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## ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHERS' PRACTICES REGARDING READING DIFFICULTIES<sup>1</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

This research aims to determine the relationship between the skills of elementary school teachers concerning reading difficulties (dyslexia) and teaching practices. The research participant group consists of six elementary school teachers teaching second and third-grade students during the school year of 2017-2018 in Kastamonu province in Turkey. This research is qualitative research and was designed in a case study pattern. An observation form, a semi-structured interview, and a teachers' opinion survey form were used during the data collection process of the research. Content analysis and descriptive analysis were made with the data obtained from the observation form, teachers' opinion survey form and semi-structured interviews. The elementary school teachers' practices, solutions to problems, and to what extent their skill levels matched with their practices were analysed comparatively via the observation form, teachers' opinion survey form and interview form by the researchers. When the study results are examined; it was determined that the participants group did not show special attention to their dyslexic students, did not receive an effective education and had difficulties coping with dyslexia. Moreover, it has been determined that certain teaching practices such as improving reading and reading comprehension, motivating and encouraging students, giving feedback, arranging the learning environment, and guiding are not carried out qualitatively by using different methods and strategies such as awakening and forming prior knowledge to do fluent reading, paired reading and repetitive reading activities as well as education of dyslexic children and syllable and word exercises.

**Keywords:** Reading difficulties, dyslexia, teaching practices, intervention.

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<sup>1</sup> This study is derived from the first author's doctoral thesis under the supervision of the second author.

## INTRODUCTION

Dyslexia is a reading disability that deeply affects individuals' academic performance. In the United States (USA), 38.6% of students with special needs are students with specific learning difficulties (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). Although there is no statistical data on the number of students with specific learning difficulties in Turkey, 6% of children with specific learning difficulties are among the children diagnosed with special needs (Ministry of National Education [MONE], 2021). One of the reasons for this low number is that individuals with dyslexia have difficulties being diagnosed and in accessing appropriate education in Turkey (Aslan, 2015; Çakıroğlu, 2017; Demir, 2005). In addition, teachers' insufficient knowledge about dyslexia and a general lack of awareness slows down the diagnostic process. Around the world, the attempt has been made to solve these problems by working on the issues facing children with dyslexia, supporting these children with laws, and providing effective interventions (Björn et al., 2018; Hughes & Dexter, 2011; Scanlon, 2013).

New research and policies are also being developed in Turkey with regard to the little-known concept of dyslexia. In Turkey, students are sometimes misdiagnosed, and in some cases, they go unnoticed or face negative treatment from their peers, teachers or society, and may become isolated and alienated from school (Çakıroğlu & Melekoğlu, 2014; Koç & Korkmaz, 2016; Yiğiter, 2005). Studies conducted in Turkey have found that teachers who provide general education to individuals with dyslexia have little or no information about the condition (Altun et al., 2011; Altun & Uzuner, 2016; Altındağ et al., 2017; Altuntaş, 2010; Bilen, 2007; Doğan, 2013; Ergül et al., 2012; Katsarou, 2018; Sicherer, 2014). In addition to the teachers' inability to create an inclusive and integrated environment, factors such as an inability to prepare and implement individualized education plans, and the inability of the student to benefit from educational support are all negative situations faced by students with reading difficulties (RDs) (Balci, 2019; Cankaya & Korkmaz, 2012; Çuhadar, 2006; Dalga, 2019; Doğan, 2013; Şahin & Gürler, 2018). Given the fact that these students are not able to adequately benefit from education due to the existence of combined classroom practices in the Turkish education system, overcrowded classrooms, and the inadequacy of teachers' subject and pedagogical knowledge, there is an even greater need for sensitivity towards children with RDs (Kartal, 2016; Sanır, 2009; Saraç & Çolak, 2012). It is possible for children with dyslexia to reach the same academic level as their peers through early recognition of their condition and adapting teaching in order to make it more effective (IDA, 2015; Vellutino & Scanlon, 2001). However, the absence of reading specialists, who are a successful professional group in the context of educational interventions in the USA, places this responsibility on the elementary school teacher in Turkey (Akyol & Yıldız, 2013). In this regard, elementary school teachers have an important role in helping individuals with dyslexia become competent both in academic and social life (Ataman & Kahveci, 2013; Hammeken, 2016; Reid, 2011). Elementary school teachers' knowledge about dyslexia and their ability to put this knowledge into practice in teaching is an important step in helping individuals with dyslexia (Hammeken, 2016). The resources that teachers can refer to about how to recognize dyslexic students and how to plan appropriate instructional interventions are limited. Consequently, teachers try to cope with the difficulties they encounter using their own methods or they are not aware of dyslexia at all (Balci, 2019; Çakıroğlu & Melekoğlu, 2014; Elliott, 2020).

For these reasons, how teachers recognize students at risk for dyslexia, what kind of education they provide and what they use as methods to cope with the condition are of great importance for dyslexia research.

Helping students with dyslexia cope with RDs by supporting them is possible. In this context, the main points that need to be emphasized are that the teacher should be able to identify this difficulty quickly and develop a special curriculum that takes into account each student's individual differences. For these reasons, it is of great importance that the teacher knows about RDs, how to identify them in the student, and how an intervention program should be developed without setting the student back. In this way, teachers will be able to overcome RDs by supporting students with RDs and by planning and implementing special education programs (IDA, 2015; Vellutino & Scanlon, 2001). In addition, elementary school teachers can provide supportive education to improve the reading skills of students with RDs by using strategies such as active learning, surface-behavior modification, the esound-based sentence method, the Fernald approach, the multi-sensory approach, 3P Method, paired reading, echo reading, chorus reading, repetitive reading, the cloze technique, social skills teaching, reader dramas, and peer teaching (Akyol, 2013; Arslan & Dirik, 2008; Ataman & Kahveci, 2013; Bender, 2012; Burns, 2006; Hammeken, 2016; Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2016; Mcloughlin & Lewis, 2002; Ulusoy, 2009; Yıldız, 2004). Moreover, elementary school teachers can support students with RDs by being a role model, using the think-aloud technique while modeling, guiding, providing collaborative opportunities, giving corrective feedback and reinforcements, and spending time one-on-one with individuals (MONE, 2013). In addition to all these techniques, it is necessary to physically organize educational environments so that the classroom is well ventilated and light, sound and noise are regulated. These arrangements aim to ensure that there is multi-directional communication between teachers and students. Moreover, the use of teaching techniques such as animation, demonstration, learning by doing, modeling, play, drama, discussion and case studies is essential in the education of individuals with RDs (MONE, 2008).

This study is about teachers' classroom practices and interventions during the process of coping with RDs. The practices of elementary school teachers regarding students with RDs were examined within the scope of Turkish lessons. In this context, the attempt was made to examine what kind of practices the elementary school teachers used with their students who had RDs, how they coped with RDs, and how much their knowledge and skills about RDs overlapped with their practices. The deficiencies in the literature were decisive in formulating the research problem. Before writing this article, the studies conducted in Turkey were examined and it was found that they are aimed at detecting and eliminating RDs (Altun & Uzuner, 2016; Altun et al., 2011; Altuntaş, 2010; Baydık et al., 2012; Doğan, 2013; Kocaarslan, 2013; Koç, 2012; Yiğiter, 2005; Yurdakal, 2004). In this regard, it is important to know what teachers' practices are, and what strategies they use for coping with RDs. The practices of elementary school teachers regarding their students with RDs are thus the focus of this article, and how they performed these practices led to the formulation of the research problem.

The purpose of the study was to investigate elementary school teachers' skill levels regarding RDs and their practices for students with RDs. To that end, we used an observation form, a teacher's opinion survey and an interview form to focus on the following three questions:

1. What kind of problems do primary school teachers encounter and how do they solve them while teaching reading skills to students with RDs?
2. What kind of practices do elementary school teachers use for their students with RDs?
3. To what extent do elementary school teachers' coping with RDs and their practices overlap?

**METHOD**

**Research Design**

This study, which aimed to determine the levels of coping skills of elementary school teachers regarding RDs and their classroom practices for students with RDs, was a qualitative case study. Case studies are defined as the detailed analysis of a program, an event, an activity, a process, or one or more individuals over a long period of time (Creswell, 2016). Merriam (2013) states that case studies are a design often chosen by researchers because they provide the opportunity to research complex social units, examine a phenomenon in a holistic and rich way based on real events, and enable them to influence and develop practice because it examines a specific applied field. In line with the purpose of the study, the practices of elementary school teachers for students with RDs were determined as the situation to be studied.

**Study Group**

The participants included in the study were selected by group purpose sampling method. In line with the purpose of our study, the aim was to meet three basic criteria. The criteria for participating in the research were volunteering to participate in the study, having at least one student with RDs in their classes, and teaching the second and/or third grades in the academic year in which the research will be conducted. The sample of the study consisted of six primary school teachers who were teaching the second and third grades of primary school during the 2017-2018 academic year in the city center of Kastamonu in Turkey. Pseudonyms were given to the participants and their initials were coded A, M, R, H, D and F. Their students with RDs were coded as SA, SM, SR, SH, SD and SF. Descriptive information about the participants is given in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Descriptive Characteristics of the Participants

Participants	Gender	Grade Level Taught	Professional Seniority	Education Level	Status of Receiving In-service Training Related to LD	Status of Taking Undergraduate Courses Related to LD
Ayfer	Woman	2	15	Undergraduate	No	No
Mehmet	Man	2	30	Undergraduate	Yes	Yes
Rezzan	Woman	3	24	Undergraduate	Yes	No
Hülya	Woman	3	14	Undergraduate	No	No
Duygu	Woman	3	10	Undergraduate	Yes	No
Fatma	Woman	3	21	Postgraduate	No	No

### **Data Collection**

In line with the purpose of the study, the practices of elementary school teachers for students with RDs were determined as the case to be studied. In this study, interviews, observations and teacher opinion surveys were used in order to attain rich data. The data collected from the data tools used were evaluated by subjecting them to descriptive analysis and content analysis.

Before starting the research, the main permissions were obtained from the Governor's Office and the Provincial Directorate of National Education for 2017-2018 academic year. Then, the school principals were interviewed and research began with the teachers who met the necessary criteria, as directed by the school principals. The teachers participating signed a participant consent form explaining the purpose of the research and summarizing it. The Error Analysis Inventory was applied to the students with RDs identified by the participating teachers. The Error Analysis Inventory is an informal error analysis inventory created by Akyol (2013), making use of Harris and Sipay (1990), Ekwall and Shanker (1998) and May (1986), in order to determine the reading and reading comprehension level of the reader. It aims to determine the levels of vocabulary and reading comprehension, and consists of two parts. The level of the reader is determined by both reading aloud and reading silently. The scores obtained from the answers given to the reading comprehension questions and the reading level from the inventory are used to determine three different reading levels: anxiety, teaching and free reading levels. In order to determine the reading and reading comprehension levels of the students who had RDs, the students who were determined to be at the level of anxiety were selected using the error analysis inventory. Then, it was observed how the participant teachers dealt with their students with RDs who were determined to be at the anxiety reading level. In the research, observations made for 20 hours for each participant, 120 hours in total, were made in Turkish lessons because they included intensive reading activities.

### **Data Collection Tools**

The research used a structured observation form for classroom observations, a semi-structured interview form to understand the skills and practices of teachers, and a teacher opinion survey form to determine the methods and techniques used by teachers as data collection tools. During the preparation for the observation, interview and survey forms, field experts who were knowledgeable about the observation and interview technique were consulted, and draft forms were created by reviewing the relevant literature. Then, the expert opinion was re-applied for content validity, some corrections were made, and a pilot study was conducted. As a result of the pilot study, the forms were finalized. For interested researchers, the final version of the structured observation form is presented in the appendix. In order to ensure validity in qualitative research, it is necessary for the researcher to show the research they have conducted in an unbiased way (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016). Therefore, it was found appropriate to collect observation data together with a co-observer. The researcher and the co-observer attended the classes for 120 hours together, and filled in the observation forms. In order to determine the interobserver reliability, Miles and Huberman's (1994) percentage of agreement between encoders was calculated. According to this calculation, the agreement between the encoders is obtained by

consensus/consensus + disagreement. In this process, 40% of the 120 hours were randomly selected and the percentage of compliance was calculated. The agreement between the researcher and the co-observer was calculated as 95%. This ratio shows that the reliability of the research is at a strong level. In addition, researcher diversity was ensured by continuing the research with a co-observer, and it is thought that the validity of the research was thus increased (Guion, 2002). In addition, because this research was a case study, various data collection techniques were used and the reliability of the research was increased by making data diversification (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016).

### **Observation Form**

In the study, the attached structured observation form was developed to observe the practices of the participating teachers regarding their students with RDs. While creating the observation form, national and international literature was scanned and codes were created from what teachers should do in class for their students with reading difficulties (Baydık, 2011; Baydık et al., 2012; Doğan, 2013; Hammeken, 2016; Heiman, 2004; Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2016; MONE, 2008; MONE, 2013; Reid & Green, 2018; Yuen et al., 2005). The structured observation form consists of the preparation process for the lesson, the process of teaching the lesson and the conclusion of the lesson. In the course preparation process category, there is a preparation process subcategory. The sub-category of the preparation process is divided into four sub-sections: "activating prior knowledge", "working with keywords", "making predictions" and "informing about the target".

Under the category of teaching process, the sub-categories of "allocating individual time", "literacy exercises", "using different methods", "giving informative instructions", "giving feedback", "questioning", "giving study materials", "giving additional time", "helping in the teaching process", "arranging the learning environment" and "ending the course" were formed. The sub-category of individual time allocation is divided into six sections, "developing vocabulary", "reading fluently", "helping the student organize things", "telling how to spell words", "telling how to write words" and "being with the student when needed". The reading and writing sub-category is divided into three sub-sections, "reading aloud", "silent reading" and "writing". The sub-category of using different methods is divided into five sub-sections, "working in groups", "drama", "peer assistance", "paired reading" and "other". The sub-category of giving informative instructions is divided into two sub-areas, "written notes" and "oral explanations". The sub-category of feedback is divided into seven sub-areas, "reading", "writing", "listening/watching", "speaking", "behavior", "visuals" and "information-based feedback". The inquiry sub-category, on the other hand, is divided into two sub-areas, "asking questions" and "giving opportunities to ask questions". The study material subcategory is divided into five sub-categories, "using technological tools", "presenting worksheets", "supplementary books", "making text adaptations" and "other". The sub-category of giving additional time is divided into the sub-field of "giving additional time to answer the question asked". The sub-category of helping in the teaching process is divided into three sub-areas, "encouraging and speaking encouraging words", "guiding" and "emphasizing and developing strengths". The subcategory of organizing the learning environment is divided into five sub-areas, "maintaining silence", "arranging heat and light", "odor issues", "keeping course materials accessible", and "determining and

explaining classroom rules". Finally, the ending of the course sub-category is divided into three sub-areas, "summing up", "giving homework" and "making suggestions about the next lesson".

#### ***Interview Form***

Before starting the observations within the scope of the research, semi-structured interviews were conducted in order to understand what kind of practices the participants used with their students with reading RDs and how they coped with the reading triad. The interview form consisted of questions about what kind of practices they used with students with RDs, what kind of problems they experienced with these students in terms of classroom communication and classroom management, how they coped with RDs and what kind of information they shared with their families and other stakeholders.

#### ***Teacher Opinion Survey Form***

The teacher opinion survey used in the research was prepared based on the observation form created by reviewing the relevant literature. In the survey form, which included closed and open-ended questions, the closed-ended questions included the demographic information of the participants, while the open-ended questions included information about the participants' RDs, their practices, and their ideas about coping skills. The researchers used the teacher opinion survey form as a type of interview, which prevents the setbacks that the participants may experience in the direct interview technique and in which the participants were able to discuss their own ideas.

#### ***Analysis of Data***

Content analysis and descriptive analysis techniques were used in the analysis of the data obtained from the observations, interviews and teacher opinion survey form regarding the practices of the teachers regarding their students with RDs. After the written documents had been read several times, common and similar concepts were written in a code list, and interesting patterns of terms were recorded in separate documents. Each set of data was read several times and the associated actions, views, concepts and differences were transformed into codes and categories. Data analysis was carried out based on the research questions. The practices of the participants, the problems they encountered, how they solved these problems, and the extent of their practices were analyzed comparatively with the data obtained from the observation form, the teacher opinion survey form and interview form. In the first sub-problem, the problems the participants encountered and how they solved them were discussed. The findings were supported by making descriptive analyses with the statements of the participants in the interview data. In the second sub-problem, content analysis was conducted using the observation form, interview form and teacher opinion survey, which the participants made to their students with RDs. The data were analyzed under the themes of preparation for the lesson, teaching the lesson and concluding the lesson. In addition, the findings were supported by descriptive analyses. In the last research problem, the extent to which the participants' coping with RDs and their practices overlapped was analyzed with a matrix determined as "seen" and "not seen" by using the observation form, the interview form and the teacher opinion survey form.

**FINDINGS**

This study aimed to determine the compatibility of the relationship between elementary school teachers' skills regarding RDs and their classroom practices. For this purpose, the findings regarding the first sub-problem, which included the processes of dealing with RDs as detailed in the interviews with the participating teachers and from the teacher opinion survey form, are presented below. First, the negative situations experienced by the participants were determined and presented in Table 2 under the individual and environmental categories.

**Table 2.** Opinions of the Participants on the Difficulties They Encountered While Teaching Reading Skills

Categories	Codes	Participants
Individual	Absenteeism	F, M
	Belligerent attitude	F, M
	Talking a lot	D, F
	Failure to take responsibility	A, R
	Indifference to the lesson	A, F
	Comprehension problems	A, H
	Forgetfulness	D
	Quiet tone of voice	A
	Breaking the rules	F
	Slow reading	H
	Motivation problems	F
	Environmental	Not getting family support
Peer bullying		M

Table 2 shows that teachers experienced both individual and environmental problems while teaching reading skills to their students with RDs. The environmental problems included not being able to get adequate family support and peer bullying. Participants D, F and M emphasized that they could not obtain family support with the following statements:

F: I'm not sure who has custody right now. We don't see much of grandpa. There's a chance he's there. But speaking about our troubles with the mother, does not help either. No matter how much you do, he says, "I don't have custody". In addition, their financial situation is very good, in fact, they do not have any financial problems. But there is no one to look after and support [the child], there's no value placed on education.

M: Children with RDs are often in a situation where they can't get support from their families. The economic situation of the family is also very influential. They have to work. To survive, to live. Although we don't have communication problems with the family, we can't enforce the guidelines. They don't care about education, they cannot support him. At least make him ready for school; don't set him back... He doesn't have a bag, he doesn't have books. He doesn't bring back what we give him. There's a mess, like I said - his house is a mess.

As explained in Table 2, a common view of the participants is that parents are not interested in children with RDs. They explained this situation with examples of the breakup of families and parents arriving home late at night due to economic reasons. Other problems identified by the participants were to do with the students' individual behaviors. When the individual category was examined, it was seen that these included absenteeism,

belligerent attitudes, talking too much, not being able to take responsibility, comprehension problems and indifference towards the lesson. How the participants coped with these problems is presented in Table 3:

**Table 3.** Opinions of the Participants on the Methods of Coping with the Problems They Encountered While Teaching Reading Skills

Categories	Codes	Participants	
Practices	Finding a solution by identifying the cause of the difficulty	D, M	
	One-on-one work	A, F, M	
	Providing study materials	D, F	
	Reading exercises	A, F, H	
	Rewards	A, H, R	
	Giving remedial warnings	F	
	Intensive homework	R	
	Repeating work	A, R	
	Getting them to study with a private tutor	D, R	
	Trying to get them to talk by asking questions	A	
	Getting Help	From the guidance teacher	A, D, F, M
		From peers	D, M, R
		From the family	D, H, M, R,
From the elementary school teacher community		D	
From professional institutions		R	
Legal Processes	Prompting to receive disability report	M, R	
	Providing support training	M, R	
	Notifying the administration	M	

As seen in Table 3, the participants' methods of coping with RDs are grouped under three categories, practices, getting help, and legal processes. When the practices category was examined, it was seen that three participants' included doing reading exercises (A, F, H) and providing rewards (A, H, R). In addition, the participants worked one-on-one with their students (A, F and M), used lots of repetitions (A and R), provided study materials (D and F), and had them study with a private teacher (D and R). Participant A emphasized that he worked one-on-one with the following statement:

A: I teach one-on-one lessons for one hour after school. Not every day, but two days a week in the first semester, and then I do the same in the second semester. Eight people. We solve the problems together with the other children. There is homework, there is repetition. There is Turkish, there is also mathematics. I don't just leave it at Turkish.

Examining participant A's statement, it is likely that giving a course containing Turkish and mathematics lessons two days a week to a group of eight will not be sufficient to cope with RDs. Considering that the student is a student with a learning disability, it would be more efficient to prepare an individualized education program and provide supportive education. As seen in Table 3, the participants mostly sought help from the family (D, H, M, and R) and the guidance teacher (A, D, F, and M), followed by peers (D, M, and R). The common view of the participants with regard to getting help from the family is that the family helps if they accept that their children have RDs. Participants D and R received significant familial support. Participant D asked an undergraduate student to become a private tutor to his student as a result of meetings with the parents. As a result of this additional temporary support, his student became

literate and his reading became fluent. Participant R, on the other hand, communicated frequently with the parents of their student and received familial support.

With regard to legal practices, Table 3 also shows codes for directing the family to obtain a disability report for their children, providing support training and notifying the administration. Participants M and R indicated that they had previously directed families to obtain a disability report for their students and had provided support education. However, this statement was not valid for the students who were in their classes during the academic year in which the research was conducted.

The second sub-problem of the research, regarding what kind of in-class practices the elementary school teachers used for their students with RDs is tabulated in Table 4. The letters "G" and "S" in the applications section in the table represent teachers' general and special practices. The teachers' practices are considered general if they are used with the whole class, and special if they are only for students with RDs. The practices of the participant teachers regarding their students with RDs are presented in Table 4.

**Table 4.** Practices of Participants for Students with Reading Difficulties

Practices	*	A (f)	M (f)	R (f)	H (f)	D (f)	F (f)	Total (f)
Activating prior knowledge	G	6	-	1	3	4	-	14
Working with keywords	G	6	-	2	1	1	-	10
Guessing	G	3	1	2	-	1	1	8
Notifying the target	G	16	16	19	15	19	20	105
Vocabulary development	S	-	-	2	-	-	1	3
Fluent reading	S	1	-	-	1	-	1	3
Help her/him organize things	S	4	5	2	1	6	11	29
Telling how to spell words	S	1	4	-	1	1	5	12
Telling how to write words	S	1	1	-	2	2	6	12
Being with the student when the need is felt	S	7	13	8	3	16	17	64
Reading aloud	S	10	11	4	4	8	8	45
Silent reading	G	9	4	5	5	9	5	37
Doing writing work	G	10	12	13	12	14	17	78
Working with the group	G	3	1	-	-	-	-	4
Drama	G	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Peer assistance	S	-	14	-	-	4	-	18
Paired reading	S	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Other methods	G	5	3	4	1	2	3	18
Written small notes	S	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Verbal explanations	S	6	6	5	10	6	13	46
Giving feedback on reading	S	8	5	-	3	3	8	27
Giving feedback on writing	S	7	8	2	2	7	12	38
Giving feedback on listening/watching	S	-	2	1	1	1	1	6
Giving feedback on the speech	S	6	4	-	1	-	-	11
Giving feedback on behaviour	S	1	11	4	2	8	15	41
Knowledge-based feedback	S	7	4	6	7	4	3	31
Give feedback on images	S	2	-	4	-	-	1	7
Ask questions	S	12	9	10	11	6	4	52
Giving opportunities to ask questions	S	1	3	-	-	1	7	12

Using technological tools	S	-	-	1	-	-	2	3
Giving a working paper	S	6	2	1	3	2	6	20
Submitting a companion book	S	2	-	1	9	1	3	16
Making text adaptations	S	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Other	S	5	-	2	-	-	-	7
Giving additional time when answering the question asked	S	4	5	2	2	2	4	19
Encouraging and encouraging words	S	9	4	-	3	3	11	30
Guiding	S	3	3	1	4	2	4	17
Focusing on strengths and developing	S	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Ensuring silence	G	16	11	15	19	19	7	87
Making sure it sits in the right place	S	9	7	3	-	6	15	40
Regulating heat, light, smell	G	20	9	13	14	17	16	89
Keeping course materials accessible	G	20	12	-	20	20	2	74
Identifying and explaining classroom rules	G	20	10	7	3	20	8	68
Summarizing	G	-	-	1	1	-	-	2
Giving homework	G	3	2	2	6	6	5	24
Make suggestions for the next lesson	G	4	8	5	8	12	4	41
TOTAL		253	212	148	178	233	246	

\*Teachers' practices do not only concern students with reading difficulties but represent general (G) if they appeal to the whole class, and special (S) if they are only for students with reading difficulties.

As seen in Table 4, a total of 253 practices were used by Participant A for a student with RDs, 212 practices by participant M, 148 practices by participant R, 178 practices by participant H, 233 practices by participant D, and 246 practices by participant F. It was determined that the teacher who was observed to use the most practices with his student who had RDs during Turkish lessons was participant A (f=253), while the teacher who was observed to use the fewest practices was participant R (f=148).

The most common practice by the participants is to notify about the target. Participants notified their students about the goal 105 times during the 120-hour observation period. Participant F (f=20) notified the student who had RDs about the goal the most. Participant F notified his student about the goal 20 times during the 120-hour observation period. After notifying the student about the goal, the participants mostly engaged in reading, regulating heat, light and odor (f=89), keeping silent (f=87) and giving written work (f=78).

As seen in Table 4, the practices most frequently used by the teachers are for the all students, including the students with RDs, and not for the students. In this case, although teachers were not using practices designed for students with RDs, these students may have been able to get as much out of these practices as other children in the class. When the specific practices of the participants regarding students with RDs are examined, the most common practices were to be there when they are needed (f=64), asking questions (f=52), providing verbal explanations (f=46) and having them read aloud (f=45). F (f=17) was the teacher who most used the practice of being with the student when needed. A (f=12) was the participant who asked questions the most. The participant who provided the most verbal explanations for the student with RDs was F (f=13), while the teacher who most used reading aloud was M (f=11). As a result of the observation data, it was determined that

the practices that the participants never used with students with RDs were drama, paired reading, giving small written notes, making text adaptations, and focusing on and developing their strengths.

In the last problem of the study, the extent to which how the primary school teachers' coped with RDs and their practices were analyzed comparatively with the data obtained from semi-structured interviews with the participants, observations and teacher opinion survey. The data obtained from the interviews and teacher opinion surveys were compared with the observation form and calculated for each participant with a matrix determining them as "seen" and "not seen". The data obtained were presented and interpreted in Table 5 with a percentage for all participants.

**Table 5.** The Percentage of Convergence of the Opinions and Practices of the Participants towards Students with RDs

Practices	A	M	R	H	D	F
Seen	2	2	0	1	3	3
Not Seen	3	1	6	1	1	1
Overlap Percentage of Opinions and Practices	%40	%67	%0	%50	%75	%75

Table 5 expresses how the participants coped with RDs, their answers to the questions about their classroom practices, and the percentages of overlap with the observation results. In other words, the fact that these values are more or less related to the self-awareness of the participants gives clues about the practices of the teachers and the practices determined as a result of observation.

The fact that the percentage of overlap is 75% means that three of the practices that the participant said she used were observed during 20 hours of observation. For example, Participant F stated that she had her students with RDs work one-on-one, gave them study materials, had them do reading exercises and warned them constantly. Giving study material, conducting reading exercises and continuous warnings are in line with the observation results. The reading exercises used by F for her student with RDs included reading aloud (8), silent reading (5), telling how to read words (5), fluent reading exercises (1) and giving feedback on reading (8). In addition, it was observed that F, who stated that she constantly warned her students verbally and gave behavioral-based feedback to her student who had RDs (15). These practices were consistent with the results of the observation. The only non-overlapping for F was one-to-one work. She expressed this situation in the interview with the participant researcher as follows:

F: I started to be more interested in the lesson because you came, otherwise I left my student alone. I've had him for three years. He's a child who has just started to read for himself. There are seven foreign students in the class. I gave them a reading kit when they arrived, but then I found it in the trash.

**CONCLUSION and DISCUSSION**

In line with the problem of the research, interviews were conducted with the participating teachers, the teacher opinion survey was filled in, and classroom practices were observed. According to the research data, it was observed that the participants mostly told the students with RDs about the goals of the lesson, regulated heat, light and odor, maintained silence and gave them writing practice. When the practices most frequently

used by the participants are examined, it is seen that the applications were mostly aimed at the whole class and did not directly target the students with RDs. In this context, it can be said that this finding is the most striking finding of the research. The first practices that teachers used specifically for students with RDs were being with students with RDs when needed, asking questions, providing verbal explanations and having them read aloud. Various studies in the literature have made similar findings that teachers teach their students by asking questions (Demir & Ersöz, 2014; Gudmundsdatter Magnusson, 2022; Karasu-Avcı & Ketenoğlu-Kayabaşı, 2019; Taşkaya & Muşta, 2008).

It is one of the legal rights of students with RDs to sit in the front (MEB, 2008). When the seating arrangements were examined, all the teachers followed a continuous sliding system. Another important finding of the study is that students with RDs were not deliberately placed in the front. Two of the participants had their students with RDs receive peer assistance. This finding is supported in the literature (Hammeken, 2016; Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2016; Van Keer & Verhaeghe, 2005). However, it was found that the teachers did not use a specific plan in providing peer assistance to students with RDs. The fact that the participants randomly assigned students to receive peer assistance suggests that they did not know enough about effective teaching methods.

It was observed that the participants never used paired reading and drama strategies (Akyol, 2013; Stahl & Heubach, 2005; Vaughn & Linan-Thompson, 2004), which are the most effective ways to cope with RDs. In addition, the permanence of learning can be increased by teaching using the drama method, and it also allows students to interact with each other (Doğan, 2002; Susar Kırmızı, 2008). In this context, the drama method, which is a necessary method for students with RDs to learn effectively and to become integrated with the rest of the class, had been ignored.

The majority of the teachers stated that they did not use special practices so that their students would not feel belittled, and that they did not give different assignments so that their students would not feel bad. This positive attitude towards integrating the student with the rest of the class, combined with the lack of awareness about RDs, unfortunately becomes a disadvantage for the student. The inadequacy of the student cannot be coped with or overcome by ignoring it. This shows that the elementary school teachers were insufficient in terms of dealing with RDs. In the literature, there are many studies that draw attention to the fact that teachers do not use special practices for their students with RDs because they feel inadequate (Altun & Uzuner, 2016; Altun et al., 2011; Altuntaş, 2010; Doğan, 2013; Katsarou, 2018; Leseşane et al., 2018; Sicherer, 2014).

Another striking finding of the study was whether the teachers focused on the strengths of their students with RDs or not. Students who have RDs or are affected by other deficiencies should benefit from all kinds of practices that will enable them to improve themselves, become motivated and, therefore, learn. In this context, it can be said that it is among the responsibilities of elementary school teachers to discover and develop the strengths of their students who have RDs. It is seen that the participants generally did not use special practices for their students who had RDs and they were insufficient in this regard.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that elementary school teachers offer special education, and that they examine the research other material when they have students who are diagnosed with, or who they think have, RDs. When they identify these students, promptly notifying the family, the school administration and school counsellor will be effective in terms of providing rapid access to the support education that the student should receive. It is important that teachers do one-on-one reading activities with students who have RDs, so that they do not fall behind their peers and can continue their education in the general class. In this context, it is recommended that teachers work with their students who have RDs to improve their reading skills through activities such as repetitive reading, paired reading, choir reading and reader theatre. In addition, considering that these students have reading comprehension problems, it is recommended that reading comprehension and metacognitive strategies be taught. Whether teachers provide effective, high-quality education in reading skills to their students with RDs depends on their mastery of the field. In this context, it is recommended that elementary school teachers be given intensive in-service trainings including reading disability support programs, reading teaching strategies, creating a positive classroom environment and self-regulation skills. In the process of coping with RDs, the effectiveness of the curriculum given to students with RDs can be increased by obtaining support from their families. In this context, it is recommended that school administrations cooperate with Guidance Research Centers and organize support programs to raise families' awareness about RDs. Although reading disability is a neurological and language-based disability, many children are diagnosed with dyslexia solely as a result of inadequate education. Many children who can gain reading skills by being supported with effective teaching techniques and strategies are labelled and alienated from school due to their diagnosis of dyslexia. For this reason, elementary school teachers have a great responsibility in identifying RDs and providing effective instructional support. It is essential for all children with and without special needs that elementary school teachers are properly trained in education faculties before entering the profession. In this context, it is suggested that a "Learning Disability" course be added to the elementary school teaching departments of education faculties separately from the special education course. It may be possible for pre-service teachers, who have been trained about learning disabilities in all their dimensions, to teach with a method similar to the Intervention Response Model, which has been applied in the USA in recent years, and which significantly reduces the number of individuals diagnosed with dyslexia. Reading experts should be trained in order to increase the professional individual support available to students with learning difficulties and to support teachers with techniques and methods. Our recommendation that reading specialists can both provide support to the elementary school teacher in classroom teaching and provide professional, individual or small-group teaching support to students who are experiencing difficulties.

## **ETHICAL TEXT**

In this article, the journal writing rules, publication principles, research and publication ethics, and journal ethical rules were followed. The responsibility belongs to the authors for any violations that may arise regarding the article. The data of the research were collected in the 2017-2018 academic year. This research

was carried out with the approval of Kastamonu Governorship and Provincial Directorate of National Education dated 10.01.2018 and numbered E.481807.

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