



Meta-Thematic Analysis of the Studies on the Remedial Education Program in Primary Schools

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Received: 9 June 2022 ▪ Revised: 24 July 2022 ▪ Accepted: 28 July 2022

Abstract

The purpose of this research is to analyze the studies on the Remedial Education Program in Primary Schools using meta-thematic analysis. In this research, qualitative research papers containing the opinions of participants about the Remedial Education Program in Primary Schools (REPPS) were examined by reviewing using Google Scholar and TR Dizin databases. In our research, research papers were determined by making a search using the keywords “Remedial Education Program in Primary Schools” and “REPPS.” As a result of the review, 12 articles published as full text, using the qualitative research model and containing participant views, were included in the research. Five themes were developed as a result of this research.

Keywords: primary school, Remedial Education Program in Primary Schools (REPPS), meta-thematic analysis, classroom teacher, basic education.

1. Introduction

It is safe to say that there has been an improvement in quantity in education in Turkey in terms of the number of students per classroom and the schooling rate. However, the results of international student evaluation studies indicate a significant difference between students in terms of academic success in Turkey (Taş, Arıcı, Ozarkan & Özgürlük, 2016: 26). For this reason, as a result of monitoring and evaluation efforts, it is recommended to establish compensation, remediation, support, and similar programs in order to cope with poor academic success, based on low schooling rates and differences in success between regions (Gür, Çelik, Bozgeyikli & Yurdakul, 2018: 26). Support efforts carried out to increase student success and eliminate learning deficiencies around the world are mostly performed at the primary school level (Cesur & Yetkiner, 2020: 376). Remediation and support programs in European countries usually last for a couple of weeks and these programs may be reorganized depending on the success of students (European Commission, 2012: 35). In Turkey, for various reasons, students in primary school cannot acquire some skills at a sufficient level. Therefore, it is necessary to use tools that will reveal the individual learning needs of students in early grades, to eliminate the learning deficiencies, and to support students psychosocially. To meet this need, the Remedial Education Program in Primary Schools (REPPS) was jointly developed by the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) and UNICEF as an

early intervention measure and program aiming at making up for the shortcomings of third graders in primary schools, who, for various reasons, were not able to acquire the basic skills and achievements in the Turkish and mathematics curricula (MoNE, 2019: 1). Within this framework, significant and in-depth efforts are being carried out recently on the structuring and updating of the programs in the Turkish education system and the widespread use of the updated curricula in schools (Büyüköztürk, Çakan, Tan & Atar, 2014: 1). REPPS was developed in line with the philosophy, basic skills, and teaching-learning approaches of the curricula currently being implemented. In other words, no additional program philosophy, basic skills, and learning-teaching approach was adopted for this program (MoNE, 2020: 8).

The achievements in the REPPS were picked from the first and second grade curricula. The REPPS is not an alternative to existing curricula or the formal educational system (MoNE, 2020: 8). The competencies included in the program consist of basic level achievements, skills and learning areas in the Turkish and mathematics curricula that are currently in place. However, in some cases, these pre-determined achievements and skills may not be provided to students in the desired way (Özdoğan, 2022: 54). In this context, REPPS aims to help students achieve the literacy and comprehension skills they need, as well as the achievements in natural numbers and four operations in natural numbers, while supporting students' multi-faceted development, feeling of achievement and improving their self-confidence, and at the same time ensuring their school attendance (MoNE, 2020: 8).

The purpose of this study was to examine the studies on REPPS using meta-thematic analysis. The purpose of performing a meta-thematic analysis is that the obtained data contain a sufficient number of participant opinions to be analyzed. In addition, the number of papers on REPPS has been increasing in recent years. A decision was made to conduct this research to identify the qualitative research results that include the views of participants on REPPS by performing a meta-thematic analysis and to contribute to the field. In addition, it was considered that it is important to ensure the diversity of the studies conducted in the literature and to examine the articles written about REPPS using meta-thematic analysis. At the same time, it is safe to say that it is appropriate to evaluate REPPS within the scope of meta-thematic analysis.

1.1 Purpose of the research

The purpose of this research is to examine the qualitative research that include the opinions of participants on the Remedial Education Program in Primary Schools in Turkey (REPPS) using meta-thematic analysis. As the sub objectives of the research, the following were examined:

- 1) The effect of the REPPS on the academic success of students,
- 2) The effects of the REPPS on the affective characteristics of students,
- 3) The measurement and evaluation dimension of the REPPS,
- 4) The evaluation of the REPPS from the point of view of parents, and
- 5) The encountered problems of the REPPS and possible solutions.

1.2 Methodology

In this research, studies containing the qualitative views of participants that will contribute to the determination of the effectiveness of the Remedial Education Program in Primary Schools (REPPS) were examined and these studies were meta-thematically analyzed. A meta-thematic analysis is based on the review of documents, which includes a verbal analysis process, and combines the qualitative findings of studies by creating themes and codes (Batdı, 2019: 38). In other words, it is the re-expression of the data in the research conducted in a

qualitative context and collected based on document analysis, in a common context, in the form of themes and codes, and given meaning (Batdı, 2019: 38).

1.3 Data collection and analysis

In this study, qualitative research on the Remedial Education Program in Primary Schools (REPPS) was examined on Google Scholar and TR Dizin databases. To identify the studies to be included in the research, a search was made using the following keywords in Turkish: “Remedial Education Program in Primary Schools and (REPPS)”. The inclusion criteria of the research were the studies conducted using the interview technique, a qualitative research model, and include participant views, Google Scholar and TR Dizin databases, and the range of October 2017 – January 2021. The reason why 2017 was determined as the first year to scan the studies included in our research was that REPPS was first implemented in October of the 2017-2018 school year. The latest study included in the research was published in January 2021. As a result of the review performed with this criteria, 12 qualitative research papers containing the views of participants were identified. In this context, the codes created during the content analysis were taken from the opinions of the participants and the complete sentences of these opinions were taken and the statements of the person were cited directly (Merriam, 2009: 207; Yin, 2018: 243). When reviewing studies on the relevant databases, the papers were coded using the letter “S”, the number, and the page number from which the code was obtained (e.g., S1-p.199). After accessing the studies and writing down the codes, content analysis was performed, codes were extracted from the studies and themes were created.

In qualitative studies, content analysis is used to analyze the studies reached by document review (Merriam, 2009: 136). Content analysis is a research method used to make repeatable and valid inferences from the data (Krippendorff, 2004: 313). In this study, content analysis was used to find the common aspects of the textual content obtained from papers and to re-interpret and structure these common aspects. The data obtained from qualitative studies through meta-thematic analysis are indicated in themes and codes. The reliability formula proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994: 64) was used to calculate the reliability of the codes. $\text{Reliability} = \text{Agreement} / (\text{Agreement} + \text{Disagreement})$. For this research, the researchers calculated the inter-coder reliability twice. In the first one, the inter-coder reliability coefficient was found to be .85. In the second one, which was performed two weeks after the first, the inter-coder reliability coefficient was found to be .92. According to Miles and Huberman (1994: 64), a minimum of .80 is accepted as inter-coder consensus in research, which makes this one reliable. The creation of codes can be performed through various software, as well as manually by the researcher (Merriam, 2009: 182). In this study, the codes were created manually by the researcher and the themes and codes were listed in tables.

2. Findings

In this study, a meta-thematic analysis was performed based on document analysis. The obtained data are presented and interpreted under this section in tables. The themes and codes obtained as a result of the analyses are presented in tables. As shown in the tables, the themes were determined as follows: the effect of the REPPS on the academic success of students, the effects of the REPPS on the affective characteristics of students, measurement and evaluation dimension, evaluation from the point of view of parents, and the encountered problems and possible solutions.

The findings obtained regarding the first sub objective of the study are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. The effect of the REPPS on the academic success of students

Effect on the Academic Success of Students
1. Time allocated for modules and acquisitions
2. It provides a learning environment
3. It contributes positively to students' learning
4. It improves their reading and writing skills
5. It improves the skill to solve math problems
6. It increases academic success
7. It ensures active participation in classes
8. Make up for learning deficiencies
9. It contributes to the self-expression skill
10. It develops the basic mathematical operation skills
11. It improves performance

The codes that were developed and shown in Table 1 that explain the effect of the REPPS on the academic success of students are as follows: time allocated for modules and acquisitions, it provides a learning environment, it contributes positively to students' learning, it improves their reading and writing skills, it improves the skill to solve math problems, it increases academic success, it ensures active participation in classes, make up for learning deficiencies, it contributes to the self-expression skill, it develops the basic mathematical operation skills, and it improves performance. Some of the quotes cited in the context of this theme from the study S2-p.402 are as follows: *"Of course it has been useful. Students were not able to have the chance speak up among 40 students. Now, they are able to participate in class, engage in activities, and are happy."* From the study S3-p.2165 *"It improves the listening and speaking skills of students, addresses their shortcomings in reading and writing, improves the level of comprehension, improves the literacy skills of those who are having difficulties in literacy, and improves their four operations skills."* From the study S6-p.10 *"It definitely contributes. For example, students who were afraid of math class or who had difficulty reading and were embarrassed were taken care of individually, which helped them feel more self-confident. The performance in class increased. A student of mine, who previously had excellent operations skills, but was having trouble with problem-solving skills, has now reached a level where he can instruct the class, and he is very happy."* And, for the study S9-p.441 *"As they learn, they participate in the class more and are more motivated. This has contributed to course performance."* For the study S7-p.804 *"It has been useful for third and fourth-graders who, for various reasons, have not been able to acquire literacy, comprehension, and four operations in natural numbers skills."* For the study S9-p.441 *"Students participated in classes more actively as they were dealt with individually."*

The findings obtained regarding the second sub objective of the study are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. The effect of the REPPS on the affective characteristics of students

Effect on the Affective Characteristics of Students
1. Increased self-confidence
2. Desire for learning
3. Interest
4. Feeling valued
5. Feeling happy
6. Motivation

As shown in Table 2, the codes created to explain the effect of the REPPS on the affective characteristics of students are as follows: *"increased self-confidence, desire for learning, interest, feeling valued, feeling happy, and motivation."* Some of the quotes cited for this theme are as follows. For the study S7-p.804 *"Students who witnessed their improvement in REPPS want to learn more and are more motivated and interested."* For the study S12-p.163 *"The biggest contribution of the program is that the students' self-confidence increased. They have*

experienced the pleasure of succeeding. A student came up to me and told me that he walked up to the board in the classroom.” For the study S4-p.914 “REPPS has had a positive impact on student motivation as it allows for more one-on-one lessons with students, which leads to progress based on each students' level. Since the achievements in the classroom are higher than their own level, the motivation and self-confidence of students inevitably decrease. I observed that students are more interested and more active in the lesson while studying with their friends in the same module as themselves.” For the study S9-p.411 “As they learned, their participation and motivation increased. This contributed to course performance.”

The findings obtained regarding the third sub objective of the study are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. The measurement and evaluation dimension of the REPPS

Measurement and Evaluation Dimension
1. Obtaining the opinions of teachers
2. Development of measurement and evaluation tools
3. Timing of the evaluation
4. Helping out students during exams
5. Exam environment

As shown in Table 3, the codes created to explain the evaluation and measurement dimension of the REPPS are as follows: obtaining the opinions of teachers, development of measurement and evaluation tools, timing of the evaluation, helping out students during exams, and the exam environment. Some of the quotes cited for this theme are as follows. For the study S1-p.385 *“Questions in measurement and evaluation tools, were quite simple. I think they can be a little bit more difficult. The questions mostly focused on basic topics, such as reading and writing and addition and subtraction. So, the students who I considered to be unsuccessful passed the exam. So, in addition to focusing on basic skills, I think measurement and evaluation tools, should be made a little bit more difficult and below average students should also be included in the program.”* In the study coded S3-p.2172 *“More effective, comprehensive and valid measurement tools should be developed in selecting students for the program and the views of first grade teachers should be taken.”* In the study coded S5-p.26 *“The students were not identified properly. Teachers should be decisive. The exam for evaluating the results was performed long after the course. The exams should be performed right after the course.”* In the study coded S6-p.8 *“We received generally negative reviews. We were asked why we did not help students during the exam. It turned out that most of our colleagues helped out their students in the exam, ensuring that they remained in REPPS. Of course, from the outside, this makes us look like we have failed.”* In the study coded S12-p.165 *“The exam was selective, but the way it was administered and the scale of assessment were poor. We read the question to each student one by one. When one student finds the answer and tells it, the others would hear it.”*

The findings obtained regarding the fourth sub objective of the study are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. The evaluation of the REPPS from the point of view of parents

Evaluation from the Point of View of Parents
1. Informing families about REPPS
2. The support of families
3. Parent satisfaction
4. Economic convenience to families

In Table 4, the codes created to evaluate the REPPS from the point of view of parents are stated as: “informing families about REPPS, the support of families, parent satisfaction, and economic convenience to families”. Some of the quotes cited for this theme are as follows: In the study coded S3-p.2167 *“It is a particularly important opportunity for families and students with*

a lower socio-economic background. It is very important that this program was launched in schools affiliated to the Ministry of National Education and is free of charge.” In the study coded S3-p.2167 *“From the point of view of parents, it makes them happy that their children can achieve and more forward with a little help.”* In the study coded S4-p.916 *“Parents should be informed and experts should be sent to schools to inform teachers about REPPS, how they can do better and what.”* In the study coded S7-p.804 *“Since families were not properly informed about the program, they were hesitant to send their children during the weekends.”* In the study coded S8-p.281 *“Parents will be happy that their children are learning topics that they do not know, or have difficulties with. Their attitude towards school will change and they will pay more attention to school. They will also be financially more comfortable. They will improve their communication with their children.”*

The findings obtained regarding the fifth sub objective of the study are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. The encountered problems of the REPPS and possible solutions

Encountered Problems and Possible Solutions	
Encountered Problems	Possible Solutions
1. Insufficient time	1. Inclusion of other courses
2. Lack of course materials	2. Changing the learning environment
3. Inadequacy of modules and achievements	3. Implementation at other grades
4. Language and communication problems	4. Diversification of areas of support
5. Absenteeism	5. Increasing additional course fees
6. Tiredness and low motivation	6. Admission of students to the program by their own teachers
7. Lack of interest of parents	7. Cooperation with parents
8. Lack of knowledge of teachers about the program	8. Extending the duration of the program
9. Students coming via transported education	9. Improving modules and achievements
10. Lack of knowledge of parents	10. Offering additional service points
11. Low additional course fees	11. Having different teachers deliver courses
	12. Reducing class populations
	13. Making the program mandatory
	14. Increasing the number of activities
	15. Providing in-service training
	16. Following up
	17. Maintaining constant contact with parents

In Table 5, the codes created to explain the encountered problems of the REPPS and possible solutions are divided into two sub-themes. Codes with regard to the sub-theme of encountered problems in the REPPS are as follows: Insufficient time, lack of course materials, the inadequacy of modules and achievements, language and communication problems, absenteeism, tiredness and low motivation, lack of interest of parents, lack of knowledge of teachers about the program, students coming via transported education, lack of knowledge of parents, and low additional course fees. Codes with regard to the sub-theme of possible solutions in the REPPS are as follows: Inclusion of other courses, changing the learning environment, implementation at other grades, diversification of areas of support, increasing additional course fees, admission of students to the program by their own teachers, cooperation with parents, extending the duration of the program, improving modules and achievements, offering additional service points, having different teachers deliver courses, reducing class populations, making the program mandatory, increasing the number of activities, providing in-service training, following up, and maintaining constant contact with parents. Some of the quotes cited under this theme were: In the study coded S2-p.396 *“The achievements of the first math module was very simple. Therefore, I had to constantly go over it with my students. For achievements, activities of different difficulty levels could be developed.”* In the study coded S3-p.2170 *“One of the biggest challenges is uninterested parents who do not spare enough time for their children. Because parents who are not open to cooperation do not feel the need to follow up on their child's lessons or absenteeism. This prevents*

us from doing what is necessary.” In the study coded S3-p.2173 *“In my opinion, each student should be included in the program on his own grade and by his own classroom teacher. This would increase the efficiency of the course.”* In the study coded S4-p.915 *“The 2-hour course after a whole day of school causes tiredness and students are unable to focus. Students coming via transported education either cannot benefit from the program or face more challenge. Leaving it to the discretion of parents causes the student who needs it not to benefit.”* In the study coded S4-p.916 *“For the more effective and productive implementation of REPPS, I am of the opinion that materials should be organized and diversified, teachers should be given additional service points, and additional course fees should be increased. These would increase motivation and willingness to take part in the program.”* In the study coded S5-p.25 *“The scope can be extended. Other courses can also be added. Lessons such as physical education, music and painting can also be added to entertain the children.”* In the study coded S5-p.27 *“The number of resources and materials should be increased. The course should be delivered by the relevant teachers. Teacher fees should be increased. The duration of the course should be extended.”* In the study coded S10-p.1404 *“The goal has not been achieved. Because the programming was not done well. There was no cooperation with the parents. The fact that the course is not mandatory also had a negative impact.”*

3. Discussion and conclusion

Within the scope of this research, various conclusions were made by examining the studies related to the Remedial Education Program in Primary Schools through meta-thematic analysis. The themes obtained as a result of meta-thematic analysis are the effect of the REPPS on the academic success of students, its effect on their affective characteristics, the dimension of measurement and evaluation, its evaluation from the point of view of parents, as well as the encountered problems in the REPPS and possible solutions.

The findings related to the first sub-objective of the study revealed codes under the theme of REPPS' effect on the academic success of students, which are the time allocated for modules and achievements, providing a learning environment, positive contribution to the learning of students, and improvement of literacy skills. In addition, it was found that through this program, students' math problem-solving skills improved, their academic success increased, they participated more actively in classes, helped eliminate subject shortcomings, contributed to their self-expression skills, improved their basic numeracy skills, and increased their performance. In Özdoğru's study (2022: 61), classroom teachers mainly noted that REPPS increases academic achievement and ensures the participation of students in the lesson. In Ergün's study (2017: 101), managers and teachers working in courses noted that the courses contributed to eliminating students' shortcomings in learning, providing a regular studying environment, and increasing the success of students. In the study conducted by Dilekçi (2019: 442), the conclusion that REPPS provides opportunities for students to improve themselves by eliminating their deficiencies supports our research. In addition, Nartgün and Dilekçi (2016: 552) found in their study that courses, similar to remedial programs, increased the academic success of students. Also, as stated by Mishna et al. (2013: 4), remedial programs contribute to the development of students academically and socially.

Considering the findings of the second sub-objective of our study, it was found under the theme of the effect of REPPS on the affective characteristics of students that it increased students' self-confidence, formed a desire to learn, increased their interest in the lesson, felt valued, were happy and their motivation increased. In the study of Özdoğru (2022: 61), it is stated that REPPS contributes to increasing students' motivation and self-confidence, which is in line with the findings of our study. In the study conducted by Kale and Demir (2021: 172), it is stated that REPPS has a positive effect on the motivation of students, which supports our research.

Similar to the result of our study, in the study conducted by Açı, Ekinci, Dündar and Bilgiç (2021: 257), it was also found that REPPS created motivation and self-confidence. It was also noted that the fact that students attend activities such as courses increased their motivation and interest in lessons (Krajcik & Blumenfeld, 2005: 317).

As for the findings related to the third sub-objective of the study under the evaluation and measurement dimension of REPPS, the following codes were created: obtaining the opinions of teachers, development of measurement and evaluation tools, timing of the evaluation, helping out students during exams, and the exam environment. With regards to teacher selection, the majority of the teachers included in the study of Yıldız and Kılıç (2020:1408) stated that it was not executed properly, that the test was not selecting students accurately, and that teachers should also be included in the process. These statements are in line with the results of this study. In addition, the fact that classroom teachers noted that a student identification tool should be developed according to their views in Hamidi and Kinay's (2019:684) study, supports the outcome of our study.

The findings of the fourth sub objective of the study revealed the following codes: informing parents about REPPS, the support of families to the program, the satisfaction of families with the program, and its economic convenience. Similar to this research, Lawson (2003: 79) noted in his study that family involvement increases the learning experience and academic performance of children. In addition, in the study conducted by Kırnık, Susam and Özbek (2019: 413), it was concluded that leaving REPPS participation to the discretion of parents created a challenge. In addition, it is safe to say that the fact that families have limited knowledge of REPPS, they do not want to include their children in the program, or their lack of interest are also in line with the results of this study (ERG, 2019: 34).

According to the findings on the fifth sub objective of the study, classroom teachers mentioned the encountered problems of REPPS to be the lack of implementation time, the lack of course materials, the lack of modules and achievements, language and communication issues, absenteeism, fatigue and lack of motivation, the lack of interest of parents, the lack of knowledge of teachers about the program, the lack of knowledge of parents, and the low additional course fees. On the other hand, teachers offered these solutions to the abovementioned encountered problems: inclusion of other courses, changing of the learning environment, starting from other grades, diversification of areas of support, increasing course fees, making sure that each student is included in the program by his/her own teacher, parent-teacher collaboration, extending the duration of the program, improving modules and achievements, and giving additional service points for teachers. In addition, they made suggestions such as having different teachers to deliver courses, reducing classroom population, making the program mandatory, increasing the number of activities, providing in-service training, tracking attendance, and establishing constant communication with parents. In their research, Gürol and Gül (2021: 29) identified problems during the implementation of REPPS, such as mistakes made in selecting students for modules, lack of time, absenteeism, tiredness of teachers and students, lack of interest of parents, and lack of interest of teachers due to low additional course fees, which supports the results of this study. In support of the results of this study, Yıldız and Kılıç (2020: 1404) found in their research that REPPS was not productive as it was implemented after classes during weekdays when students are tired. Similarly, Bray (1999: 60) noted that remediation training-tired students.

Similar to the results of our research, in the study of Aydın Gürler (2020: 275), some classroom teachers noted that the program should also include science, life science, social science, sports, and art courses, in addition to math courses. In line with the results of Canpolat and Köçer's (2017: 144) research, it is safe to say that including other courses to REPPS will increase the overall effectiveness of the program. However, different from the results of our study, in the study carried out by Cesur and Yetkiner (2020: 389), the majority of teachers stated that it is sufficient to have Turkish and mathematics courses under REPPS. The fact that teachers stated in the study of Cesur

and Yetkiner (2020: 389) that the program should be started to be implemented before third grade and continue all through primary school is in line with the results of this research. In the study conducted by Kırnık, Susam, and Özbek (2019: 413), it was concluded that leaving REPPS participation to the discretion of parents created a challenge. In line with this view, classroom teachers stated that the program should be mandatory. Also, teachers working in Supporting and Training Courses which are considered to have a similar structure to this program, are paid additional course fees on an incremental basis (MoNE, 2016: 33). The additional course fees are made to teachers working in REPPS within the framework of the existing additional course fee payments (MoNE, 2019: 4). In their study, Çaycı and Demir (2006: 454) found that teachers were not able to attend to students properly due to high classroom populations and time constraints, which is similar to the results of our study. In their study, Anılan and Özgan (2020: 56) concluded that REPPS materials should be diversified, albeit being appropriate. This finding supports the view of our study indicating that material needs should be fulfilled. Also, in their research, Timur, Kahraman, and İşseven (2020: 197) identified some problems, such as the fact that the courses are on weekdays, and lack of resources, which support the results of this research. In the study of Göksu and Gülcü (2016: 160), teachers and administrators pointed to a lack of books, resources and materials in the courses, which is similar to the results of our research. The classroom teachers stated in Hamidi and Kinay's (2019: 686) study that additional worksheets should be distributed to students, books should be divided into modules, and the number of activities should be increased, which are line with the results of this study.

According to the results obtained in our study, the following recommendations are proposed:

Further research can be conducted on the Remedial Education Program in Primary Schools using various research methods.

The number of research on the Remedial Education Program in Primary Schools that includes not only teachers but also school administrators and parents can be increased.

The curricula can be updated to make sure that the Remedial Education Program in Primary Schools include courses besides Turkish and math.

Acknowledgements

This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

The authors declare no competing interests.

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Note: This manuscript is an expanded version of the oral presentation, which was presented in 19th International Primary Teacher Education Symposium, 12-14 November 2021.

