



Impact of remedial teaching on ESL/EFL low achievers: An Arabian Gulf experience

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Abstract

This study discusses the benefits of remedial teaching to poor performers or 'at risk' students in an English as a Second/Foreign Language (ESL/EFL) classroom. It presents a case of remedial teaching to a group of 21 intermediate level students in a technical vocational training institution in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The learners are all male students of age 16-22, trained to work as entry level technicians in the oil and gas industry upon completion of their studies. They were identified within the first month of the semester and measures taken for intervention. To implement the remedial work, several tools and procedures were used including diagnosis, material preparation, motivation, data collection and classroom observation, to name just a few. The success rate of the program provides testimony to the worth of early intervention in curtailing and remedying learning deficiencies and rescuing slow performers at the risk of failing a subject or perhaps dropping out of an entire course. Significantly, the study adds voice to the existing literature that commends remedial education as a guiding instrument suited to overcome underperformance while raising the level of learner competency.

Keywords: Arabian Gulf education, 'at risk' learners, ESL/EFL, low achievers, reading skills, remedial teaching, UAE

1. Introduction

English is the medium of the institution under the lens of this study. It is an institution established as part of a national plan that responds to the policy of education and training that caters for skills building for the local youth. Accordingly, the requirements for enrollment into this male-only institution include that the candidate had dropped out of study for some time and had left school at least at grade nine or first year of secondary/high school. Depending on the Institutional Entry Test (IET) score, a student may study between 2 years and half to 4 years to graduate with a Technical Vocational Diploma.

Usually a student enrolled at beginner level may spend 2 years of academic studies in the Foundation Program after which he qualifies to proceed to the Technical Program for 2 more years of specialization course. He then graduates as a qualified and certified technician either as a mechanical technician, electrical technician, machine operator, or instrument technician. Along with courses in Math, Science, Arabic and Islamic Studies, students learn English as a core subject in which the four skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening are taught as separate courses by individual lecturers. This study, however, is focused only on the Reading Skills course of two intermediate level classes I was assigned to teach at the beginning of the semester.

The project began when my attention was drawn to the students' poor performance reflected in the successive results of the first three weeks of school. Unlike other learners, their records were not showing any up-spiral gain, despite weekly activities of eight periods of learning (55 minutes each) and two periods of tests (2 hrs every Thursday) evaluating the overall weekly progress. Although the students, numbering 21 from two classes of 22 learners each (almost half of the total), showed difficulty in meeting the course requirement for the level; the intriguing issue was that, for some, the basic skills of decoding, reading speed and/or fluency were relatively weak.

On several occasions, I realized how the general communication strategy of some of them was fine. But it usually took them longer than expected for that level to demonstrate comprehensibility of the lesson and prompt submission of exercises. For others, the competency was somehow below the requirement for the level. Yet, although the course was supposed to focus on the various sub-skills that improve reading comprehension and vocabulary study, emphasis was made on silent (independent) reading. In fact, I recall (in an incident unrelated to this study) my two supervisors' (an elderly Sudanese and a young Egyptian) deprecation of loud reading in the classroom. According to them, because students do not read aloud during the exit test, its practice inside the classroom is pointless! The statement echoes a huge disregard for a vital component to the improvement of reading skills.

In fact, this misconception and other impediments fringing from instructional method and inappropriate materials make such institutions succumb to an unethical academic dilemma such as featured in Eno's (2013) versified critique:

When eighty percent of our harvest
 Earn less than a projected eminence
 Anger grips the entire land
 But the two top cooks burst
 Shamelessly into laughter
 And the untouched, turban-clad
 Topmost chef takes tens
 Of compatriot kitchen cabinet to joyride
 While two toadying tobacco-teasers team up
 To turn over the outcome top-down
 For the table of our earnings to read
 "Only twenty percent drop-out" ("Moral Decimation," p. 94).

In the stanza, Eno chastises the unproductive undertaking by the so-called senior or supervisory officials. Rather than

rectifying the anomaly academically and with attributes of good leadership, the so-called senior staff proffer nothing but indulgence “To gerrymander the goalposts that gauge morality” (“Charlatans’ chicanery: A Poetic Barb,” p. 95). It is from this background and the underperformance of a high number of students that provoked my early intervention for remedial teaching. In the following sections, the study will demonstrate the literature review, setting the remedial strategy, implementing the remedial task, outcome and goals achieved, constraints, and conclusion in the same sequential order.

2. Literature Review

When poor performance reigns in the learning situation, the alarm bell of the dysfunction disturbs all the stakeholders, teachers being the most concerned. This is why remediation and reinforcement mechanisms are recommended in many cases as strategies to control the situation and rescue ‘at risk’ learners as demonstrated in research carried out in diverse corners of the world (Slavin 1989; Wood 2003; Aguele *et al.* 2010; Schwartz 2012; Selvarajan & Vasanthagumar 2012; Cheng 2014; Luoch 2014; Jangid & Inda 2016; Triviño 2016) ^[22, 24, 1, 20, 21, 5, 16, 14, 23].

In the context of the Arab World, similar studies were conducted most recently that contribute extensively to the broadening sphere of academic discussion on the topic. However, contrary to the appreciation of remediation as an effective strategy for overcoming learning difficulties, these scholars scrutinize its ineffectiveness. They expressively highlight a myriad of the potential causes of the inefficacies and obstacles leading to failure. For instance, Al Othman and Shuqair (2013) ^[2] analyze a number of research that reveal the unproductiveness of remediation in most of the Arab universities before the duo recommend the adoption of measures and strategies that yielded success elsewhere. Khan (2011) ^[15] submits an overview of the general conundrum in ESL/EFL learning in Saudi Arabia, suggesting diagnostic based remedial approaches to deal with the problem. Credible contribution by Alghamdi and Siddiqui (2016) ^[3] critiques the anomalous factors undermining an extant institutional remedial program and propose a reorganization of the body in whose docket the program functions.

Unlike the dissatisfaction mentioned in the preceding paragraph, research shows a wide scope of advocacy for an appropriate roadmap that not only embraces the significance of a relevant program but one that well responds to the ideals of a successful remedial intervention. Available literature also testifies to how the problem of poor learning was contextualized from different perspectives. Furthermore, scholars provide a detailed account of how lack of supportive infrastructure distresses not only the student but also the teacher whose students do not demonstrate either “progress from one practice period to another” or “the ability to retain the effects of previous learning experiences” (Davis (2003:421) or may be both. This explains why educational stakeholders need to heed Rao’s (2002) solace that a student’s lack of recall should not always warrant a misperception “that no learning has taken place.” Although Rao postulates that poor performance could result from circumstances where the student’s “learning has not been effective and useful” (p. 184), a counter argument could still be surfaced that equally predicates inefficacious methodology as a suspect.

Defending the learners, Ebel and Frisbie (1991 ^[10]) advise us not to attribute learners’ undesirable performance entirely to their lack of effort, noting the problem could probably arise from a complexity of issues such as an institution’s unsatisfactory educational agenda. Ebel and Frisbie contend that “the teacher cannot claim to be doing a good job of teaching” in a situation of insufficient learner accomplishment. Ebel and Frisbie sound unsatisfied with the notion that “most low test scores...for whatever reason” are blamed on learners—usually with accusations that they “have not tried very hard to learn...” (p. 5). A similar analysis is shared by Aguele *et al.* (2010:139) ^[1] that regardless of the “numerous reasons for students’ poor performance,” the castigation primarily goes to the students themselves with the assumption that they “aren’t working hard enough or taking the subject seriously.”

While on the one hand I agree with Ebel and Frisbie and Aguele *et al.* on account of the substance of their argument proposing for students, on the other hand I feel tempted to elucidate that not all teachers generally prescribe to the (mis)perception of exacting the burden of blame squarely and unfairly on the learners. As Rao proposes, any intricacy related to poor performance poses a challenge to the quality of teachers’ expertise in identifying the “deficiencies.” For that matter, responsible teachers consider the extra step of offering appropriate “remedial assistance” to curb the problems encountered by low-achievers or “grade repeaters,” and even “drop-outs,” that keep recurring “due to subject disabilities and their complications” (Rao, p.72).

3. Setting the Remedial Strategy

3.1 Diagnosing the Problem

Upon observing the students’ poor grades during the first few weeks of the semester, I determined to diagnose the source of the problem. I sought information relating to: (a) the cause/s behind the students’ delay in submitting their work; (b) the areas of weakness leading to the poor performance in the assessments such as quizzes and weekly tests; (c) whether the inability was due to dissatisfaction with the instruction and material (Harmer 2001; Cunningsworth 1995) ^[13, 8]; and (d) whether the poor performance had connection with unanticipated factors.

3.2 Classroom Observation

Aside from my presumption of the causation of the problem, I understood that the current situation was not only an early indication of learners experiencing difficulty, but need for a prompt intervention with a solution. Consequently, I requested purposeful observation in which I was commended for all three sessions: the first by my supervisor accompanied by the head of academic section; the second included the two along with the manager of the institute; while the third was undertaken by a colleague as part of an assignment for a course he was taking. Upon their satisfaction, the management approved my request to conduct an investigation and apply take any possible remedial action.

3.3 Data Collection

I used a dual tool data collection method. In the first instance, I used rapport during informal discussions to collect a section of the data, particularly students’ perceptions. I deemed it necessary to informalize the situation at this stage, with the aim of creating awareness of

the problem and seeking the accommodation of their opinion. Secondly, raising the concern and my enthusiasm about their success, I assumed, would bind them to the project, create effective ownership, and thereby encourage their participation as important stakeholders towards finding the solution. To that end, and in addition to my informal information-gathering initiative, I asked them two formal questions relating to:-

1. Potential out-of-classroom issues affecting performance
2. Potential in-class issues affecting performance

3.4 Findings

Based on the formal and informal data collected, I could determine the problem as related to: a. low/poor comprehension; b. inadequate after-class reading or lack of revision; c. less concentration caused by low motivation; d. inadaptability to the new schema (for newcomers); e. "late [night] sleep"; "little sleep [at night]"; f. instructional material "not interesting"; g. frequent absenteeism caused by "family problem"; and h. inadequate study skills. In the course of diagnosis and data collection, the Arabic term *ta'baan* (tired, fatigued), derived from the noun *ta'ab* (tiredness, fatigue) had frequent recurrence. I could then assume it as one of the possible causes of disengagement from the lesson and a prominent leader to poor performance. We should note here that the word *ta'baan* or exhausted/fatigued is often misused by students for *sleepiness* due to insufficient sleep in the previous night. So, in denial of sleepiness and sleeplessness, they simply prefer to attribute their condition to exhaustion.

On method of instruction, there was not a major complaint except the speed, the intensive pace at which the lessons were delivered—a traditional nature of the Foundation Program in which groups of the same level maintained the same pace and covered a pre-determined set of activities to sit for the same weekly test. On the contrary, I noted how a majority of learners reported the instructional material as "not interesting", "not good", "too much war" and "only about fighting," a possible factor for demotivation. Notably, these were technical trainees whose core reading syllabus contained three graded readers all on the context of war!

I also discovered through the informal discussions that the repeaters attributed their lack of reading to reliance on possession of some of the previous semester's quizzes and tests; admitting their helplessness upon discovering the modifications made to the assessment tools for the new semester. Interestingly, most of the newcomers thought their problem was partly related to the institutional schema which was "very fast" and required "too much work" and higher achievement than "my school before this." Accordingly, they felt overwhelmed by the institutional strictness on performance, continuous assessment, and follow-up of results for further action—describing this scenario of accountability as "very bad" and a cumbersome new experience.

Relying on the results, I planned to address the problem from two fronts: a) Remedial instruction: re-teaching the learners for better grasp of the reading comprehension passages and the vocabulary items in context; b) Motivation & counseling: I had to play, continually throughout the program, the role of counselor to help some of the learners overcome emotional problems rooted in their domestic environment. Along with counseling, motivation and encouragement were essential nutrients in persuading the

learners change their attitude and develop a positive outlook (Eno *et al.* 2018) ^[11] to overcome the deficiency. Subsequently, I classified the learners into three categories:

Category One: Students who say "I can follow the lesson," despite not doing the quizzes well. Only four in number, these learners believe they do not have difficulty with the pacing of the lessons or intensiveness of the program. However, they require "some help" or "little help," as they express; "to push [them]" reach the target. To this group, I would pay them more attention during the normal class. They do not seem to experience serious comprehension problems but the effects of laxity and complacency. I should observe them closely so they maintain equal footing with their peers at the top of the class or at average level of performance.

Category Two: Comprised of seven, these learners can follow the lesson but with a feeling that the pace should have been "a little slow." One of them confesses, "...time is very fast, teacher," while in reconfirmation another one states "...before I finish half my quiz, time finish fast, teacher!" The third admits, "I am not understand paragraph [passage] very well," while his peer agrees with him, "Yes, he is same same like me; because I read, read, read, but don't understand all; don't understand more and more about story." I assumed that the problem here was related to both comprehension and pacing, although the latter was raised by only a couple of individuals. But despite the poor comprehension, their reading speed and attempts at long or new words sound good. Instead, their concern focuses on the rigor of the material covered and intensiveness of the course. They have a positive attitude toward possibility for better performance.

These candidates are obviously not as good as their peers in Category One, though comparatively not as weak as those in Category Three, as we shall see. Therefore, I saw no indication of need for developing new material or modifying/simplifying course material for this group. With some re-teaching or repetition and further clarification of regular course materials, there is likelihood for improvement. For more attention to their problem, they need a focused remedial program with separate timetable from both the ordinary course and the other remedial groups. Dealing with this particular situation necessitates a reasonably more flexible teacher intervention than I would be able to provide during the mainstream class. My assumption of the best way to guide this group was to establish for them a special session for remedial re-teaching.

Category Three: This group of ten, mostly newcomers and repeaters, complains about "very fast speed" of instruction delivery as well as "very difficult chapters [passages]." According to them, the pace should have been "too much slow" and likewise the course material should have been made "more very easy", or "very very easy". Comprehension was a main concern as they expressed "too much need for understand" as well as "more and more explain." In this case, "more and more explain" means, in my opinion, more of *teacher-centered method* to overcome the deficit and realize better understanding. Because most of the 3rd category learners constitute newcomers and repeaters, I noticed the obvious lack of study skills to cope with the intensive teaching/learning and related activities

offered in the Foundation Program. It also declares the need to provide them with supplementary time for special tutorial/re-teaching sessions that would focus on remedial tasks without interfering with their normal institutional learning. Similar to Category Two students, this could be treated in stay-back remedial sessions during which specialized remediation would be applied.

3.5 Setting the Remedial Timetable

In my assessment, students in Categories Two and Three face more difficulty than their peers in Category One. For Category One, I planned to solve the problem with special attention during regular classes, but the other two groups need more attention and much closer guidance and follow-up than the first group. As a consequence, I (after discussion with the learners and management) designed a remedial timetable which the management approved and the participants were informed of accordingly. The sessions were scheduled for the afternoon from 2:50pm to 3:50pm for one group and from 4:00pm to 5:00pm for the other. The scheduled timing notwithstanding, the activity would sometimes extend to 5:30pm and beyond. Later, somewhere in the middle of the program, Category 3 learners requested for a reconsideration of schedule change which was modified to take place from 7:00pm to 8:00pm. However, the session would often continue till 8:30pm.

3.6 Preparation of Remedial Material

- a) Preparation of a simplified, modified (tailor-made) version of the passages for
- b) Category Three;
- c) Preparation of a list of contextualized vocabulary items selected from the passages to
- d) enhance comprehension for groups Two and Three;
- e) Development of a wide range of exercises of diverse models to reinforce
- f) comprehension and improve retention for both categories Two and Three;
- g) d. Preparation of anchor activities for high bar students in mainstream classes to avoid
- h) boredom during my engagement with Category One students

4. Implementing the Remedial Task

4.1 An Overview

As mentioned earlier, for the learners in Category One, I planned to attend to their problem during the mainstream class. I teamed up each one of the four with a group of faster peers to work together on the team-based exercises and other classroom activities. Because the slower learners in this study needed more of my attention and time to guide them through some of the individually assigned classroom tasks, I prepared anchor activities (Tomlinson 2001; Perry 2012) for engaging the more skilled students. I used carefully selected, culturally relevant short newspaper stories and simple articles about the Arab world in general and Arabian Gulf society and youth in particular. The aim was to avoid boredom of the faster students, thus drawing a balance between the “complex and difficult task” of engaging “the most able” while simultaneously “catering for those with learning difficulties” (Cowley 2005:113)^[7].

For Category Two and Category Three students, separate schedules for remediation were created that would start after the regular institutional school day was over. During the

reinforcement classes, I had to divert from the institute’s traditional approach of conducting the instruction where the student did most part of the work—from silent reading to vocabulary study. In the institutional approach, teacher intervention is minimal, mainly involving topic introduction and explanation of difficulties arising from vocabulary use and contextualized grammatical items. The instructor would also deal with the elaboration of meaning of phrasal verbs, and simplification of incomprehensible sentences and paragraphs. But such interventions would occur only after learners had expressed inability to digest elements in the context of the reading comprehension. In such a situation, many who had not understood the lesson would not raise the problem due to shyness, timidity, carelessness, or confusion.

4.2 Exploiting Learners’ L1

In most sessions I had to adopt an eclectic approach to teaching that also benefited from the ‘less favored’ teacher-dominated mode of instruction, which I *modified* and *solidified* with frequent poses of questions as well as elaboration of texts, phrases and sentences. Additionally, I considered allocating significant time for learners’ discussion on the topics. On several occasions, I would embark on a re-introduction of simple grammatical segments relevant to the context but which the learners had lost retention of and thus left unable to link to the context of the current lesson. My little knowledge of Arabic, the learners’ L1 became extremely helpful (Auerbach 1993; Medgyes 1994; Copland & Neokleous 2011; Hall & Cook 2013)^[4, 17, 6, 12]. More than in any ESL/EFL classroom encounter I had had in the institute. It complemented the explanation in English, particularly during vocabulary study. The learners exploited their L1 mainly for clarification purposes as well as ascertain differences between the structures of the English and Arabic sentences where, unlike the former, the latter can have the pronoun and verb of a sentence attached in one word.

4.3 Variation of Activities to Close Gaps

To reinforce comprehension of the passages and general discussion of the stories, I used a variety of tailor-made exercises of different challenge levels—but grounded on the mainstream syllabus—yet purposely adapted to the remedial program. Significantly discernible was the enhancement of retention and improvement of retrieval of information from previous lessons in the mode of application of the knowledge gained. The re-teaching sessions were gradually proving to be worthwhile remedial approach by bridging the gap between the current level of students’ readiness and that required by the course. It increased the motivational level for more reading as there was less intimidation such as caused by the presence of higher performers in the mainstream classroom. Quite unlike the syllabus concentration on multiple choice questions only, I incorporated in the new material questions which the learners had to elaborate their answers verbally as well as write them in their exercise book. These multiple activities and spheres of approaches helped students improve not only in their reading comprehension but, as they said, impacted indirectly on the enhancement of their oral communication skills. It is worthwhile mentioning that the improvement also indirectly impacted the writing skills course, as was confirmed by the other teachers.

4.4 Stimulating Learner Interest

In addition to remedying the difficulties related to comprehension of the stories in the three core syllabus graded readers (*A Red Badge of Courage*; *Eagle of the Ninth*; and *King Solomon’s Mines*); I allocated ample teaching time for the *Intermediate Reading Practices* by Keith S. Folse. Taught alongside the three compulsory graded readers, the IRP was supposed to be a supplementary reading component of the Foundation Level 2 Reading syllabus; though less utilized. However, I observed students’ more preference to the passages in this book than the stories covered in the outdated graded readers whose theoretical presentation and topical substances lacked connection with the students. So I allowed them to practice, with sufficient examples, the morphological changes within patterns of words and structures and their use in context.

Some of the activities we focused on included (though not limited to) the affixes such as prefix-root-suffix techniques for understanding and locating words and using them relevant to the themes highlighted in the course book. Table 1 below shows some examples:

Table 1: Word parts

prefix	root	suffix	(word in context)
pre	cook	ed	precooked
im	mature	ity	immaturity
in	sufficient	ly	insufficiently

To broaden the understanding, I assigned students to produce contextualized examples based on their experience, which contributed to the goal of the remedial program. In order to put more flavor into the less admired graded readers, I had to create some activities that linked them to the IRP (wherever possible); so I tasked the learners to identify as many affixed words as they could find in the graded readers. The method was to contribute to learners’ more comprehensive understanding of the use of the words, retention of word meaning, and a better grasp of the serialized episodes in the graded readers.

Students would introduce comparisons of English sentences with their Arabic equivalents to experience either similarity or difference and how they occurred—and whether and when a particular noun was the name of the action or the doer of that action. The technique of the practice, the simplicity, as I noted, resonated with the learners’ interest because they lacked initial understanding of how the changes occurred. With such activities and intelligibility, it helped me guide the learners on how to scan and determine (or otherwise guess) the main idea of a paragraph. By identifying the key word(s) and chunks of ideas expressed in the sentences, they could determine on what constituted the main idea of a paragraph—by differentiating between the general (covering the entire paragraph) and the detail (specific for certain matter/s).

We laid more focus on the representative role of the main idea sentence in a given question, or its coverage of all relevant meaning and information in a given paragraph. I tasked the boys to analyze and determine what holds the main idea and what constitutes as the most important information of a given passage or a paragraph in the passage. Other routine practices included students’ construction of their own examples with the new vocabulary and narration and discussion of the passage in their own English. To encourage reading and appreciate scaffolding

during students’ oral presentation, I avoided discussion and correction on grammatical errors as the purpose was to enhance reading comprehension. The strategy created a favorable environment which enabled students to experience, practice and apply the new items.

4.5 Teamwork

I planned individualized tasks as well as daily teamwork activities. I teamed up into one reading group a learner who was good in speaking, one fine in writing and another whose vocabulary use was sound and named them A, B, C etc. I then assigned each group a timed reading of a few paragraphs or a page from the textbook. After they have read and discussed for about 10 to 15 minutes, we would all interact with one another on the same subject to develop detailed comprehension through reflective questioning. Each member of the group would then present the story in a few minutes, according to his understanding, before undergoing an open-question session in which the presenter (narrator) would answer any question posed by his audience/peers. Despite the challenge, this was the most appreciated practice and one that developed into a competition in which every learner became eager in either raising a perplexing question or proving to the rest his ability to respond to their questions satisfactorily. The technique aided in recalling key vocabulary and important phrases highlighted in the passages, thus minimizing disuse of the little knowledge gained.

5. Outcome and Goals Achieved

5.1 Level of Recovery

Table 2: Learners’ Level of Recovery

Level of Recovery	Number of learners	Percent
Fast remedied in mainstream class	4	19%
Full remedial task	17	81%
Total	21	100%

Four or 19% of the 21 learners recovered under special observation during their regular classes. According to them, the new blend with top rated classmates, “the teacher is helping me more,” and “I am trying more and more” became some of the effective tools to realize improvement. As I had viewed, the setback of this group was more about reluctance and avoidance than real competency issues. Comparatively, eighty-one percent, numbering 17 learners, continued the remedial course in the Language Enhancement Center (LEC) till the end of the semester while the gradual improvement of each one of them was reflected in the assessment record.

5.2 Performance of Remedied Learners in the Coursework

Table 3: Performance of Remedied Learners in the Coursework

Qualification	Number	Percentage
Qualified to do exit test	19	90%
Failed	2	10%
Total	21	100%

At the end of the semester, 19 students representing an overall number of 90% of the remedial groups qualified from the coursework assessments. They satisfied the institutional requirement of a minimum of 70% aggregate score in their Reading Skills coursework that combines

scores from attendance, classroom performance, quizzes, assignments, and weekly tests. The result allowed them to sit for the Institutional Exit Test conducted by the institution’s independent Testing Center where lecturers are (in most cases) exempted from invigilating students testing for the courses they were teaching.

5.3 Exit Test Results of Remedied Learners

Table 4: Exit Test Results of Remedied Learners

Exit status	Number	Percent
Passed in 1 st attempt	16	76%
Passed in the re-test	3	14%
Referred/failed	2	10%
Total	21	100%

From the Exit Test, 76% of the remedied ‘low achievers’ or 16 examinees, crossed to the next upper level in their first attempt, while 3 students equivalent to 14% passed later in a re-test. Only 2 candidates or 10% of the initial learners in the remedial program were unable to proceed to the higher level and had to repeat the entire course in the following semester—mainly due to frequent absenteeism.

6. Constraints

Every study has some limitations, and this one has not been an exception. Although it was not costly in financial terms, it had perplexities with great effect on me and the students in various ways. Some of these are demonstrated below:

6.1 Stressful Weeks

Coping with full load of mainstream class duties while conducting remedial teaching synchronously, left me with incredible amount of stress, physically and psychologically. It unpleasantly impacted on my spare time, leading to the suspension of a considerable amount of my private/domestic activities. My weekends were not spared either as I spent a great deal of time preparing anchor activities for the high performers and the simplified versions and exercises for the reinforcement tutorials. Even after the students’ achievement became evident and I appealed for exemption from some of my full-load 20 periods per week (15 hrs) of teaching along with other administrative tasks, my request was dishonored by the so-called senior/supervisory staff. Regardless of the disappointment and related increase of stress, my strong drive and commitment to the success of the students remained uncompromised.

For the sole purpose of the students, I had to dismiss most of my personal or postpone them till end of the semester because the remedial sessions were intensive and for three days a week. Sometimes, the re-teaching could extend beyond the allocated time to cause me a considerable amount of exhaustion; yet starting the following morning *fresh* with the rest of my colleagues. This meant I had to cope with a variety of tasks to which neither time nor any other resources had initially been allocated by the institution, despite availability of funds to cater for all of them. It would do me a lot of relief had the management assigned some of my regular morning classes to part-timers who were available and paid by the institute for relieving other teachers with milder, less important, less intensive, and much less productive tasks than the remedial program.

6.2 Inconveniences to Students

Although the students participated in the project with a commendably high rate of commitment, they nevertheless expressed the inconvenience by the prolongation of the learning activity. Some of them were not pleased with the extension of the stay-back time to late afternoon or into the early hours of the evening—after completing their normal classes just at about 2:40pm. Indeed the institute provided a free meal in the canteen at the students’ hostel for all the day-students staying back for the remedial program in the afternoon, and dinner for those attending in the evening, but still certain learners raised deprivation of their free-time as a concern. Even after rescheduling the re-teaching timetable to from 7:00pm to 8:00pm in the evening, to allow them time to go home and rest for a while, some students still kept complaining about the hassle of commuting to and from distant locations and in certain cases through heavy traffic.

6.3 Materials as More Burden to Learners

A number of the learners regarded the supplementary material as an extra load, a burden to their regular activity. In their own words, “...more activity” and “more reading” or “always reading and reading” interfered with their free-time for attending to other “personal” or “family” matters. Others would report their displeasure with terms like “no time for relax,” but instead “only study, study, study.” My intervention as a counselor and motivator became a crucial role in cleansing their mind off the “burden” and keeping them extensively engaged toward success.

7. Conclusion

The current study focused on the diagnosis and remediation of difficulties faced by “low achievers” in an ESL/EFL Reading Skills course in an Arabian Gulf environment. By using a combination of activities, the goal was achieved successfully in cooperation with the students who worked hard to face the learning challenges in the course of several weeks. It therefore dispels perceptions on the ineffectiveness of remedial programs by adding voice to earlier advocacy for remediation of ‘at risk’ learners. It further reveals not only the worthiness of early intervention but indeed the necessity of dedication in the part of the teacher and motivation in that of the students. Finally, the high rate of achievement is testimony to the multiple roles and factored that were followed as a result of setting an appropriate strategy for the implementation of the project—an unprecedented sacrifice by the teacher and the learners.

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