessions.
- 6 The **home-visits** that the facilitator conducts with struggling students. The facilitators share activities the parents can do with their children at home and give them a tool to track their children's practice at home. This encourages the involvement of parents and increases the time children spend practicing their skills.

Endnotes

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