

Unlocking The Potential: Teacher's Take on The Power of Starter Activities in Remedial Intervention

Sharmini Siva Vikaraman, Sheila Adelina Ramasamy and
Zubaidah Bibi Mobarak Ali

English Language Teaching Centre, Ministry of Education, Bandar Enstek, Malaysia
Email: sharmini@eltc.edu.my, sheila.rama@eltc.edu.my, zubaidah.mobarak@eltc.edu.my

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Abstract

Starter activities in remedial intervention are essential tools for engaging students and setting the tone for effective learning experiences. These activities typically serve as brief, focused tasks or exercises designed to kickstart the learning process at the beginning of a lesson or session. A series of classroom observations and lesson plan analysis, prior to embarking on this study, revealed that teachers lack the understanding and practice of utilising starter activities in the Pre-lesson stage. This study focuses on collecting data from year 4 English language teachers who have conducted remedial intervention in their classrooms which requires a small weightage of starter activity in the Pre-Lesson stage. Data was gathered through an online survey distributed to teachers who had received training in Remedial Instruction. The respondents were requested to share their understanding of starter activities, their reflections of starter activities, and opinions on the effectiveness of incorporating starter activities in their main lesson. The responses were obtained from 30 teachers which were then analysed thematically and descriptively to assess the efficacy of starter activities within remedial intervention. The findings demonstrate and confirms the value of incorporating these starter activities into pre-lesson teaching strategies, enabling educators to foster an inclusive and supportive learning environment. The findings were also used to support theories related to cognitive readiness theory among remedial students. Ultimately, this approach assists students in overcoming academic challenges and realizing their full potential, which proves particularly significant when engaging remedial students in the core lesson.

Introduction

Starter activities in remedial classrooms are structured, content-based beginning-of-class activities that serve multiple purposes such as gaining attention, ensuring accountability, reviewing material, introducing new content, and establishing routines (Davis, 2009;

Honeycutt, 2019). These activities typically serve as brief, focused tasks or exercises designed to kickstart the learning process at the beginning of a lesson or session. Their primary objectives include captivating students' attention, motivating students to be prepared for the main lesson, assessing students' prior knowledge, refreshing their previously learned content, cognitive warm-ups, boosting students' confidence by starting with achievable tasks and providing a clear introduction to the lesson's objectives (Bordia, 2021).

According to Naz et al (2021), starter activities are essential tools for engaging students and setting the tone for effective learning experiences. They emphasize the importance of starter activities in fostering a friendly classroom environment and sparking curiosity. Additionally, Rouvrais et al (2010); Bordia (2021) suggest that well-designed starter activities contribute to students' understanding of learning objectives and enhance their motivation and involvement in project-based learning.

Examples of starter activities in remedial classrooms include short quizzes, thought-provoking questions, brainstorming sessions, or problem-solving exercises (Bordia, 2021). By incorporating these activities into their teaching strategies, educators can create an inclusive and supportive learning environment, ultimately helping students to overcome academic challenges and reach their full potential (Bordia, 2021). Starter activities foster intrinsic motivation and help students develop a positive attitude towards learning (Bordia, 2021).

The need for this study arose from the Remedial Instruction classroom observation visits. The findings from the classroom observations provided evidence that only a handful of teachers (Primary 4 ESL teachers) were starting their lessons at the Pre-Lesson stage with a starter activity. Some of the frequently observed gaps in teachers' implementation of starter activities include - the lack of clarity on the impact of starter activities, insufficient lesson planning, ineffective time-management of the whole lesson, inability to engage students, lack of relevant activities, not creative in designing starter activities, lack training and inadequate resources.

Cognitive readiness is another critical factor in remedial students' ability to benefit from remedial programmes or interventions (Kyro-Ammala & Maatta, 2011). Cognitive readiness among remedial students refers to the state of preparedness and ability of these students to engage in effective learning and problem-solving (Grunder & Hellmich, 1996). Remedial students are those who require additional support to catch up with their peers in certain academic areas, often due to learning difficulties or gaps in their foundational knowledge. When designing starter activities for a language class, it is important to consider how these activities can promote cognitive readiness in students. Cognitive readiness refers to the ability to engage in and process information effectively, which is crucial for language learning.

Piaget's theory of cognitive development suggests that children go through different cognitive developmental stages (Ghazi et al., 2014). For example, the preoperational stage is characterized by limited logical thinking, while the concrete operational stage involves more concrete and systematic thought. When designing starter activities for remedial instruction, it's essential to align them with the cognitive abilities of the students. For Pre-Lesson stage students, starter activities should be more concrete and sensory-oriented, while for During-Lesson stage, students' activities can involve more systematic and logical thinking. Starter activities can be designed to ensure that students are cognitively ready to engage with the main lesson content. If students are not cognitively prepared for the material presented, they may struggle to grasp the remedial instruction's core concepts. Starter activities can help bridge the gap between students' current cognitive abilities and the cognitive demands of the lesson.

To address these gaps, it's essential for teachers to receive adequate training and ongoing support in designing and conducting effective starter activities. Additionally, collaboration with colleagues and sharing of best practices can help improve the implementation of these activities in the classroom. There is also a pressing need for increased local research that delves into the learning styles, cognitive readiness, and instructional methods tailored to cater to the needs of remedial students (Lehmann & Ifenthaler, 2012; Willingham, 2018).

The results from the survey are utilized to substantiate theories concerning the cognitive preparedness of remedial students. Additionally, based on the observation that includes lesson plan analysis, the study advocates for the integration of starter activities as a fundamental element in the pre-lesson phase for teaching English language to primary school students.

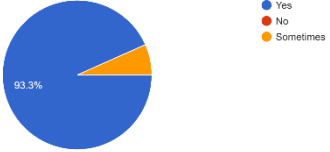
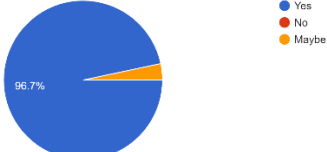
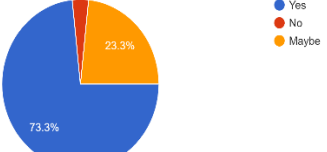
Methodology

This study adopted a mix method approach. Observation was the primary source of data collection followed by a survey. The classroom observations revealed that not all primary English language teachers began their lessons with a starter activity. To address this issue, a survey instrument was developed to gather information from a group of trained Remedial Instructors across the country on the understanding, practice, challenges and feedback on using starter activities. Given that this study is in its pilot phase, a minimum of 30 responses were deemed sufficient. The survey instrument was disseminated to 50 teachers, and the first 30 responses were utilized for qualitative data analysis using a thematic approach.

Main Findings and Discussion

Understanding and the Practice of Starter Activities in Remedial Intervention

The definition and importance of "starter activities" in the context of remedial education is clear and compelling. These activities serve as brief, engaging exercises designed to prepare students for the day's lesson, creating a seamless transition and igniting their curiosity and enthusiasm for learning. They play a pivotal role in capturing students' attention, activating prior knowledge, and creating an induction set for effective learning. Importantly, starter activities are seen as vital components of every lesson, serving as bridges that connect students' background knowledge to new learning material. They enhance the classroom environment, making it more relaxed and conducive to learning. These activities ignite curiosity, motivation, and excitement, increasing students' focus and engagement, and ensuring a smooth transition from previous knowledge to new material. Ultimately, they are regarded as crucial elements in the remedial education process, playing a central role in improving lesson effectiveness and energizing students for the main lesson.

<p>1. Do you plan for starter activities in your Pre-lesson stage? 30 responses</p>  <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Response</th> <th>Percentage</th> <th>Count</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Yes</td> <td>93.3%</td> <td>28</td> </tr> <tr> <td>No</td> <td>0%</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Sometimes</td> <td>2.7%</td> <td>2</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Response	Percentage	Count	Yes	93.3%	28	No	0%	0	Sometimes	2.7%	2	<p>Findings show that 93.3% (28) teachers from the total 30 respondents plan for starter activities and 2.7% (2) teachers sometimes plan for starter activities.</p>
Response	Percentage	Count											
Yes	93.3%	28											
No	0%	0											
Sometimes	2.7%	2											
<p>2. Do you presume starter activities are important to start your English lesson? 30 responses</p>  <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Response</th> <th>Percentage</th> <th>Count</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Yes</td> <td>96.7%</td> <td>29</td> </tr> <tr> <td>No</td> <td>0%</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Maybe</td> <td>3.3%</td> <td>1</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Response	Percentage	Count	Yes	96.7%	29	No	0%	0	Maybe	3.3%	1	<p>96.7% (29) teachers presume that starter activities are important to start English lesson. Only 3.3%(1) teacher presume that starter activities maybe important.</p>
Response	Percentage	Count											
Yes	96.7%	29											
No	0%	0											
Maybe	3.3%	1											
<p>3. Is a 10 minutes starter activity sufficient to get the pupils to be prepared to progress towards the main lesson? 30 responses</p>  <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Response</th> <th>Percentage</th> <th>Count</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Yes</td> <td>73.3%</td> <td>22</td> </tr> <tr> <td>No</td> <td>3.3%</td> <td>1</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Maybe</td> <td>23.3%</td> <td>7</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Response	Percentage	Count	Yes	73.3%	22	No	3.3%	1	Maybe	23.3%	7	<p>73.3% (22) teachers agreed, 23.3% (7) teachers said maybe and 3.3% (1) teacher said no to that 10 minutes starter activity is sufficient to get the pupils to be prepared to progress towards the main lesson.</p>
Response	Percentage	Count											
Yes	73.3%	22											
No	3.3%	1											
Maybe	23.3%	7											

The respondents defined starter activities as preparing students for the current lesson, grabbing their attention, and helping them transition from one subject to another. These starter activities are meant to initiate students into the lesson, ignite curiosity, and engage them in the upcoming content. They can include guessing games, watching videos, or asking about the topic's keywords. The goal is to provide an introduction to the lesson, activate prior knowledge, and set the stage for productive learning. These activities are crucial for capturing students' attention and getting them mentally prepared for the lesson, ultimately fostering a positive and engaging learning environment.

The cruciality of starter activities was positive for several reasons. They boost students' motivation and focus on the class. They set the right mood for learning and provide insight into what to expect in the lesson. For remedial students, starter activities are particularly important as they can improve attention, motivation, and readiness to learn.

However, when conducting classroom observations and analyzing lesson plans, it became evident that most teachers tend to initiate the main lesson stage by commencing with a recap of the previous lesson, inquiring about what students have learned in the previous class, presenting the main lesson's vocabulary bank, and asking if students comprehend the primary concepts introduced in the lesson. These approaches appear to be quite traditional, lack innovation and did not show an engagement from students while in the main lesson stage.

On the other hand, teachers who practiced creative activities like games, songs, videos, audios, images managed to gain much attention from their students for the rest of the lesson.

Effectiveness of Starter Activities in the Remedial Intervention

Starter activities play a multifaceted and pivotal role in remedial education, effectively capturing students' attention and preparing them for the main lesson. They serve as bridges connecting prior knowledge to new information, creating an inclusive and engaging learning environment. The overwhelmingly positive feedback from educators underscores their impact, as students become more engaged and attentive after participating in these activities, displaying better recall of prior knowledge and a deeper understanding of lesson context. The activities foster a positive classroom atmosphere, promoting receptiveness and participation in the main lesson.

In summary, the suggested activities for remedial instruction pupils should aim to generate cognitive readiness, learning curiosity and active engagement. These activities include:

Activities for remedial instruction pupils	Impact
1. Visual literacy activities, such as using pictures and videos	Capture students' interest and facilitate understanding
2. TPR (Total Physical Response) activities	Physical actions to reinforce learning.
3. Intertextuality activities that connect different texts or subjects,	Make connections and think critically.
4. Picture guess games (guess the content)	Stimulate students' curiosity.
5. Quizzes with rewards	Making learning fun and engaging.
6. Game-based activities	Students' engagement throughout the lesson
7. Singing or Music	Creativity, enjoyable, therapeutic and relaxed learning environment (stress-free)
8. Simple instructions paired with interesting activities	Learning process more appealing and easier to adapt situations.
9. Chants, word games, and storybooks	Involve students and foster their interest.
10. Adaptation of activities	Appropriate to pupils' ability and then relate to the topics being taught.

Challenges and Solutions

Educators face several challenges in an inclusive classroom with remedial students, primarily related to capturing students' attention and ensuring comprehension. Language barriers are a significant hurdle, requiring the use of simple language and mother tongue for understanding. Some remedial pupils struggle to maintain focus, necessitating strategies for engagement. Additionally, accommodating students with varying abilities presents challenges in ensuring equal participation and benefit from starter activities.

Language barriers and resource limitations further complicate the process, with educators often relying on translation, despite it being discouraged in English classrooms. To address these challenges, educators emphasize the importance of simplifying instructions and ensuring they are comprehensible to all students. Classroom control, organization, and adapting activities to students' proficiency levels are key considerations. Despite these challenges, the focus remains on creating engaging, inclusive starter activities to foster an effective learning environment for remedial students.

Discussion

The results of this research endorse the importance of gaining a deeper understanding and actively incorporating introductory activities during the initial phase of an English lesson. The study, conducted with 30 teachers, indicates that incorporating starter activities is instrumental in fostering cognitive readiness and priming students for effective lesson engagement. This aligns with the findings of Naz et al (2021), where teachers successfully utilized starter activities to captivate students, establish a positive classroom atmosphere, and spark students' curiosity.

Observation reports in this study further affirm that when starter activities were implemented proficiently, students became highly engaged, ready to delve into the main lesson without signs of anxiety. Throughout the lesson, students interacted more seamlessly with their peers and the teacher. The suggested array of starter activities provided in this study can enhance the development of a comprehensive lesson plan that kicks off with authentic and suitable starter activities, serving as a catalyst for the main lesson, particularly in the context of remedial classes. It is crucial to accord remedial students equal attention and provide interventions tailored to their abilities (Bordia, 2021). Therefore, well-integrated and differentiated lesson plans are pivotal for effectively managing remedial students in an English classroom.

Conclusion

This study proposes three suggestions to enhance the effectiveness of remedial instruction among English language teachers.

Local studies on remedial students' learning styles correlating to cognitive readiness, and instructional strategies can be highly beneficial. These studies can provide insights into the specific needs of the student population in a particular region or context and inform more targeted and effective interventions.

Use data to inform instructional strategies. Regular assessment of students' progress and the effectiveness of teaching methods can help educators make informed decisions about what works and what needs improvement.

Teachers working with remedial students should receive ongoing professional development and training to understand the specific needs and challenges of this student population. This training can include strategies for differentiated instruction, identifying learning styles, and creating effective starter activities. Various creative activities, including brainstorming, flashcards, videos, music and games, have been suggested, catering to different learning styles and levels of proficiency, making starter activities a valuable addition to the remedial instruction toolkit.

In conclusion, starter activities are a vital part of the teaching process, helping to engage and prepare students for effective learning, particularly for remedial students who may require additional support and motivation. The study strongly emphasizes the importance of understanding and implementing appropriate starter activities at the Pre-Lesson stage that promotes cognitive readiness, learning curiosity and active engagement into the Main-Lesson stage, compulsory for remedial classrooms.

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