

Challenges and Strategies for Learner Support and Remediation in the Context of Free Education and the Competency-Based Curriculum in Selected Secondary Schools in Chirundu District

Ephraim Mapiki

School of Education Institute of Virtual & Distance Learning
St Eugene DMI University

Abstract — This study investigated the challenges and strategies for learner support and remediation in the context of Free Education and the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) in selected secondary schools in Chirundu District, Zambia. The study was guided by three objectives: to identify challenges schools face in providing learner support and remediation; to examine how Free Education and CBC affect the provision of learner support and remediation; and to determine strategies for addressing the identified challenges. A qualitative research approach and descriptive research design were employed. The study involved three selected secondary schools, with three headteachers, thirty teachers and fifteen learners participating. Data were collected through headteacher interviews and structured questionnaires administered to teachers and learners, and were analysed thematically and descriptively. The findings revealed that learner support and remediation were being provided through remedial and extra lessons, continuous assessment, peer support, group work, additional explanations and follow-up of learners experiencing difficulties. However, their effectiveness was constrained by large class sizes, inadequate classroom space, shortages of textbooks and other teaching and learning materials, limited computers and practical equipment, heavy teacher workloads, limited instructional time and inadequate professional support. Learners particularly reported difficulties caused by classroom noise and overcrowding, while also highlighting shortages of textbooks, computers and practical materials. At the same time, learners appreciated teachers' efforts to provide extra lessons and simplify explanations. The study further found that Free Education had significantly increased access to secondary education, particularly for learners from financially disadvantaged families. However, increased enrolment had placed additional pressure on teachers, classrooms and learning resources, thereby reducing opportunities for individualised learner support and making remediation and continuous assessment more difficult. The study concludes that expanding access without proportionately expanding school capacity can undermine the effectiveness of learner support and the attainment of CBC competencies. The study recommends increased provision of teachers, classrooms, textbooks, ICT and practical resources; strengthened continuous professional development; structured remedial programs; effective assessment and monitoring; supportive supervision; and stronger parental and community involvement. The study concludes that the effective implementation of Free Education and CBC requires not only increased access to education but also adequate resources and systematic learner support to ensure that all learners have meaningful opportunities to achieve the expected competencies.

Keywords— Learner support, Remediation, Free education, Competency-Based, Curriculum (CBC), Secondary schools, Chirundu District, Learner achievement, Academic performance

I. INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the background to the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, research objectives and research questions. It also explains the significance, scope and delimitations of the study. The chapter concludes by defining the key terms used in the study.

1. Background to the Study

Education is widely regarded as an important human right and a major contributor to social and economic development. In

Zambia, the Government introduced the Free Education Policy in 2022 to increase access to education and reduce financial barriers that prevented some learners from attending school. The policy resulted in a substantial increase in secondary school enrolment (Ministry of Education, 2022).

Although increased access to education is a positive development, it has placed additional demands on schools. Many secondary schools have experienced overcrowded classrooms, shortages of teaching and learning materials, inadequate classroom space and increased teacher workloads.

These conditions can affect the quality of teaching and learning (UNESCO, 2023).

At the same time, Zambia has adopted the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC), which places emphasis on the development of knowledge, practical skills, values and competencies. The curriculum requires learner-centered teaching, continuous assessment, differentiated instruction, learner support and remediation for learners experiencing learning difficulties (Curriculum Development Centre, 2023).

Learner support involves academic and non-academic assistance provided to learners to promote successful learning, while remediation involves interventions intended to help learners overcome learning difficulties and achieve the expected learning outcomes. These practices are important under CBC because learners differ in their abilities, learning needs and rates of progress (Mulenga & Kabombwe, 2019).

The increased enrolment associated with Free Education may, however, make it difficult for schools to provide adequate individual attention and effective remediation. Large classes, limited resources and increased teacher workloads may restrict teachers' ability to identify learning difficulties, monitor learner progress and provide timely support. The relationship between increased access to education and the quality of learner support therefore requires careful examination.

In this context, the present study investigates learner support and remediation challenges associated with Free Education and CBC implementation in selected secondary schools in Chirundu District. The study seeks to understand the challenges experienced by schools, examine the effects of increased enrolment and identify strategies that may improve learner support and remediation.

2. Statement of the Problem

The introduction of Free Education in Zambia has increased access to secondary education and consequently increased enrolment in schools. At the same time, the Competency-Based Curriculum requires schools to provide effective learner support and remediation so that learners can acquire the expected competencies.

However, increased enrolment has created challenges such as overcrowded classrooms, inadequate teaching and learning resources, increased teacher workloads and limited instructional time. These conditions may reduce teachers' ability to provide individual attention, monitor learner progress and conduct effective remedial activities.

Consequently, some learners may not receive the academic assistance they require to overcome learning difficulties and achieve expected learning outcomes. Although learner support and remediation are important aspects of CBC implementation, there is limited empirical information on how secondary schools in Chirundu District are responding to these challenges.

It is therefore necessary to investigate how increased enrolment following the introduction of Free Education has affected learner support and remediation under CBC in selected secondary schools in Chirundu District, and to identify practical strategies for improving these services.

3. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate learner support and remediation challenges associated with Free Education and the implementation of the Competency-Based Curriculum in selected secondary schools in Chirundu District.

The study further seeks to identify strategies that schools can use to improve learner support and remediation programs under CBC.

4. Research Objectives

General Objective

To investigate the challenges and strategies for providing learner support and remediation in the context of Free Education and the Competency-Based Curriculum in selected secondary schools in Chirundu District.

Specific Objectives

- To identify the challenges schools face in providing learner support and remediation in the context of Free Education and the Competency-Based Curriculum in selected secondary schools in Chirundu District.
- To examine how the implementation of Free Education and the Competency-Based Curriculum affects the provision of learner support and remediation in selected secondary schools in Chirundu District.
- To determine strategies that can be used to address learner support and remediation challenges in selected secondary schools in Chirundu District.

General Research Question

How can learner support and remediation be effectively provided in the context of Free Education and the Competency-Based Curriculum in selected secondary schools in Chirundu District?

Specific Research Questions

- What challenges do schools face in providing learner support and remediation in the context of Free Education and the Competency-Based Curriculum in selected secondary schools in Chirundu District?
- How does the implementation of Free Education and the Competency-Based Curriculum affect the provision of learner support and remediation in selected secondary schools in Chirundu District?
- What strategies can be used to address learner support and remediation challenges in selected secondary schools in Chirundu District?

6. Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it addresses an important challenge arising from the implementation of Free Education and the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC): how schools

can provide effective learner support and remediation while responding to the diverse learning needs of an increasing number of learners.

The Ministry of Education may use the findings to strengthen policies, planning and resource allocation for learner support and remediation. The findings may particularly help in identifying the teacher, classroom, material and institutional support required for effective implementation of Free Education and CBC.

District Education authorities may use the findings to identify challenges experienced by schools and provide appropriate professional, administrative and instructional support. The findings may also assist in planning interventions that respond to the specific needs of schools in the district.

School administrators may benefit from a clearer understanding of the challenges affecting learner support and remediation. The findings may guide them in strengthening school-based support systems, organizing remedial programs and making better use of available resources.

Teachers may benefit from practical strategies for identifying learners' difficulties, providing differentiated support and organizing remediation within the demands of Free Education and CBC. The study may also highlight areas where teachers require additional professional development and resources.

Learners may benefit indirectly from improved systems of learner support and remediation. More effective support may enable learners experiencing difficulties to receive timely

assistance and greater opportunities to achieve the competencies expected under CBC.

Researchers and scholars may use the findings as a reference for further studies on Free Education, CBC implementation, learner support and remediation in Zambia. The study may also contribute to the limited local literature on how schools can respond to learner-support challenges within the changing educational environment.

7. Scope of the Study

The study focuses on learner support and remediation in the context of Free Education and the Competency-Based Curriculum in selected secondary schools in Chirundu District. It examines the challenges schools face in providing academic support and remediation to learners, including challenges related to increased enrolment, teacher workload, classroom space, teaching and learning materials, instructional time and the demands of implementing CBC.

The study also examines how the conditions associated with Free Education and CBC influence the provision of learner support and remediation. In addition, it identifies strategies that schools and other education stakeholders can use to address the challenges and strengthen learner support and remediation.

The study focuses on three selected secondary schools in Chirundu District and involves school administrators, teachers and learners. It does not seek to examine all aspects of Free Education or the entire implementation of CBC. Its specific focus is on their relationship with learner support and remediation.

8. Delimitation of the Study

The study is deliberately delimited to learner support and remediation in the context of Free Education and the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) in three selected secondary schools in Chirundu District. It focuses specifically on the challenges schools face in providing learner support and remediation, the ways in which the conditions associated with Free Education and CBC influence these services, and strategies for addressing the identified challenges.

The study is further delimited to school administrators, teachers and learners because these groups are directly involved in or affected by the provision of learner support and remediation. It does not seek to evaluate the overall success or failure of the Free Education Policy or the Competency-Based Curriculum. Similarly, it does not examine all challenges associated with curriculum implementation, school management or secondary education generally.

The findings will therefore be interpreted within the context of the three selected secondary schools in Chirundu District and will not be assumed to represent all secondary schools in Zambia. This delimitation enables the study to examine the problem in sufficient depth while maintaining a clear focus on learner support and remediation.

9. Definition of Key Terms

Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC): A curriculum approach that emphasises the acquisition and demonstration of specified knowledge, skills, values and competencies through learner-centered teaching, continuous assessment and active participation in learning. In this approach, learner support is provided by identifying individual learning needs through continuous assessment, adapting instruction and providing appropriate guidance and learning activities. Remediation is provided to learners who have not attained the expected competencies through additional instruction, targeted practice, differentiated activities and continued assessment until progress is achieved.

Free Education: A government policy that removes tuition fees and other major financial barriers to enable learners, particularly those who may previously have been excluded by poverty, to access and remain in school. In the context of this study, Free Education is understood not only as increased access to secondary education, but also as an expansion of school enrolment that places greater demands on teachers, classrooms, teaching and learning materials and other school resources. These increased demands may affect the ability of schools to identify learners' learning difficulties, provide individualized support, conduct remedial activities and monitor learners' progress. Effective Free Education therefore requires increased access to be accompanied by adequate resources and support systems that enable schools to respond effectively to the learning needs of all enrolled learners.

Learner Support: Academic and non-academic assistance provided to learners to help them participate effectively in learning and achieve expected outcomes.

Remediation: Educational interventions provided to learners who experience learning difficulties in order to help them attain the expected learning outcomes.

Enrolment: The number of learners registered and attending school within a specified period.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Introduction

This chapter reviews literature relating to learner support and remediation in the context of Free Education and the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) in secondary schools. The review is guided by the central concern of the study, which is to examine the challenges and strategies associated with providing learner support and remediation in selected secondary schools in Chirundu District. The literature is therefore organised around the concepts and issues that directly relate to the study objectives, namely learner support, remediation, Free Education, the Competency-Based Curriculum, challenges affecting the provision of learner support and remediation, and strategies for strengthening these practices.

The review draws from policy documents, scholarly books, journal articles, theses, empirical studies and other relevant publications. Particular attention is given to the Zambian context because educational policies and school-level practices are influenced by the country's curriculum reforms, the expansion of access through Free Education and the changing demands placed on schools and teachers. The review also considers selected international literature where it provides theoretical and empirical perspectives that are useful for understanding learner support and remediation.

The chapter proceeds from a conceptual discussion of learner support and remediation to the relationship between Free Education and learner support, followed by the implications of the Competency-Based Curriculum. It then examines challenges affecting learner support and remediation and discusses strategies that have been proposed or employed to address such challenges. Finally, empirical studies are reviewed and the research gap that the present study seeks to address is identified.

2. Conceptualising Learner Support

Learner support refers broadly to the academic, pedagogical, psychosocial, material and institutional assistance provided to learners to enable them to participate effectively in education and achieve the intended learning outcomes. Learner support is therefore broader than classroom teaching alone. It includes identifying learners' needs, providing appropriate learning opportunities, monitoring progress, offering additional assistance to learners experiencing difficulties and creating conditions that enable learners to remain engaged in learning.

The importance of learner support is particularly evident in systems that seek to expand educational access. Increased

access does not automatically guarantee successful learning. Learners enter school with different levels of prior knowledge, abilities, interests, motivation, social backgrounds and learning needs. Effective education systems therefore require mechanisms for identifying differences among learners and responding to those differences.

Jere, Manchishi and Mulenga (2021:28) observe that effective learner support begins with identifying learners' needs, including their educational and social backgrounds, existing knowledge, learning needs, learning styles, values, attitudes and motivation. Although their study focused on distance teacher education, the principle is relevant to conventional secondary schooling because effective support similarly requires schools and teachers to understand the characteristics and learning needs of the learners they serve. Their study found that although learners and teacher educators were aware of learner support services, many learners reported that the services were not adequately implemented.

Learner support can therefore be understood as a continuous process rather than an intervention that occurs only when a learner fails. It begins with the identification of learning needs and continues through appropriate instructional responses, monitoring, feedback, counselling, additional learning opportunities and evaluation of progress. In a competency-based system, this process becomes particularly important because learners are expected not merely to reproduce information but to demonstrate knowledge, skills, values and attitudes in meaningful contexts.

3. Learner Support in Secondary Schools

In secondary schools, learner support takes several forms. These include individualised assistance, differentiated instruction, academic counselling, peer support, guidance and counselling, provision of learning materials, additional lessons, remedial teaching, continuous assessment, feedback and engagement of parents or guardians.

The Zambia Education Curriculum Framework emphasises an education system that is learner-centred, inclusive and responsive to individual needs. The Education Act also provides a legal basis for educational institutions to support learners with special educational needs and promotes their integration into mainstream institutions. The Act requires educational institutions to adopt positive and affirmative measures for learners with special educational needs and provides for support mechanisms for such learners (Republic of Zambia, 2011).

Learner support is therefore not simply an optional activity undertaken by individual teachers. It forms part of the broader responsibility of schools to ensure that learners are able to benefit from education. This responsibility becomes more demanding where schools serve large and diverse populations.

The expansion of access under Free Education has increased the importance of learner support. The Ministry of Education's statistics indicate substantial growth in enrolment following the expansion of free schooling. The 2024 Education Statistics Bulletin reported total enrolment of approximately 6.53 million learners and 1.39 million secondary-school learners in 2024 (Ministry of Education, 2024: xiv–2). The bulletin attributed much of the increase in enrolment to the expansion of Education for All in public schools.

The increase in enrolment has important implications for learner support. When more learners enter school, schools must respond not only by providing physical access but also by ensuring that learners receive adequate instructional attention, learning materials, assessment and academic assistance. Thus, the success of Free Education should be considered not only in terms of enrolment but also in terms of the ability of schools to support learners once they enter the education system.

4. Conceptualising Remediation

Remediation refers to planned educational intervention intended to address identified learning difficulties, knowledge gaps, misconceptions or deficiencies that prevent learners from attaining expected learning outcomes. Remediation is therefore a corrective and supportive process. It is normally informed by evidence obtained through assessment and seeks to help learners attain competencies or learning outcomes that they have not adequately achieved.

Remediation differs from ordinary classroom teaching in its emphasis on identified learning gaps. While classroom teaching introduces and develops new learning, remediation responds to areas in which learners have experienced difficulty. Effective remediation consequently requires assessment, diagnosis, appropriate intervention and subsequent monitoring.

Kangwa (2022) examined remedial education in selected junior secondary schools in Mongu District and found that remedial education was not sufficiently effective in the schools studied. The study reported inadequate knowledge and understanding of remedial education among some teachers, inadequate policy guidance and negative attitudes among some learners and parents. It consequently recommended teacher training in remedial education and stronger institutional support for remedial programmes.

Musongole and Chipindi (2021:90–100) similarly investigated factors affecting the effectiveness of remedial work policy in selected secondary schools in Kasempa District. Their study considered government and school policies, teacher preparedness, teachers' ability to prepare appropriate teaching and learning activities, and head teachers' support for remedial work. The study is particularly relevant to the present research because it demonstrates that the effectiveness of remediation depends not only on the willingness of teachers to provide additional assistance but also on policy, leadership, teacher preparedness and the availability of appropriate teaching approaches.

The literature therefore suggests that remediation should not be reduced to giving learners additional exercises or asking them to repeat lessons. Rather, it should be based on the identification of specific learning difficulties and should involve appropriate instructional responses. In this study, remediation is consequently understood as a deliberate process through which schools and teachers identify learning gaps and provide targeted assistance intended to enable learners to attain the required competencies.

5. Relationship Between Learner Support and Remediation

Learner support and remediation are closely related but are not synonymous. Learner support is broader and may be preventive, developmental or corrective, whereas remediation is specifically concerned with addressing identified learning difficulties or gaps.

Learner support can prevent learning difficulties from becoming severe. For example, continuous assessment and regular feedback may enable teachers to identify learners who are beginning to fall behind. Such learners can then receive additional explanation, differentiated activities, peer support or individual assistance before their difficulties become entrenched.

Remediation, on the other hand, represents a more targeted response after a learning need has been identified. The two concepts can therefore be represented as complementary processes:

Identification of learner needs → Learner support → Assessment and monitoring → Identification of learning gaps → Remediation → Monitoring of progress → Further support where necessary.

This relationship is particularly important within CBC because competency attainment is expected to be monitored continuously. Where assessment reveals that a learner has not

achieved a particular competency, the teacher needs to provide appropriate intervention rather than simply progressing to another topic.

6. Free Education and Learner Support

Free Education is fundamentally an access and equity intervention. Its removal or reduction of financial barriers enables learners from economically disadvantaged households to attend school. However, free access does not by itself guarantee equitable learning outcomes.

The Zambian government's expansion of free education has resulted in substantial increases in school participation. The Ministry of Education reported that national enrolment increased from 5,936,505 learners in 2023 to 6,527,980 in 2024 (Ministry of Education, 2024:2). The 2025 Education Statistics Bulletin subsequently reported 6,833,236 learners nationally in 2025, demonstrating continued expansion of participation (Ministry of Education, 2025:7).

The expansion of access creates both opportunities and pressures. On the positive side, Free Education enables learners who might previously have been excluded by financial barriers to enter and remain in school. On the other hand, rapid increases in enrolment can create pressure on classrooms, teachers, instructional materials and other school resources.

Sinkala, Kabaso, Kanyamuna, Simui and Muleya (2026:895–909) found in their systematic review of literature on Free Education in Zambia that free education has significantly expanded access but that increased financial support does not automatically translate into improved academic outcomes. They identified overcrowding, inadequate teaching resources, infrastructure limitations, teacher-related challenges and broader socio-economic factors as issues that can limit the educational benefits of increased financial support.

This observation is important for the present study because learner support requires resources and time. A teacher working with a manageable number of learners may be able to identify individual learning needs and provide targeted support more easily than a teacher working with a very large class. Thus, increased access through Free Education creates a corresponding need for schools to strengthen mechanisms for learner identification, support and remediation.

Free Education should therefore be understood not merely as the removal of school fees but as a policy that increases the responsibility of schools and the education system to ensure that newly enrolled learners are supported to learn successfully.

7. Free Education and Increased Diversity of Learner Needs

The expansion of access has the potential to increase diversity within the learner population. Learners may differ in prior educational experiences, preparedness, socio-economic circumstances, language background, learning pace and academic ability.

Such diversity creates implications for classroom practice. A uniform instructional approach may not adequately address the needs of all learners. Teachers may consequently need to differentiate learning activities, provide additional explanations, use peer-assisted learning, offer individual support and employ assessment information to identify learners requiring remediation.

The Education Act provides for the identification, assessment, placement and support of learners with special educational needs and requires the integration of such learners into mainstream education to the greatest extent possible (Republic of Zambia, 2011).

The principle underlying this provision extends beyond learners with formally identified special educational needs. A learner-centred system generally requires schools to recognise differences in learners' educational needs and respond appropriately. The expansion of Free Education therefore increases the importance of flexible learner-support mechanisms.

8. Competency-Based Curriculum and Learner Support

Competency-Based Curriculum places emphasis on what learners are able to know, understand, demonstrate and apply rather than on the mere accumulation of content. Mulenga and Kabombwe (2019) explain that the competency-based curriculum adopted in Zambia is intended to help learners acquire knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that can be applied effectively in society. They note that Zambia's curriculum review began in 2013 and that the competency-based approach was progressively implemented.

This orientation has significant implications for learner support. If the goal of learning is demonstrated competence, teachers need to monitor whether learners are actually developing the intended competencies. Learners who do not demonstrate a particular competence require additional support, explanation, practice and feedback.

Competency-based education therefore strengthens the rationale for formative assessment and remediation. Assessment becomes a means of determining what a learner

can and cannot yet do. This information can then guide subsequent teaching.

The transition towards competency-based teaching has nevertheless presented implementation challenges. Kabombwe and Mulenga (2019:19–41), in a study of History teachers in selected secondary schools in Lusaka District, found that 67% of the teachers studied did not adequately understand the competency-based or outcomes-based curriculum concepts. The researchers also reported that teachers were not using competency-based approaches to a large extent because of inadequate knowledge and skills, and recommended strengthened in-service training and continuous professional development.

This finding has direct relevance to learner support and remediation. If teachers do not fully understand CBC, they may experience difficulty identifying competencies, designing appropriate learning activities, assessing competency attainment and providing targeted remediation.

9. The 2023 Zambia Education Curriculum Framework and Learner Support

The current curriculum context also requires attention to the Zambia Education Curriculum Framework 2023. The 2023 framework replaced the 2013 framework following evaluation and curriculum review. Muzata (2025) notes that the 2023 framework was introduced to guide education in Zambia and examines its implications for special and inclusive education.

The transition from the 2013 framework to the 2023 framework does not eliminate the relevance of earlier literature on CBC. Rather, it provides an opportunity to examine how the continuing competency-oriented approach is interpreted and implemented under the revised curriculum framework.

For the present study, this distinction is important. The study does not assume that the CBC exists only as a document. It is concerned with how curriculum expectations are experienced at school level, particularly in relation to supporting learners who have difficulty attaining expected learning outcomes.

The curriculum framework therefore provides the policy context, while teachers and schools are responsible for translating curriculum expectations into classroom practice. The extent to which this translation occurs effectively may depend on teacher competence, resources, class size, assessment practices, school leadership and professional development.

10. CBC and Differentiated Learner Support

Competency-based teaching requires attention to individual learner progress. Learners may reach competencies at different rates and may require different forms of support.

Differentiated support may include varying learning activities, grouping learners according to identified needs, using peer support, providing additional practice, simplifying explanations, using concrete materials and giving individual feedback. Such strategies are consistent with the principle that learners should be supported according to their learning needs rather than treated as a homogeneous group.

The competency-based approach therefore has the potential to strengthen learner support because it encourages teachers to focus on demonstrated learning rather than simply completing the syllabus. However, the implementation of this principle depends on teachers' understanding of CBC and their ability to use assessment evidence to modify instruction.

Kabombwe and Mulenga's (2019:19–41) findings demonstrate the potential gap between curriculum expectations and classroom practice. Their study showed that inadequate teacher understanding and skills affected the extent to which competency-based approaches were implemented.

11. Assessment, Learner Support and Remediation

Assessment constitutes an important link between CBC, learner support and remediation. In a competency-based system, assessment should provide information about what learners have achieved and what they still need to learn.

Continuous assessment can help teachers identify learning difficulties at an early stage. Where assessment reveals inadequate performance, teachers can provide targeted intervention. Remediation can then be followed by further assessment to determine whether the learner has improved.

This creates a cycle of:

Assess → Identify → Support → Remediate → Reassess → Progress.

The effectiveness of this cycle depends on the quality and frequency of assessment, teachers' ability to interpret assessment information and the availability of time and resources to provide additional support.

Remedial work studies in Zambia suggest that these processes are not always effectively institutionalised. Kangwa (2022) found inadequate understanding of remedial education among

teachers and identified the absence of adequate policy guidance as one of the factors affecting effectiveness.

Consequently, the implementation of CBC cannot be separated from the school's capacity to assess learners continuously and respond to identified learning needs.

12. Challenges Affecting Learner Support and Remediation Large Class Sizes and Increased Enrolment

Large class sizes constitute a major potential challenge to effective learner support. When the number of learners increases without a corresponding increase in teachers and classrooms, teachers may have less time to attend to individual learning needs.

The expansion of Free Education has increased enrolment substantially. The Ministry of Education's statistics show continued growth in national enrolment, while the literature on Free Education identifies overcrowding as one of the challenges associated with rapid expansion. Sinkala et al. (2026:895–909) argue that increased enrolment can place pressure on classrooms, teachers and instructional resources.

In such circumstances, remediation may be difficult to organise because teachers must first complete ordinary classroom instruction for large numbers of learners before providing additional support.

Teacher Preparedness

Teacher preparedness is central to effective learner support and remediation. Teachers require knowledge of learner-centred pedagogies, assessment, differentiation and remedial approaches.

Kabombwe and Mulenga (2019:19–41) found inadequate understanding of competency-based approaches among a significant proportion of History teachers in their study. The authors recommended increased in-service training and continuous professional development.

Similarly, Musongole and Chipindi (2021:90–100) identified teacher preparedness and teachers' ability to prepare different teaching and learning activities as factors relevant to remedial work effectiveness.

These findings suggest that learner support cannot be separated from teacher capacity. Where teachers lack adequate knowledge and skills, the existence of a curriculum requirement or school policy may not necessarily result in effective classroom practice.

Inadequate Teaching and Learning Materials

Learner support and remediation frequently require additional materials. Teachers may need differentiated worksheets, textbooks, reference materials, practical resources and other learning aids.

The 2023 Education Statistics Bulletin reported a pupil-book ratio of approximately 13 learners per book at secondary level, illustrating continuing resource pressures (Ministry of Education, 2023).

Where learning materials are insufficient, teachers may find it difficult to provide individualised or small-group remedial activities. Learners may consequently depend heavily on teacher explanations and shared materials.

Limited Time for Remedial Activities

Remediation often requires additional instructional time. However, teachers already have responsibilities for completing the prescribed curriculum, assessment, administrative work and other school activities.

Where schools have large enrolments, additional remedial activities may be difficult to organise without extending the school day or using alternative arrangements. This creates a potential tension between curriculum coverage and targeted learner support.

Inadequate Understanding of Remediation

The effectiveness of remedial programmes depends on teachers understanding what remediation entails. Kangwa (2022) found that some teachers had inadequate knowledge and understanding of remedial education in the schools studied. The study recommended training teachers in the administration of remedial lessons.

This suggests that remediation should be treated as a professional instructional practice requiring specific knowledge rather than simply as additional teaching time.

Weak Policy and Institutional Guidance

Policy provides direction for educational practice. However, policy expectations may not automatically translate into school-level implementation.

Kangwa (2022) identified inadequate policy guidelines as one of the factors affecting the effectiveness of remedial education in Mongu District. Musongole and Chipindi (2021) similarly examined the relationship between policy and remedial work effectiveness in Kasempa District.

The implication is that schools require clear procedures for identifying learners requiring remediation, planning interventions, allocating time, documenting progress and evaluating outcomes.

Socio-Economic and Family Factors

Although Free Education reduces direct financial barriers to schooling, learners may continue to experience socio-economic difficulties that affect learning. Poverty, food insecurity, inadequate learning space at home and limited parental capacity to support schoolwork can affect learner participation and achievement.

Sinkala et al. (2026:904–906) identify poverty, food insecurity, child labour, digital exclusion, cultural factors and limited parental engagement among factors that can continue to affect learner participation and academic outcomes even under Free Education.

This demonstrates that removing school fees does not remove all barriers to learning. Learner support therefore needs to take account of the broader circumstances affecting learners.

Inadequate Monitoring of Learner Progress

Learner support becomes less effective when learner progress is not systematically monitored. Without continuous monitoring, schools may identify learning difficulties only after poor examination results.

CBC requires attention to demonstrated competencies, making regular assessment and monitoring particularly important. The absence of systematic monitoring may therefore weaken the connection between assessment, support and remediation.

13. Strategies for Strengthening Learner Support and Remediation

Early Identification of Learning Difficulties

One important strategy is the early identification of learners experiencing learning difficulties. Diagnostic and formative assessment can help teachers identify learning gaps before they become severe.

Early identification allows schools to provide support when the learning problem is still manageable. It also reduces the likelihood of learners progressing through grades with significant foundational gaps.

Differentiated Instruction

Differentiated instruction enables teachers to adjust learning activities according to learner needs. It can involve different

tasks, levels of difficulty, instructional materials, grouping arrangements and forms of assessment.

This strategy is particularly compatible with CBC because competency attainment rather than uniform exposure to content becomes the central concern.

Structured Remedial Programs

Schools can strengthen remediation by establishing structured programs rather than relying entirely on informal teacher initiatives. Such programs can include clear criteria for identifying learners, scheduled remedial periods, appropriate instructional activities, attendance records, progress monitoring and evaluation.

Kangwa (2022) recommended stronger teacher preparation and institutional support for remedial education.

Teacher Professional Development

Continuous professional development is essential for strengthening teachers' capacity to implement CBC and provide effective learner support.

Kabombwe and Mulenga (2019:19–41) recommended strengthened in-service training and continuous professional development to improve teachers' understanding and implementation of competency-based approaches.

Professional development should therefore address not only curriculum interpretation but also assessment, differentiated instruction, diagnosis of learning difficulties and remedial teaching.

Peer Tutoring and Cooperative Learning

Peer tutoring can provide additional opportunities for learners to receive assistance from classmates. Cooperative learning may also allow learners to explain concepts to one another and practise skills in smaller groups.

Such strategies can be particularly useful where teacher-to-learner ratios are high. However, peer support should be carefully structured and supervised to ensure that inaccurate information is not reinforced.

Parental and Community Involvement

Schools can strengthen learner support by involving parents and communities in identifying and responding to learners' needs.

Parental involvement can include monitoring attendance, supporting homework, communicating with teachers and

encouraging learners to participate in remedial activities. This is especially important where socio-economic conditions continue to affect learning despite Free Education.

Use of Available Technology

Technology can supplement learner support through digital learning materials, communication platforms, online exercises and teacher-learner communication.

Research on learner support in Zambia has shown that communication technologies can provide additional channels through which learners receive academic and social support. Simui et al. (2018:36–44) examined WhatsApp as a learner-support tool and argued that technology can help address communication and isolation challenges. Although their study concerned distance education, the principle can potentially be adapted to secondary schools where technological access permits.

School Leadership and Monitoring

School leadership plays an important role in establishing conditions for effective learner support. Head teachers and heads of department can monitor remedial programmes, support teachers, allocate time and resources and ensure that learner progress is reviewed.

Musongole and Chipindi (2021:90–100) included head teacher characteristics and support among factors affecting remedial work.

Effective school leadership can therefore transform learner support from an individual teacher initiative into an institutional practice.

14. Free Education, CBC and the Need for Integrated Learner Support

The literature indicates that Free Education and CBC should not be considered as separate developments. Free Education primarily expands access, while CBC establishes expectations concerning the nature and outcomes of learning. The interaction between the two creates a significant demand for effective learner support.

The expansion of access means that more learners enter public schools, potentially increasing diversity and pressure on school resources. At the same time, CBC requires learners to demonstrate competencies and requires teachers to monitor learning more closely.

This produces a central implementation challenge:

More learners + greater diversity of learning needs + competency-based expectations = greater demand for effective learner support and remediation.

If access expands without adequate support systems, some learners may attend school regularly without attaining the expected competencies. Consequently, the success of Free Education should be judged not only by enrolment and attendance but also by the capacity of schools to enable learners to learn successfully.

Sinkala et al. (2026:895–909) similarly conclude that increased financial support alone does not guarantee improved academic outcomes and that educational quality depends on how resources, teaching practices and contextual interventions are organised.

15. Empirical Review

Empirical studies conducted in Zambia provide useful evidence concerning learner support, remediation, curriculum implementation and educational expansion.

Jere, Manchishi and Mulenga (2021) investigated learner support services in selected public colleges of education in Zambia. The study found that learners and teacher educators were generally aware of learner support services, but many learners considered the implementation inadequate. The researchers emphasised the importance of identifying learner needs and providing appropriate support.

Although the study focused on distance teacher education, its findings demonstrate a broader principle: the existence of a learner-support policy or structure does not necessarily mean that learners receive adequate support. This is relevant to the present study because it raises the question of how learner support is actually experienced and implemented at secondary-school level.

Kabombwe and Mulenga (2019) investigated the implementation of competency-based teaching approaches among History teachers in selected secondary schools in Lusaka District. The study found substantial gaps in teachers' understanding and use of competency-based approaches. The researchers recommended professional development and in-service training.

The study is relevant because effective learner support under CBC depends partly on teachers understanding how the curriculum is designed and how competency attainment can be assessed and supported.

Kangwa (2022) examined the effectiveness of remedial education in selected junior secondary schools in Mongu District. The study found that remedial education was not very effective in the schools studied and identified inadequate teacher knowledge, insufficient policy guidance and negative learner and parental attitudes among the challenges.

This study is particularly close to the present research because it focuses directly on remediation in Zambian secondary education. However, it concentrated on Social Studies and on the effectiveness of remedial education in Mongu District. The present study differs by examining learner support and remediation more broadly and by situating these practices specifically within the combined context of Free Education and CBC in selected secondary schools in Chirundu District.

Musongole and Chipindi (2021) examined factors affecting remedial work policy in selected secondary schools in Kasempa District. Their study considered teacher preparedness, teaching and learning activities, policy and head teacher support. The study demonstrated that remedial work is influenced by multiple institutional and instructional factors rather than by teacher effort alone.

The relevance of this study to the present research lies in its identification of institutional and teacher-related factors. However, Kasempa District provides a different geographical and educational context, and the study did not specifically examine remediation within the combined context of the post-Free Education expansion and CBC.

Sinkala et al. (2026) reviewed literature on Free Education and academic outcomes in Zambia and found that increased access and financial support had not automatically produced corresponding improvements in academic performance. The review identified overcrowding, inadequate resources, teacher-related factors and socio-economic conditions as important considerations.

This study is particularly significant because it represents recent evidence concerning the consequences of Free Education. However, it focuses primarily on the relationship between financial support and academic outcomes in Copperbelt Province rather than on the specific school-level practices of learner support and remediation. It therefore leaves room for research examining how schools actually respond to increased learner numbers and diverse learning needs.

16. Synthesis of the Reviewed Literature

The literature reviewed demonstrates several important relationships.

First, learner support is broader than remediation. Learner support encompasses the range of academic, psychosocial, instructional and institutional interventions designed to enable learners to participate and succeed, whereas remediation is more specifically directed at addressing identified learning gaps.

Second, Free Education has substantially increased educational access in Zambia. However, increased access creates additional demands on teachers, classrooms, instructional materials and school management. The literature suggests that access without adequate learner-support mechanisms may not automatically result in improved learning outcomes.

Third, CBC strengthens the need for learner support because it emphasises the attainment and application of competencies. Teachers therefore need to assess learner progress continuously, identify gaps and provide appropriate interventions.

Fourth, empirical evidence from Zambia identifies teacher preparedness, inadequate resources, large enrolments, weak policy guidance, limited institutional support and socio-economic factors as challenges that can affect remediation and learner support.

Fifth, the literature identifies several possible strategies, including early identification of learning difficulties, differentiated instruction, structured remedial programmes, teacher professional development, peer support, parental involvement, technology and stronger school leadership.

However, the literature also indicates that these strategies cannot simply be transferred from one context to another. Their effectiveness depends on school conditions, teacher capacity, learner characteristics, available resources and institutional support.

17. Research Gap

The reviewed literature demonstrates that considerable research has been conducted on Free Education, CBC implementation, learner support and remedial education in Zambia. Nevertheless, several gaps remain.

First, much of the literature has examined these issues separately. Studies of Free Education have tended to focus on access, financing, enrolment and academic outcomes, while studies of CBC have frequently concentrated on curriculum

understanding and implementation. Studies of remediation have examined remedial programs in particular subjects or districts. There is comparatively less research that brings Free Education, CBC, learner support and remediation together within one school-level investigation.

Second, existing studies have been conducted in different geographical settings, including Lusaka, Mongu and Kasempa. Their findings cannot automatically be assumed to apply to Chirundu District because schools operate within different social, economic, geographical and institutional conditions.

Third, the rapid expansion of Free Education has changed the context in which secondary schools operate. Recent national statistics demonstrate continuing growth in enrolment, while recent literature identifies pressures associated with increased access. There is therefore a need for context-specific research examining how schools are responding to these pressures at the level of actual learner support and remediation.

Fourth, there is a need for research that gives attention not only to challenges but also to strategies being used by schools and teachers to address those challenges. Understanding existing strategies is important because schools may already be developing context-specific responses that are not adequately documented in the literature.

Finally, there is limited documented empirical evidence concerning how selected secondary schools in Chirundu District are providing learner support and remediation within the combined context of Free Education and CBC. The present study seeks to address this gap by examining the challenges experienced, the strategies employed and the possibilities for strengthening learner support and remediation in selected secondary schools in Chirundu District.

18. Chapter Summary

This chapter reviewed literature on learner support and remediation in relation to Free Education and the Competency-Based Curriculum. The review established that learner support is a broad process encompassing academic, instructional, psychosocial and institutional interventions, while remediation represents a more targeted response to identified learning difficulties.

The literature further demonstrated that Free Education has significantly expanded access to education in Zambia, but the resulting increase in enrolment has placed additional demands on schools and teachers. CBC, on the other hand, places emphasis on the attainment and application of competencies and therefore requires continuous assessment, learner-centred

teaching and appropriate intervention when learners experience difficulties.

The reviewed empirical studies identified several challenges affecting learner support and remediation, including large enrolments, inadequate resources, teacher preparedness, limited understanding of remediation and CBC, inadequate policy guidance, limited time and socio-economic barriers. Several strategies have also been identified, including early identification of learning difficulties, differentiated instruction, structured remedial programs, professional development, peer support, parental involvement, technology and school leadership.

Despite the existing literature, a gap remains concerning the integrated examination of learner support and remediation within the context of Free Education and CBC in selected secondary schools in Chirundu District. The present study therefore seeks to contribute context-specific empirical evidence on the challenges and strategies associated with supporting learners and providing remediation in this changing educational environment.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1. Introduction

This chapter presents the methodology that was used to investigate the challenges and strategies for learner support and remediation in the context of Free Education and the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) in selected secondary schools in Chirundu District. It describes the research approach and design, study site, target population, sample and sampling procedures, data collection instruments and procedures, ethical considerations, data analysis procedures, and measures taken to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings.

2. Research Approach

The study adopted a qualitative research approach. The qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study sought to obtain detailed descriptions of the experiences, perceptions, challenges and strategies relating to learner support and remediation under Free Education and the CBC. The approach enabled the researcher to obtain information directly from headteachers, teachers and learners concerning how learner support and remediation were experienced and implemented in the selected secondary schools.

The qualitative approach also allowed the researcher to explore the views of participants in their natural school contexts rather than relying solely on numerical measurements. This was important because the study focused on understanding the

practical realities surrounding learner support and remediation following the implementation of Free Education and the CBC.

3. Research Design

The study employed a qualitative descriptive research design. The design was appropriate because it enabled the researcher to describe and interpret the experiences and practices of participants concerning learner support and remediation in the selected secondary schools.

The study involved three selected secondary schools in Chirundu District. Data were collected from headteachers, teachers and learners at each of the three schools. The use of these three categories of respondents enabled the researcher to obtain information from different perspectives and to compare the experiences and views of school administrators, teachers and learners.

4. Study Site

The research was conducted in three selected secondary schools in Chirundu District of Zambia. The schools were selected because they provided an appropriate context for examining learner support and remediation within the implementation of Free Education and the Competency-Based Curriculum.

The three schools constituted the research sites for the study. At each school, the headteacher, ten teachers and five learners participated in the study. Consequently, the study involved three headteachers, thirty teacher respondents and fifteen learner respondents.

5. Target Population

The target population comprised headteachers, teachers and learners from the three selected secondary schools in Chirundu District. These categories of participants were considered relevant because each had direct experience with teaching, learning, learner support and remediation under the prevailing educational context.

The headteachers were included as key informants because they were responsible for the overall administration and supervision of teaching and learning activities at school level. Teachers were included because they were directly involved in classroom instruction, identification of learning difficulties, learner support and remediation. Learners were included because they were the direct beneficiaries of learner support and remediation interventions and were therefore able to provide information about their experiences of the support provided to them.

6. Sample Size

A total of 48 respondents participated in the study. The sample consisted of three headteachers, thirty teachers and fifteen learners.

Table 3.1 presents the distribution of respondents by category.

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by Category

Respondent Category	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Headteachers	3	6.25
Teachers	30	62.50
Learners	15	31.25
Total	48	100.00

The sample provided representation from the three selected schools and from the three major groups directly involved in the implementation and experience of learner support and remediation.

7. Sampling Procedure

Three secondary schools were selected for the study. At each selected school, the headteacher was included as a key informant. Ten teachers and five learners were also selected to participate in the study.

The selection of respondents was guided by their relevance to the research objectives. Headteachers were selected because of their administrative and supervisory responsibilities. Teachers were selected because of their direct involvement in classroom teaching, learner support and remediation. Learners were selected because they were the intended recipients of learner support and remediation services.

The final sample therefore comprised three headteachers, ten teachers from each school and five learners from each school.

8. Respondents and Demographic Characteristics

The study involved 48 respondents drawn from the three selected secondary schools. The respondents were grouped into three categories: headteachers, teacher respondents and learner respondents.

All respondents who participated in the study were aged 18 years and above. This was particularly relevant to the ethical procedures of the study because all participants were legally able to provide informed consent for their participation.

Table 2: Distribution of Respondents by School

School	Headteacher	Teachers	Learners	Total
School 1	1	10	5	16
School 2	1	10	5	16
School 3	1	10	5	16
Total	3	30	15	48

Table 3: Distribution of Respondents by Gender

Respondent Category	Male	Female	Total
Headteachers	3	0	3
Teachers	14	16	30
Learners	9	6	15
Total			

Table 4: Distribution of Teacher Respondents by Age Group

Age Group	Number of Teachers
18–29 years	0
30–39 years	17
40–49 years	11
50 years and above	2
Total	30

Table 5: Distribution of Learner Respondents by Age Group

Age Group	Number of Learners
18–20 years	15
21–25 years	0
26 years and above	0
Total	15

9. Data Collection Instruments

Three types of data collection instruments were used in the study: interview guides for headteachers, written questionnaires for teachers and written questionnaires for learners.

Headteachers' Interview Guide

An interview guide was used to collect data from the three headteachers. The headteachers served as key informants because of their positions and responsibilities in managing teaching and learning in their respective schools.

The interview guide contained questions relating to learner support and remediation, the implementation of Free Education and CBC, challenges encountered in supporting learners, and strategies used by schools to address identified learning needs. The interview format enabled the researcher to obtain detailed responses and to probe issues that required further clarification.

For purposes of confidentiality and presentation of the findings, the headteachers were coded as follows

Code	Respondent
HKII 1	Headteacher Key Informant Interview 1
HKII 2	Headteacher Key Informant Interview 2
HKII 3	Headteacher Key Informant Interview 3

The codes were used throughout the presentation and discussion of findings instead of the actual names of the headteachers.

Teachers' Questionnaire

A written questionnaire was administered to thirty teachers, with ten teachers drawn from each of the three selected schools. The questionnaire contained questions designed to obtain information about teachers' experiences and perceptions regarding learner support and remediation under Free Education and CBC.

The questionnaire addressed issues such as the identification of learners requiring additional support, forms of remediation provided, availability of resources, challenges encountered by teachers, and strategies used to support learners.

The teacher respondents were assigned codes from TR1 to TR30. The coding system was used to protect the identities of the respondents and to facilitate systematic presentation of their responses.

Code Range Respondents

TR1–TR10	Teachers from School 1
TR11–TR20	Teachers from School 2
TR21–TR30	Teachers from School 3

Learners' Questionnaire

A written questionnaire was administered to fifteen learner respondents, with five learners selected from each of the three participating schools. The questionnaire sought to obtain learners' experiences and perceptions concerning the support and remediation they received at school.

The questions focused on the availability and forms of learner support, teachers' assistance, remediation practices, challenges experienced in learning and the strategies that learners perceived as helpful in improving their learning.

The learner respondents were assigned codes PR1 to PR15, where PR represented Pupil Respondent.

Code Range Respondents

PR1–PR5	Learners from School 1
PR6–PR10	Learners from School 2
PR11–PR15	Learners from School 3

10. Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was conducted in the three selected secondary schools. Before data were collected, the researcher followed the required procedures for obtaining permission to conduct the study and sought the cooperation of the participating schools.

At each school, the headteacher participated as a key informant and was interviewed using the headteacher interview guide. Ten teachers were administered written questionnaires, while five learners were also administered their own written questionnaires.

The researcher explained the purpose of the study and the procedures involved to the participants before they participated. Participants were given an opportunity to seek clarification concerning the study and their participation. The completed questionnaires and interview responses constituted the primary data for the study.

11. Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were observed throughout the research process. Participation in the study was voluntary, and participants were informed about the purpose of the research and what their participation involved.

All participants were above 18 years of age and signed informed consent forms before participating in the study. Participants were informed that they had the right to participate voluntarily and that the information they provided would be used strictly for academic purposes.

Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by assigning codes to respondents instead of using their names. The headteachers were identified as HKII 1, HKII 2 and HKII 3; teachers were identified as TR1 to TR30; and learners were identified as PR1 to PR15. This coding system ensured that individual participants could not readily be identified from the presentation of the research findings.

The researcher also ensured that the information obtained from participants was treated confidentially and was not disclosed in a manner that could compromise the identity or privacy of the participants.

12. Data Analysis

The data obtained from the interviews and questionnaires were analysed qualitatively. Responses were organised according to

the research objectives and major themes emerging from the data.

Information obtained from the headteachers' interviews was examined to identify recurring views concerning the challenges and strategies associated with learner support and remediation. Responses from teachers and learners were similarly organised and examined according to the themes relevant to the research objectives.

The researcher compared responses across the three respondent categories in order to identify areas of convergence and divergence. Information from headteachers was compared with teachers' and learners' responses to provide a more comprehensive understanding of learner support and remediation in the selected schools.

The findings were subsequently presented thematically, supported by selected responses from participants using the respondent codes. This approach enabled the researcher to preserve participants' confidentiality while demonstrating how the findings were grounded in the data collected.

13. Trustworthiness of the Study

Measures were taken to enhance the trustworthiness of the findings. Data were obtained from three categories of respondents: headteachers, teachers and learners. The inclusion of these different groups facilitated triangulation of information and enabled the researcher to compare perspectives concerning learner support and remediation.

The use of three research sites also provided an opportunity to compare experiences across the selected schools. In addition, the use of interview guides and written questionnaires enabled the researcher to collect information systematically from the respective categories of respondents.

The researcher maintained consistency in the administration of the research instruments and in the recording and organisation of the responses. Respondent codes were used consistently throughout the research process to ensure systematic management and presentation of the data.

14. Chapter Summary

This chapter described the methodology that was employed in the study. The study adopted a qualitative research approach and a qualitative descriptive research design. The research was conducted in three selected secondary schools in Chirundu District. A total of 48 respondents participated in the study, comprising three headteachers, thirty teachers and fifteen learners.

Headteachers were interviewed using an interview guide, while teachers and learners completed written questionnaires. All participants were above 18 years of age and provided signed informed consent. Confidentiality was maintained through the use of respondent codes, namely HKII 1–HKII 3 for headteachers, TR1–TR30 for teachers and PR1–PR15 for learners. The chapter also outlined the procedures used for data collection, ethical considerations, data analysis and measures taken to enhance the trustworthiness of the findings.

IV. PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

1. Introduction

This chapter presents, analyses and interprets the findings of the study on Challenges and Strategies for Learner Support and Remediation in the Context of Free Education and the Competency-Based Curriculum in Selected Secondary Schools in Chirundu District. The findings are presented thematically and are organised around the three specific objectives of the study: to identify challenges schools face in providing learner support and remediation; to examine how Free Education and CBC affect the provision of learner support and remediation; and to determine strategies for addressing the identified challenges. These objectives are consistent with the research questions presented in Chapter One.

The presentation gives prominence to the voices of the participants. Headteachers are identified as HKII 1–HKII 3, teachers as TR1–TR30 and learners as PR1–PR15. The participants' responses are used to demonstrate areas of convergence and divergence among school administrators, teachers and learners. The findings are interpreted cautiously within the context of the three selected secondary schools.

2. Response Rate of Participants

The study obtained responses from all the participants who were targeted. The final sample consisted of three headteachers, 30 teachers and 15 learners, giving a total of 48 respondents.

Table 6: Response Rate of Participants

Respondent category	Targeted	Participated	Response rate
Headteachers	3	3	100%
Teachers	30	30	100%
Learners	15	15	100%
Total	48	48	100%

Source: Field data, 2026.

The 100% response rate meant that the perspectives of all three respondent categories were represented. This was particularly useful because the study sought to understand learner support and remediation from institutional, classroom and learner perspectives. The findings below therefore draw upon the three sources rather than relying exclusively on teachers' or school administrators' accounts.

3. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The study involved 3 headteachers, 30 teachers and 15 learners. The learner respondents were all within the 18–20-year age category, while the teacher questionnaire collected information on gender, age, qualification, teaching experience and subjects taught.

Headteachers

The three headteachers participated as key informants and were identified as HKII 1, HKII 2 and HKII 3. Their responses provided school-level perspectives on planning, supervision, resources, identification of learners with difficulties and remedial interventions.

- The headteachers' accounts indicate that learner support was recognised as an important responsibility at school level. HKII 1 reported that teachers were supervised weekly, while HKII
- described the use of assessment, review of learner progress and extra-lesson arrangements. HKII
- described a more targeted intervention in which learners experiencing literacy difficulties were identified and assigned to teachers who could provide specialised assistance.

Teachers

The 30 teacher respondents were drawn equally from the three schools, with ten teachers from each school. Their questionnaire collected information on gender, age, qualification, teaching experience and subject taught.

The teachers represented different teaching subjects and levels of experience. This was important because the challenges reported were not confined to one subject. Teachers involved in practical subjects particularly highlighted shortages of equipment, while teachers across subjects reported challenges associated with class size, teaching materials, workload and time.

Learners

The study included 15 learner respondents, five from each participating school. All learner respondents were aged 18–20 years.

The learners' responses provided direct evidence of how support and remediation were experienced. Their accounts were particularly valuable in identifying practical classroom effects of large classes, noise, shortages of learning materials and the availability of additional assistance.

4. Findings on Challenges in Providing Learner Support and Remediation

The first objective sought to identify the challenges schools faced in providing learner support and remediation in the context of Free Education and CBC. Five major themes emerged from the participants' responses: large classes and overcrowding; inadequate teaching and learning materials; shortages of practical and ICT resources; teacher workload and limited instructional time; and inadequate teacher preparation and support.

Large Classes and Overcrowding

Large classes and overcrowding emerged as one of the strongest challenges.

HKII 2 directly associated overcrowding with Free Education and explained that increased enrolment resulted in “less individual attention.” The respondent further indicated that large numbers made it difficult for teachers to identify individual learning difficulties and provide frequent remediation.

Teachers' responses supported this observation. TR17 identified “overcrowded classrooms” together with inadequate teaching and learning materials and lack of training as major challenges. Another teacher similarly identified overcrowding, lack of teaching materials and heavy workload.

The learners provided perhaps the clearest evidence of the classroom consequences. PR7 stated that other learners “make noise and they disturb the learners who are serious about learning.” PR8 reported that the challenge was “not understanding when people are making noise” and explained that “a huge class makes a lot of noise.”

These responses demonstrate that overcrowding affected more than physical space. It affected concentration, classroom interaction and the teacher's ability to give individual attention.

Inadequate Teaching and Learning Materials

A second major challenge was inadequate teaching and learning materials.

Teachers repeatedly identified shortages of textbooks and other instructional resources. One teacher recommended the

provision of adequate textbooks and properly equipped laboratories to support CBC activities. Another identified lack of teaching materials as one of the central challenges facing the school.

The learners also experienced the shortage directly. PR7 reported that teachers sometimes provided textbooks and used examples to support understanding, but recommended that the school provide additional classrooms and a library.

The finding suggests that teachers attempted to compensate for resource shortages through improvisation and explanation, but these measures could not fully substitute for adequate school resources.

Shortage of Practical and ICT Resources

The shortage of practical equipment was particularly evident among learners taking practical subjects.

Learners reported difficulties in Food and Nutrition and Science because instruments and laboratory facilities were inadequate. Other learners identified computers as a resource that needed to be improved.

This finding is important because CBC requires learners to demonstrate knowledge and practical competencies rather than simply recall content. The lack of practical equipment therefore limits opportunities for learners to practice and demonstrate the competencies expected by the curriculum.

Teacher Workload and Limited Instructional Time

Teacher workload also emerged as a significant challenge. Large enrolments increased the number of learners requiring attention, while teachers continued to be responsible for curriculum coverage, assessment and other school duties.

The headteachers' responses reflected this pressure. The available evidence showed that large classes made supervision and frequent follow-up more difficult. In addition, the practice of teachers providing additional assistance during their free time demonstrated that ordinary instructional time was often insufficient for learners requiring additional support.

The issue was therefore not simply a shortage of time in the abstract. It was a competition between curriculum coverage, assessment, administrative responsibilities and targeted remediation.

Inadequate Teacher Preparation and Professional Support
Teacher preparedness was another important concern. Some teachers identified lack of training as a challenge and called for refresher training and continuous professional development.

TR26, for example, identified lack of teaching materials, overcrowded classrooms and lack of training as challenges. The same respondent recommended provision of teaching and learning materials, refresher training, support for teachers to upgrade their qualifications and improved supervision.

This finding is consistent with Kabombwe and Mulenga (2019), whose study found inadequate understanding of competency-based approaches among a substantial proportion of teachers and recommended strengthened in-service training and continuous professional development.

4. Findings on the Effects of Free Education and CBC on Learner Support and Remediation

The second objective examined how Free Education and CBC affected the provision of learner support and remediation.

The findings revealed a dual effect. Free Education expanded access and enabled learners from financially disadvantaged households to attend school, but increased enrolment placed additional pressure on classrooms, teachers and learning resources. CBC increased the need for continuous assessment, individual attention and competency-oriented intervention.

Increased Access to Education

Learners expressed strong appreciation for Free Education.

PR7 explained: "Free education helps those whose parents cannot manage to take their children to school."

The same respondent explained that the policy had helped learners whose parents could not afford school fees. This positive perception was also reflected in other learner responses. Free Education was viewed as reducing financial barriers and enabling more learners to remain in school. The finding therefore indicates that Free Education has had an important access-related benefit. However, increased access also produced consequences for the capacity of schools to provide individualised support.

Increased Enrolment and Pressure on Schools

Learners consistently reported that the number of learners in their classes had increased since Free Education was introduced. PR7 and PR8 both answered "Yes" when asked whether class numbers had increased.

The headteachers' accounts confirmed the same trend. The increased number of learners created difficulties in providing individual attention and maintaining adequate learning conditions. The finding is consistent with the national context discussed in Chapter Two, where increased access is associated with additional demands on classrooms, teachers and instructional resources.

Effect on Individual Learner Attention

The increase in enrolment affected the ability of teachers to provide individualised support.

This was particularly visible in the learners' descriptions of noise and difficulty concentrating. PR8's statement that a huge class "makes a lot of noise" illustrates how increased numbers can interfere with learning even where the teacher is willing to provide support.

The implication is that Free Education has increased the number of learners who need support while simultaneously making it more difficult for teachers to attend to each learner individually.

Effect on Remedial Teaching

Despite the challenges, the study found that remedial and extra lessons continued to be provided.

PR7 indicated that teachers provided extra help when learners did not understand lessons and that the learner had attended remedial or extra lessons. PR8 gave a similar response, reporting that teachers provided extra help and that the learner had attended remedial or extra lessons. The learner explained that teachers provided support by "explaining clearly to us in their free time."

These responses demonstrate that increased enrolment did not eliminate remedial support. Instead, teachers often attempted to compensate through additional teaching time.

Effect on CBC Practical Learning

The findings suggest that the implementation of CBC was affected by shortages of practical resources.

Learners reported difficulties in practical subjects where equipment was unavailable. This created a gap between the competency-oriented expectations of CBC and the material conditions in which teachers were expected to implement it.

The finding is consistent with the literature's argument that competency-based learning requires teachers to monitor learner progress and provide additional support where competencies

have not been attained. Kabombwe and Mulenga (2019) found that teacher knowledge and skills were important to effective implementation of competency-based approaches.

6. Findings on Existing Learner Support and Remediation Practices

Although the study identified significant challenges, participants also described several practices already being used to support learners.

Identification of Learners with Learning Difficulties

The headteachers indicated that schools attempted to identify learners experiencing learning difficulties.

HKII 3 described a particularly targeted approach involving the identification and grouping of learners with literacy difficulties and assigning them to teachers who could provide additional assistance. In more serious cases, individual support was provided.

This demonstrates that remediation was not understood merely as repeating classroom teaching. At least in some cases, it involved identifying particular learning needs and directing additional assistance towards affected learners.

Extra and Remedial Lessons

Extra lessons were one of the most frequently reported forms of learner support.

Learners indicated that teachers provided additional explanations and lessons during their free time. PR8 reported that teachers explained clearly during their free time.

This practice was important because it allowed learners who had not understood the initial lesson to receive further explanation.

However, the findings also suggest that extra teaching often depended on teacher commitment. This raises an important issue of sustainability: remedial support is more sustainable when it is incorporated into school programmes and supported with adequate staffing and time.

Continuous Assessment and Monitoring

The headteachers reported the use of assessment to identify learner difficulties and monitor progress.

This practice corresponds with the requirements of CBC, where assessment is intended to provide evidence of what learners can and cannot yet demonstrate. Such evidence can then guide additional instruction.

The finding is also consistent with the literature reviewed in Chapter Two, which identifies assessment as an important link between CBC, learner support and remediation.

Peer and Group Support

Peer support was another strategy identified by the school leadership. Stronger learners could assist those experiencing difficulties.

Such an approach can be particularly useful in large classes because it increases opportunities for learners to receive assistance. However, it requires appropriate teacher guidance so that peer support reinforces rather than reproduces misunderstandings.

Simplified Explanations and Examples

Learners reported that teachers often responded to difficulties by explaining concepts again and using examples.

PR7 stated that teachers provided textbooks and “good ideas and examples.”

This finding indicates that teachers were adapting their explanations to learner needs, even where material resources were limited.

7. Findings on Strategies Suggested by Participants

The third objective sought to determine strategies that could address learner-support and remediation challenges. Participants proposed several practical interventions.

Increasing the Number of Teachers

Teachers recommended employing more teachers to reduce the pressure associated with large classes. Particular attention was given to subjects such as Mathematics and Science.

The strategy responds directly to the problem identified under Objective One: where too few teachers serve large numbers of learners, individual attention and remediation become difficult.

Constructing More Classrooms

Learners strongly supported the construction of additional classrooms.

PR7 recommended that the school should “provide classes and a library.” PR8 simply recommended “Making more classes.”

The consistency of these learner responses indicates that classroom space was perceived as a direct condition affecting learning.

Providing Textbooks and Learning Materials

Teachers and learners called for adequate textbooks and other learning materials.

This strategy is particularly important for remediation because learners who experience difficulties may require additional reading, practice and reference materials outside the teacher's direct explanation.

Providing Practical and ICT Resources

Learners recommended laboratories, practical equipment and computers.

This was especially important for practical subjects and Computer Studies. The recommendation directly responds to the identified gap between CBC's competency expectations and the resources available for practical learning.

Continuous Professional Development Teachers recommended refresher training and CPD.

TR26 specifically recommended refresher training so that teachers could “teach and offer remediation effectively.”

This finding reinforces the importance of teacher capacity in implementing CBC and remediation. It also agrees with Kabombwe and Mulenga (2019), who recommended in-service training and continuous professional development.

Strengthening Supervision and Monitoring Improved supervision was another recommendation.

TR26 proposed “improve on supervision and teacher monitoring by the deputy and the headteacher.”

The recommendation suggests that supervision should not merely check whether teaching has occurred. It should also monitor whether learners experiencing difficulties are being identified and supported.

Structured Remedial Programme

The findings point to the need for remedial activities to be incorporated into school planning and timetables.

Although teachers already provided additional assistance, much of this support appeared to depend on their availability and willingness to use free time. A structured programme would provide greater consistency and reduce dependence on individual teacher sacrifice.

Improved Funding and Resource Allocation

Participants' recommendations also pointed to the need for adequate funding. Increased enrolment requires corresponding investment in classrooms, teachers, textbooks, ICT facilities and practical equipment.

The findings therefore suggest that improving learner support cannot be achieved entirely through teacher-level strategies.

Some challenges require institutional and policy-level responses.

8. Convergence and Divergence of Participants' Views

One of the strengths of the findings is the considerable convergence among the three respondent groups.

Table 7: Convergence of Major Findings Across Respondent Categories

Theme	Headteachers	Teachers	Learners
Increased enrolment	Reported pressure from increased numbers	Reported large classes	Reported increased class numbers
Overcrowding	Reduced individual attention	Overcrowded classrooms	Noise and difficulty concentrating
Learning materials	Inadequate resources	Shortage of textbooks/materials	Need for books and library
Practical resources	Resource constraints	Need for practical materials	Lack of instruments/laboratory facilities
Teacher workload	Increased pressure on teachers	Heavy workload	Need for additional teacher assistance
Remediation	Identification, assessment and extra lessons	Additional support and teaching	Extra lessons and explanations
Teacher development	Need for support	Need for refresher training/CPD	Indirectly affected through teaching quality
Infrastructure	Need for additional capacity	More classrooms needed	More classrooms requested
ICT	Resource limitations	Need for instructional resources	Computers requested

Source: Field data, 2026.

The strongest convergence concerned overcrowding and inadequate resources. Headteachers described institutional pressure, teachers described classroom and workload difficulties, while learners described the immediate consequences through noise, reduced concentration and difficulty receiving individual attention.

There were nevertheless differences in emphasis. Headteachers tended to emphasise planning, supervision, assessment and institutional constraints. Teachers focused more strongly on workload, resources and professional preparation. Learners concentrated on their immediate classroom experiences, particularly noise, explanations, textbooks, practical equipment and additional lessons.

These differences are not necessarily contradictions. Rather, they show how the same educational conditions were experienced differently according to the participants' positions within the school.

9. Chapter Summary

This chapter presented and interpreted findings from 48 respondents in three selected secondary schools in Chirundu District. The findings were organised according to the three objectives of the study and were grounded primarily in the voices of headteachers, teachers and learners.

The first objective revealed that overcrowding, inadequate teaching and learning materials, shortages of practical and ICT resources, teacher workload, limited instructional time and inadequate teacher preparation were major challenges affecting learner support and remediation.

The second objective showed that Free Education had a significant positive effect by expanding access to education, particularly for learners whose families could not afford school fees. At the same time, increased enrolment placed additional pressure on classrooms, teachers and learning resources. The learners' accounts showed that this pressure could result in noise, reduced concentration and difficulty receiving individual attention. CBC further increased the need for continuous assessment, differentiated assistance and practical learning.

The third objective showed that schools were already employing several strategies, including identification of learners with difficulties, extra lessons, additional explanations, assessment, peer support and teacher improvisation. However, participants considered these efforts insufficient without wider institutional support.

The strategies proposed by participants included employing more teachers, constructing additional classrooms, providing textbooks and other learning materials, improving practical and ICT facilities, strengthening teacher CPD, improving supervision, formalising remedial programmes and providing adequate funding.

Overall, the findings show a consistent relationship between the expansion of access through Free Education and the growing demand for learner support under CBC. The central empirical finding is that schools and teachers are making substantial efforts to support learners, but the effectiveness

and sustainability of those efforts are constrained by overcrowding, inadequate resources, workload, limited time and insufficient professional support.

V. DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings of the study on Challenges and Strategies for Learner

Support and Remediation in the Context of Free Education and the Competency-Based Curriculum in Selected Secondary Schools in Chirundu District. The discussion is guided by the three specific objectives of the study: to identify the challenges schools face in providing learner support and remediation; to examine how the implementation of Free Education and the Competency-Based Curriculum affects the provision of learner support and remediation; and to determine strategies for addressing the identified challenges. These objectives were

developed from the central problem that, although Free Education has expanded access to secondary education, schools may experience difficulty providing effective individualised support and remediation within increasingly demanding CBC environments.

The discussion draws together the findings presented in Chapter Four, the literature reviewed in Chapter Two and the Constructivist Learning Theory underpinning the study. The chapter also considers the implications of the findings for educational policy, district administration, school leadership, teachers and learner-support practices. Conclusions are then drawn directly from the findings, followed by recommendations, the contribution of the study and suggestions for further research.

2. Discussion of the Findings

Learner Support and Remediation Challenges under CBC

The first objective sought to identify the challenges schools face in providing learner support and remediation in the context of Free Education and CBC. The study established that the major challenges were overcrowded classrooms, inadequate teaching and learning materials, inadequate practical and ICT resources, teacher workload, limited instructional time, inadequate classroom facilities and gaps in teacher preparedness and professional support.

Overcrowding as the Central Challenge

The most striking finding was the effect of increased enrolment on the capacity of schools to provide individualised learner support. HKII 2 explained that overcrowding resulting from Free Education had created “less individual attention.” This was strongly supported by learners. PR8 reported difficulty understanding when other learners were making noise and explained that “a huge class makes a lot of noise.” Other learners similarly associated large classes with distraction and difficulty concentrating.

The significance of this finding extends beyond classroom management. Learner support under CBC depends on teachers being able to observe individual learners, identify weaknesses, provide feedback and adjust instruction. Where a teacher is responsible for a very large number of learners, the possibility of identifying and responding to every learning difficulty is reduced.

This finding is consistent with the literature reviewed in Chapter Two. The study established that Free Education resulted in substantial growth in enrolment, while Sinkala et al. (2026:895–909) observed that increased financial support and access do not automatically result in improved educational

outcomes where overcrowding, inadequate resources and teacher-related challenges persist.

The present study therefore demonstrates this national problem at school level. The issue is not that Free Education has failed to achieve its access objective. Rather, the success of access has generated a second challenge: how to provide quality and individualised learning support to the larger population that has entered the education system.

Inadequate Teaching and Learning Materials

The study further established that inadequate teaching and learning materials constrained learner support and remediation. Teachers identified shortages of textbooks and other instructional materials, while learners reported the need for books, libraries and additional learning resources.

This finding has direct implications for remediation. A learner experiencing difficulty may require additional exercises, reference materials, examples or differentiated resources. Where materials are scarce, the teacher becomes the principal source of information, placing even greater pressure on teacher time.

The finding corresponds with the Ministry of Education's reported pupil-book pressures at secondary level and the literature's observation that inadequate resources make individualised and small-group remedial activities difficult to organise.

Thus, resource provision should not be regarded simply as a general school-improvement issue. In the context of this study, adequate learning materials are part of the infrastructure of remediation itself.

Shortages of Practical and ICT Resources

The findings from learners were particularly revealing concerning practical subjects. Learners reported inadequate instruments and laboratory facilities for Science and Food and Nutrition, as well as shortages of computers.

This challenge is especially significant under CBC because competency-based education requires learners to demonstrate what they can do, rather than merely reproduce information. Where practical equipment is unavailable, opportunities to practise and demonstrate competencies are restricted.

The finding therefore exposes a potential gap between curriculum expectation and material reality. The curriculum can require practical, learner-centred and competency-oriented learning, but these expectations cannot be fully realised where

the basic resources necessary for practical learning are unavailable.

Teacher Workload and Limited Time

The study also found that teacher workload constrained remediation. Teachers were required to cover the curriculum, assess learners, perform administrative responsibilities and provide additional assistance to learners experiencing difficulties.

This finding is important because remediation requires time. The literature reviewed in Chapter Two similarly established that teachers already have responsibilities for curriculum coverage, assessment and other school activities, making additional remedial work difficult where enrolment is high.

The participants' responses nevertheless revealed considerable teacher commitment. Learners reported that teachers often provided extra explanations and lessons during their free time. This demonstrates professional dedication, but it should not become the principal mechanism through which a systemic problem is addressed.

Teacher sacrifice is commendable; teacher overextension is not a sustainable education policy.

Teacher Preparedness and Professional Development

The findings further indicated that some teachers experienced inadequate training in CBC and learner-support approaches. Teachers recommended refresher training and continuous professional development.

This finding is consistent with Kabombwe and Mulenga (2019:19-41), who found inadequate understanding of competency-based approaches among a significant proportion of teachers and recommended increased in-service training and continuous professional development.

Kangwa (2022) similarly found inadequate understanding of remedial education among some teachers and recommended training in the administration of remedial lessons.

The implication is significant: remediation is not simply extra teaching time. It is a specialised instructional response requiring diagnosis, appropriate intervention, monitoring and evaluation. Consequently, teachers require more than general knowledge of CBC; they need practical competence in identifying learning gaps and responding to them.

Effects of Increased Enrolment on Learner Support and Remediation

The second objective examined how Free Education and CBC affect the provision of learner support and remediation.

The study produced an important dual finding. Free Education has expanded access, but expanded access has simultaneously increased the demand for learner support.

Free Education as an Achievement in Access and Equity

Learners generally viewed Free Education positively. They indicated that it had enabled children from families unable to afford school fees to attend school.

This finding confirms the access and equity rationale underlying Free Education. The literature reviewed in Chapter Two shows that national enrolment increased from 5,936,505 learners in 2023 to 6,527,980 in 2024 and 6,833,236 in 2025.

The study therefore does not question the importance of Free Education. On the contrary, the findings demonstrate its value to families and learners who might otherwise have been excluded from secondary education.

The more important question arising from the findings is:

What must accompany free access if increased participation is also to produce successful learning? The answer emerging from this study is capacity for learner support.

The Access–Capacity Gap

The most significant interpretation emerging from the study is what may be termed the access–capacity gap.

Free Education increases the number of learners entering school. CBC simultaneously increases the expectation that those learners should receive learner-centred teaching, continuous assessment, differentiated assistance and remediation. Consequently, the number of learners requiring support increases at the same time that the curriculum demands more individualised attention.

The relationship can therefore be expressed as:

Free Education → increased access → increased enrolment → greater diversity of learning needs
→ greater demand for learner support → pressure on teachers and resources.

This interpretation is consistent with the conceptual position developed in Chapter Two that Free Education and CBC cannot be treated as completely separate developments. Free Education expands participation, while CBC increases the demand for responsive and competency-oriented teaching.

The study's distinctive contribution is to show how these two developments interact at school level.

Increased Enrolment and Individual Attention

The findings indicate that increased enrolment reduced opportunities for individual attention.

This was expressed most directly by HKII 2 and reinforced by learner responses concerning noise and difficulty understanding lessons in large classes. The result is important because learner support is fundamentally concerned with responding to differences among learners.

Jere, Manchishi and Mulenga (2021:28) argue that effective learner support begins with identifying learners' educational and learning needs. Where large classes make such identification difficult, the quality of learner support may be weakened.

Increased Enrolment and Remediation

Despite the pressures, remediation did not disappear. Teachers continued to provide extra lessons, explanations and assistance. Headteachers reported assessment and monitoring practices, while some schools identified learners with specific literacy difficulties and provided targeted support.

This suggests that the schools were adapting rather than abandoning learner support.

However, the sustainability of this adaptation remains a concern. If remediation depends heavily on teachers using their personal free time, the system may be vulnerable to teacher fatigue, timetable pressures and increasing enrolment.

CBC as Both a Demand and an Opportunity

The findings suggest that CBC creates additional demands but also provides an important framework for strengthening learner support.

Its emphasis on continuous assessment, learner participation and demonstrated competencies creates opportunities for teachers to identify learners who are falling behind and respond accordingly.

However, the literature shows that curriculum expectations do not automatically translate into classroom practice. Kabombwe and Mulenga (2019:19–41) found that inadequate teacher understanding and skills affected implementation of competency-based approaches.

Thus, CBC can strengthen remediation in principle, but only when the system provides teachers with the competence, time, resources and manageable class sizes required to implement it.

Strategies for Improving Learner Support and Remediation

The third objective sought to determine strategies for addressing the challenges identified. The findings point to the need for a multi-level response rather than a single intervention.

Increasing Teacher Numbers

The recruitment and deployment of additional teachers emerged as an important strategy.

More teachers would reduce pressure on existing staff and create greater opportunities for individualised instruction, assessment and remediation. The need is especially important in subjects such as Mathematics and Science, where participants reported particular challenges.

This recommendation is supported by the literature reviewed in Chapter Two, which identifies recruitment and deployment of adequate teachers as an important strategy for learner support.

Expanding Classroom Infrastructure

Participants called for additional classrooms. Learners themselves repeatedly identified classroom construction as an important solution.

This recommendation addresses the root of the overcrowding problem rather than merely attempting to manage its consequences. Better classroom capacity would improve learner concentration, classroom management and opportunities for teacher-learner interaction.

Strengthening Teaching and Learning Resources

Participants called for textbooks, ICT resources, practical equipment, laboratories and other learning materials.

This should be understood as a learner-support intervention, not merely a procurement exercise. Resources enable learners to practise, review and consolidate learning, while they also allow teachers to differentiate instruction.

Strengthening Teacher CPD

Continuous professional development should focus specifically on:

CBC implementation;

- formative and continuous assessment;
- identification of learning gaps;
- differentiated instruction;
- remedial teaching;
- learner-centred methods;
- management of large classes; and
- appropriate use of locally available and ICT resources.

This is consistent with the findings of Kabombwe and Mulenga (2019) and Kangwa (2022), who both identify teacher capacity as central to effective competency-based and remedial teaching.

Formalising Remedial Programmes

The study indicates a need to move from informal teacher sacrifice to structured institutional remediation.

Schools should have clear procedures for:

- identifying learners experiencing difficulties;
- diagnosing the specific learning gap;
- grouping or referring learners where appropriate;
- allocating remedial time;
- selecting appropriate interventions;
- monitoring progress; and
- determining whether further intervention is necessary.

This approach is consistent with the conceptual relationship established in Chapter Two:

Identification → support → assessment → identification of learning gaps → remediation → monitoring → further support.

Strengthening School Leadership

The findings show that school leadership matters. Headteachers reported supervision, assessment and planning, while teachers recommended improved monitoring and feedback.

Musongole and Chipindi (2021:90–100) found that headteacher support, teacher preparedness, policy and appropriate teaching activities influenced remedial-work effectiveness.

Consequently, school leadership should transform learner support from an activity dependent on individual teachers into a whole-school responsibility.

Parent and Community Participation

Some teacher responses identified low parental and community involvement as a challenge. The literature also indicates that parental engagement can contribute to learner support through monitoring attendance, supporting homework and communicating with teachers.

Free Education removes school fees, but it does not remove all social and economic barriers affecting learning. Consequently, schools should strengthen communication with parents and communities about how learners can be supported beyond the classroom.

2. Discussion of Findings in Relation to the Theoretical Framework

The study was guided by Constructivist Learning Theory. The theory is particularly relevant because it views learning as an active process in which learners construct understanding through interaction, experience and engagement rather than merely receiving information.

The findings provide substantial support for this perspective.

First, learners reported that teachers helped them through additional explanations, examples, group activities and extra lessons. These practices create opportunities for learners to engage actively with content rather than merely memorising information.

Second, the use of peer support reported by school leadership is consistent with constructivist assumptions concerning social interaction. Learners can learn through collaboration with others, particularly when teachers structure and guide the interaction.

Third, CBC itself is compatible with constructivist principles because it emphasises competencies, learner participation and application of knowledge. The literature reviewed in the thesis similarly identifies learner-centred and differentiated approaches as important to CBC.

However, the findings also expose an important limitation: constructivist pedagogy requires conditions that permit meaningful interaction. An overcrowded classroom with inadequate materials and insufficient teacher time can make individual participation, feedback and differentiated support difficult.

The findings therefore suggest that the effectiveness of a learner-centred curriculum cannot be separated from the conditions under which it is implemented.

In this respect, the study extends the practical application of Constructivist Learning Theory by showing that learner-centred pedagogy requires not only an appropriate teaching philosophy but also adequate structural capacity.

3. Discussion of Findings in Relation to Previous Studies

The findings of this study generally agree with previous research while providing a more specific picture of the situation in selected secondary schools in Chirundu District.

Kabombwe and Mulenga (2019) found inadequate understanding of competency-based approaches among teachers and recommended increased professional development. The present study similarly found that some teachers identified inadequate training as a challenge and called for refresher training and CPD. The convergence suggests that teacher preparedness remains an important issue in CBC implementation.

Musongole and Chipindi (2021) found that remedial effectiveness was influenced by teacher preparedness, headteacher support, policy and teachers' ability to prepare appropriate learning activities. The present study confirms the importance of these factors. However, it adds a further dimension: rapidly increasing enrolment makes it more difficult to translate teacher preparedness and leadership support into sustained individualised remediation.

Kangwa (2022) identified inadequate understanding of remedial education and recommended training teachers in remedial practices. The present study similarly suggests that remediation should be treated as a professional intervention rather than simply as additional teaching time.

Jere, Manchishi and Mulenga (2021) found that awareness of learner-support services did not necessarily mean that learners experienced those services adequately. This distinction is highly relevant to the present study. The schools had support practices, but participants also described significant barriers to their effectiveness.

The findings also correspond with Sinkala et al. (2026), who concluded that Free Education has significantly expanded access but that financial support alone does not guarantee improved academic outcomes.

The present study adds a school-level explanation to this observation: expanded access must be matched by expanded capacity for support.

4. Conclusions of the Study

The conclusions are drawn directly from the three objectives and the evidence presented by headteachers, teachers and learners.

Conclusion on Learner Support and Remediation Challenges

The study concludes that learner support and remediation are being provided in the selected secondary schools, but their effectiveness is constrained by structural and instructional challenges.

The most significant challenge is overcrowding associated with increased enrolment, which reduces individual attention and creates classroom-management difficulties. This challenge is compounded by inadequate teaching and learning materials, insufficient practical and ICT resources, inadequate classroom space, teacher workload, limited instructional time and gaps in teacher preparation.

The study therefore concludes that the major problem is not a complete absence of learner support. Rather, it is the limited capacity to provide consistent, targeted and adequately resourced support to a growing and increasingly diverse learner population.

Conclusion on the Effects of Free Education and CBC

The study concludes that Free Education has achieved an important social and educational objective by widening access to secondary education and enabling learners from financially disadvantaged backgrounds to attend school.

However, expanded access has increased enrolment and consequently increased pressure on teachers, classrooms and learning resources. The policy has therefore created a situation in which more learners have gained entry into education, but schools have not always acquired sufficient additional capacity to meet their diverse learning needs.

CBC intensifies this challenge because it requires continuous assessment, learner participation, competency development and appropriate intervention when learners experience difficulties.

The combined effect is therefore not that Free Education and CBC are inherently problematic. Rather, their successful implementation depends on the capacity of schools to connect access with effective support.

Conclusion on Strategies for Improvement

The study concludes that no single strategy can resolve the learner-support and remediation challenges identified.

An effective response requires simultaneous attention to:

- teacher recruitment and deployment;
- classroom infrastructure;
- textbooks and learning materials;
- practical and ICT resources;
- teacher CPD;
- structured remedial programmes;
- continuous assessment;
- school leadership and supervision; and
- parent and community involvement.

Most importantly, remediation should be institutionalised as a planned school process, rather than depending mainly on individual teachers sacrificing their personal time.

Recommendations

The recommendations below are deliberately linked to the findings and assigned to the stakeholders best positioned to implement them.

Recommendations to the Ministry of Education The Ministry of Education should:

Match expansion of enrolment with expansion of school capacity.

Free Education should be accompanied by corresponding investment in teachers, classrooms, textbooks, laboratories, ICT facilities and other learning resources.

Strengthen funding for learner support and remediation.

Funding mechanisms should recognise that schools with large enrolments require additional resources to identify, support and remediate learners experiencing difficulties.

Strengthen teacher professional development in CBC and remediation.

CPD programmes should include practical training in diagnostic assessment, differentiated instruction, remedial teaching and management of large classes.

Develop clearer national guidance on school-based remediation.

Schools should have clear guidance concerning identification, diagnosis, intervention, monitoring and documentation of learner progress.

Strengthen the provision of practical and ICT resources.

Laboratories, computers and subject-specific equipment should be treated as essential components of CBC implementation rather than optional additions.

Recommendations to District Education Authorities

The District Education Board Secretary and district education authorities should:

- Monitor teacher–learner ratios and classroom congestion and prioritise schools experiencing serious overcrowding.
- Conduct regular supportive supervision focusing not only on curriculum coverage but also on whether struggling learners are identified and supported.
- Organise district-level CPD programmes specifically addressing learner support, remediation and CBC implementation.
- Facilitate the sharing of successful remedial practices among schools in the district.
- Work with schools, communities and other stakeholders to mobilise resources for classrooms, libraries, laboratories, textbooks and ICT facilities.

Recommendations to School Administrators Headteachers and school management should:

- Establish a formal learner-support and remediation programme within the school timetable.
- Use continuous assessment data to identify learners requiring additional support.
- Maintain simple records showing the learners identified, interventions provided and progress made.
- Strengthen teacher supervision and feedback, with particular attention to learner-centred teaching and remedial practices.
- Encourage teachers to use peer tutoring, group work and differentiated instruction while ensuring that such strategies are properly supervised.
- Mobilise parents, PTAs and community stakeholders to support learner welfare, resources and learning activities.
- Ensure that available resources are equitably distributed, with priority given to learners and subjects requiring additional support.

Recommendations to Teachers Teachers should:

- Use regular assessment, observation, exercises and questioning to identify learning gaps early.
- Avoid treating remediation simply as repeating the original lesson. Instead, teachers should identify why the learner has not understood and adapt the teaching approach.

- Use differentiated activities, simplified explanations, examples, peer support, group work and practical activities.
- Make effective use of locally available materials while continuing to advocate for adequate formal resources.
- Participate actively in CPD activities focusing on CBC, assessment and remediation.
- Maintain brief records of learners receiving remedial support and monitor whether the intervention produces improvement.

Recommendations for Improving Learner Support and Remediation

The study proposes a practical Learner Support and Remediation Cycle for schools:

Identify → Diagnose → Support → Remediate → Monitor → Review → Re-support where necessary

This approach would prevent remediation from becoming a once-off activity. It would make learner support a continuous process linked to evidence of learner progress.

The cycle should operate as follows:

Stage School action

Identify Use assessment, observation and classroom participation to identify learners experiencing difficulties.

Diagnose..... Establish the specific knowledge, skill or competency gap.

Support materials. Provide differentiated instruction, additional explanation, peer support or learning

Remediate

Provide targeted activities specifically addressing the identified gap.

Monitor Assess whether the learner is improving.

Review..... Determine whether the intervention was successful.

Re-support Provide further or different intervention where the difficulty persists.

This model reflects the study's conceptual understanding that learner support and remediation are related but distinct processes. Learner support can prevent difficulties from becoming severe, while remediation responds to identified learning gaps.

Contribution of the Study

The study makes several contributions.

Empirical Contribution

The study adds local empirical evidence on learner support and remediation in the context of Free Education and CBC in selected secondary schools in Chirundu District. This is significant because the problem identified in Chapter One was the limited empirical information concerning how schools in the district were responding to the changing demands created by increased enrolment and CBC.

Policy Contribution

The study demonstrates that the success of Free Education should not be assessed solely through enrolment. It should also be assessed in terms of whether schools have sufficient capacity to enable enrolled learners to achieve expected competencies.

The study therefore introduces a useful policy principle:

Free access must be matched by adequate learning support capacity.

Practical Contribution

The study provides a practical framework—the Learner Support and Remediation Cycle—through which schools can move from identifying learning difficulties to targeted intervention and monitoring.

Theoretical Contribution

The findings demonstrate that Constructivist Learning Theory is relevant to CBC and learner support, but also reveal that learner-centred approaches require supportive structural conditions. Pedagogy and capacity cannot be separated.

Contribution to School Management

The study shows that learner support should move from being largely an individual teacher responsibility to becoming a whole-school management responsibility, involving leadership, teachers, learners, parents and district authorities.

Suggestions for Further Research

Based on the findings and the delimitations of the study, the following areas are recommended for further research:

- A larger study involving more secondary schools in Chirundu District should be conducted to establish whether the findings are representative of the wider district.
- A comparative study between urban, rural and township secondary schools could establish whether learner-support challenges differ according to school context.

- A longitudinal study could examine whether the challenges associated with Free Education change as schools receive additional infrastructure, teachers and learning materials.
- Further research could examine the effectiveness of different remedial approaches, including peer tutoring, differentiated instruction, extra lessons and structured intervention programmes.
- A study could investigate the relationship between class size and individual learner support under CBC.
- Further research could examine the effectiveness of teacher CPD in CBC and remedial teaching and whether training translates into changes in classroom practice.
- Research could investigate how parents and communities can contribute more effectively to learner support despite the removal of school fees.
- A future mixed-methods study could combine qualitative accounts with learner achievement data to examine whether particular learner-support interventions produce measurable improvements in competency attainment.

8. Chapter Summary

This chapter discussed, concluded and made recommendations based on the findings of the study.

The first major conclusion is that learner support and remediation exist in the selected schools, but their effectiveness is constrained by overcrowding, inadequate resources, teacher workload, limited time, inadequate infrastructure and gaps in professional preparation. The voices of the participants show that teachers are making considerable efforts to support learners, often by providing additional explanations and lessons beyond normal instructional time.

The second major conclusion is that Free Education has been successful in widening access but has simultaneously increased pressure on the capacity of schools to provide individualised support. Learners and school leaders confirmed that increased enrolment has contributed to large classes, noise and reduced individual attention. CBC increases the importance of addressing this challenge because it requires continuous assessment, active learning, competency development and appropriate intervention.

The third conclusion is that the solution requires a system-wide response. Additional teachers, classrooms, textbooks, practical resources, ICT facilities, professional development, structured remediation and stronger supervision must operate together.

The most important message emerging from the study is therefore that access and quality cannot be treated as competing educational goals. Free Education has opened access to

secondary education; the next responsibility is to ensure that learners who enter the system are not merely present in classrooms but are seen, assessed, supported, remediated and enabled to achieve the competencies expected of them.

The study consequently argues for a shift from viewing learner support as an occasional response to failure towards viewing it as a continuous, planned and whole-school process. Such a shift would bring the ideals of Free Education and CBC closer to the lived educational experience of learners in Chirundu District.

In its simplest form, the central lesson of the study can be expressed as:

Free Education opens the door; CBC defines what learners should achieve; learner support and remediation provide the bridge between access and achievement.

This conclusion provides the strongest synthesis of the study and highlights the practical significance of ensuring that expansion of educational access is accompanied by the human, material and institutional capacity necessary to make that access meaningful.

REFERENCES

1. Curriculum Development Centre. (2023). Zambia education curriculum framework 2023. Ministry of Education.
2. Jere, G., Manchishi, P. C., & Mulenga, I. M. (2021). Implementation of learner support services in distance teacher education programmes in selected public colleges of education in Zambia. *Zambia Journal of Distance Education*, 1(1), 26–41.
3. Kabombwe, Y. M., & Mulenga, I. M. (2019). Implementation of the competency-based curriculum by teachers of History in selected secondary schools in Lusaka district, Zambia. *Yesterday & Today*, 22, 19–41. <https://doi.org/10.17159/2223-0386/2019/n22a2>
4. Kangwa, E. (2022). Remedial education in the teaching and learning of Social Studies: An examination of its effectiveness in selected junior secondary schools of Mongu district [Master's dissertation, University of Zambia]. University of Zambia Repository.
5. Ministry of Education. (2022). Free Education Policy implementation report. Government of the Republic of Zambia.
6. Ministry of Education. (2023). Education Statistics Bulletin 2023. Government of the Republic of Zambia.
7. Ministry of Education. (2024). Education Statistics Bulletin 2024. Government of the Republic of Zambia.
8. Ministry of Education. (2025). Education Statistics Bulletin 2025. Government of the Republic of Zambia.
9. Musongole, L., & Chipindi, F. M. (2021). Factors affecting the effectiveness of remedial work policy in selected secondary schools in Kasempa District. *International Journal of Research and Scientific Innovation*, 8(3), 90–100. <https://doi.org/10.51244/IJRSI.2021.8305>
10. Muzata, K. K. (2025). An eye into the 2023 Zambia education curriculum framework: What is there for special and inclusive education in Zambia. *Journal of General Education and Humanities*, 4(2), 381–400. <https://doi.org/10.58421/gehu.v4i2.403>
11. Piaget, J. (1972). *The psychology of the child*. Basic Books.
12. Republic of Zambia. (2011). Education Act, 2011. Government Printer.
13. Simui, F., Mwewa, G., Chota, A., Kakana, F., Mundende, K., Thompson, L., Mwanza, P., Ndhlovu, D., & Namangala, B. (2018). “WhatsApp” as a learner support tool for distance education: Implications for policy and practice at University of Zambia. *Zambia ICT Journal*, 2(2), 36–44. <https://doi.org/10.33260/zictjournal.v2i2.55>
14. Sinkala, H., Kabaso, O., Kanyamuna, V., Simui, F., & Muleya, G. (2026). Systematic literature review: Examining a paradox-Will the increase in financial aid through free education overwhelmingly affect academic results? An exploratory investigation in selected public schools in the Copperbelt Province of Zambia. *African Journal of Empirical Research*, 7(1), 895–909. <https://doi.org/10.51867/ajernet.7.1.77>
15. UNESCO. (2023). [Education report cited in the thesis on increased enrolment, overcrowding, teaching and learning resources, classroom space and teacher workload]. UNESCO.
16. Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press.