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Profiles of Gifted Students in Turkey

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to determine the profiles and characteristics of the students at the six science-art centers in Turkey and to find out shortcomings of the current student identification system. In this research a case study approach was used, and data gathered with the help of a developed questionnaire. This questionnaire was delivered to 304 students who are educated at the Science-Art Centers in the cities of Bayburt, Bursa, İzmir, Sinop, Tekirdağ and Trabzon and 258 questionnaires returned.

The data clarified that 36% of the sample's mothers and 55% of their fathers were graduated from the universities. In addition, present gifted student-identification system is mostly concentrated on determining the students at upper class of society.

Key words: *gifted children/students, gifted student identification system of Turkey, high-special level classrooms, science and art centers, survey method.*

1. Introduction

Individuals' education in a community should be the most important factor. In parallel to this viewpoint, the community should not avoid financial support to develop solutions on the educational issues concerning small or large part of society. For example, a large amount of money is given for individuals who have low intelligence. However, thinking of this expense as a waste of money or time is not acceptable in modern societies. Likewise, in gifted children' education process, special education and opportunities should be provided for them for the purpose of using their potentials in effective ways and thus, they can adapt into the community more

easily (Renzulli, 1985). If these individuals cannot be identified and educated accordingly, for the time being they probably become dangerous people for the community and the majority of them would also have physiological problems. All communities approximately have 2–3% of gifted students (Marland, 1972).

Giftedness is a complex of intelligence, aptitudes, talents, expertise, motivation and creativity that lead an individual to productive performance in areas or disciplines. To understand gifted children it is essential to realize that, although they are children with the same basic needs as other children, they are very different (Renzulli, 1999). Gifted and talented children are often more advanced in basic skills than their peers. They are able to learn much more rapidly than children of average abilities (Feldhussen, 1986). They are adroit in dealing with complex concepts and abstract materials and they are advanced in verbal abilities and thinking skills. For example, a gifted 2-year-old child prefers and plays appropriately with toys designed for 6 years-olds and he/she speaks very early using a sophisticated vocabulary (Roedell, Jackson and Robinson, 1980).

These children need to be educated in different programmes with different strategies. The purposes in giving different education to these children are mostly to make their psychological development healthier and to use their potential for the benefit of society. It is believed that if a community is able to give effective education to their gifted students, these students are able to give impetus to the development of society in the areas of art and science.

Unfortunately, many teachers and families do not knowingly deal with the issues or problems of gifted children in Turkey (Akarsu, 1993). They do not realize or know how to handle them. Although studies related to gifted children have been started in many countries since 1920 (Jordan, 1962), in our country it is rather new (Akarsu, 1993). This partly achieved in the art (Enç, 2005) however, in the science little has been done on this issue up to now.

Gifted Children (G/C)'s Education in the Turkish Context; Turkish studies on G/C's education are not quit advanced yet. However, some kinds of insignificant studies have been made progress. For example, high-special level classes were opened in the 1960's. Nevertheless, inequitable applications have been encountered in the G/C identification system and it had to be got rid of. In the 1980's, these kinds of attempts were started again and some projects were developed with the help of the previous projects. However, the most important development about G/Cs education is talent development centers which were established under the name of "Science and Art Centers" (SACs) in five cities by 1993. Now, there are ten SACs which function and accept G/C in Turkey under the auspices of the Ministry of National Education (MNE). There are also seven ones which do not accept children yet. However, most of these centers are either new or still in the establish-

ment phase. Thus, it has been found out that there are many problems concerning children and/or teacher selection and programme implementation processes in these centers (Gökdere, Küçük & Çepni, 2003; Gökdere & Küçük, 2003). Within those problems, it is believed that the Gifted/Talented (G/T) selection method is the most important issue because teachers have essential roles in all phases of the learning process and they are the most influential. Nevertheless, SACs have been newly opened and some of them are still in the establishment phases, it is not an unexpected result for these centers to have some problems in the teaching area. Here, there is a point that needs to be thoroughly examined: how should we select the G/T more appropriately for the task? Furthermore, how can we gain their ideal characteristics and educate them for a profession? Doubtlessly, it would be helpful to find out those problems and solve them in a way which can provide some critical implications for the G/E literature.

The selection from the start to the work of the Turkish G/T includes a sequence summarized and presented below (Gökdere & Küçük, 2003):

1. Local education administrations (LEA) where SACs are situated announce that teachers with some characteristics are required for SACs. Therefore, they send an official letter to all school administrations.
2. Teachers who are willing to work at these centers apply to LEA.
3. Those whose applications have been accepted are taken into a seminar work organized by the Ministry of National Education (MNE). Then, sample teachers are divided according to their subject areas and each group is expected to finish a project work. When these project works are finished teachers are considered as successful and then hired for the job.
4. The required correspondence is done about these teachers with related institutions and they are in charge of SACs.
5. These centers have an independent school status so that there is no mechanism to inspect these schools and teachers at work.

It is accepted that G/E includes a student-centered approach, however teachers' roles in this education are too important to be neglected. Especially, selection of the most appropriate ones among a lot of candidates is difficult and a detailed method is required to examine whether or not a candidate is suitable for the job. In the Turkish context, as mentioned above announcement for candidacy is limited to ones who work mostly in city centers. However, selection announcement of G/T candidates should be made in a manner that all teachers who want to have a job in the schools are notified and thus they should not be limited, as stressed by Renzulli (1985).

High level of intellect and giftedness is not a concept related to class, race or nationality concepts. However, children who come from a high level of social and

economical environment can be considered as better than those who come from poor environment (Csikszentmihaly, Rathunde & Whalen, 1993). As explained before, education of gifted children trend in Turkey is a new. Because of inadequacy of training institutions and quantity of staff (Akarsu, 1993), only a small part of gifted children have had the chance to benefit from these training services. Knowing the characteristics of the children at these centers is important for defining the current system's inadequacies from the student identification point of view.

2. Purpose

The purpose of this study is to determine the profiles and characteristics of the students at the six science-art centers in Turkey and to find out shortcomings of the current student identification system.

3. Method

In this research a case study approach was used (Bassey, 1999), and data were gathered with the help of a survey method. We prepared a profile questionnaire form. In the development process of this questionnaire, the literature related to gifted students' characteristics was reviewed (Renzulli, 1999; Winner, 1996; Winner, 2000; Enç, 2005). After this survey had been prepared experts criticized its form and three questions were eliminated and a total of twenty questions (One of them Open-Ended Question) constituted its final form. Data were collected in summer 2004. The questionnaire was group administered in each SAC by the authors. This questionnaire was delivered to 304 students who are educated at the Science-Art Centers in the cities of Bayburt, Bursa, İzmir, Sinop, Tekirdağ and Trabzon and 258 questionnaires returned. These centers were randomly selected.

4. Findings

In this part of the study the gathered data for each question of the survey are presented in tables. Some explanations to the data taken into consideration are under the tables.

The sample included 126 female and 132 male students. According to the talented areas, there are 120 of the students in the cognitive, 70 in music, 59 in art, 4 in theatre and 5 in physical area. While 256 of them live with their parents, only 2

of the students' parents are divorced. All of these students continue currently their regular grades in which they officially should be. Furthermore, 31 of the students have sisters/brothers who are university students.

Table 1 shows the occupation groups of the sample's parents

Table 1: Parents' Occupations

Members	Official	Worker	Free Profession	Farmer	Retired	Un employment
<i>Mother</i>	74	3	13	0	23	145
<i>Father</i>	149	18	74	5	11	1

While 149 of the students' fathers are officials, 145 of the students' mothers are housewives.

Table 2 shows sister/brother numbers of the sample and which children of their parents.

Table 2: Sister/Brother Numbers and Their Position in the Family.

Cases	1	2	3	4	5	Not a sister or brother
Sister/brother numbers	129	67	22	6	6	27
Position in the family	113	105	27	6	7	

Table 2 shows that 218 (113+105) of the students are the first or second child of their parents.

Table 3. Students' Activities out of the Classroom

1. Students' activities out of course hours	Student numbers	2. Kinds of book they read	Student numbers	3. Kinds of tv programs they watch	Student numbers
Read Books	52	Adventure	92	Child Programmes	52
Use Computer	16	Story	51	Knowledge Competition	70
Do Physical Exercises	84	Poem	1	Sport Activities	11
Listen to Music	34	Science fiction	15	Documentary Programmes	39
Play Chess	8	Novel	67	Comedy	29
Play Games	28	Essay	1	Music	13
No Activities	36	Others	8	Cinema	24
				Tv Series	16

Table 3 indicates that gifted students mostly join some kinds of sport activities (84 students), read adventure books (92 students) and watch generally knowledge competition kinds of programmes on TV (70 students) out of their school time.

These students receive help with different family members; 79 of them from fathers, 37 of them from mothers, 47 of them from sisters and brothers. However 95 of the students do not receive help from any of the family members. 165 of the students have not gone to any special education institutions and only 37 of them take special courses. More than half of the students of the sample stated that they have a habit of studying regular lessons and 140 students clarified that their studying environment is quite good. In addition, 219 of the students' academic average is between 4.5 and 5.0.

Table 4: Student Parents' Training Levels

Training position	Not any school graduate	Primary school graduate	Upper primary school graduate	High school graduate	University school graduate
Father	0	25	17	74	142
Mother	4	74	29	58	93

As seen from Table 4, 141 of the gifted students' fathers and 93 of their mothers are university graduates.

Findings Related to the Open-Ended Question

One open-ended question was also asked to the sample in order to clarify their aims to join these centers.

What is your aim to join the Science-Art Centre?

The main aims are developing talents by learning new things (82), have a good job in future (10), developing projects (30), spending their leisure time effectively (20), looking for differences (12), becoming scientists (17), becoming artists (21) at their gifted areas. The other students gave no reason.

Table 5 shows that students join these centers with their self-willingness (178) as the first, influence of their family (112) as the second, influence of their teachers (101) as the third, environmental factors (159) as the fourth and other factors (246) as the fifth factors.

Table 5. Gifted Students' Reasons to be A candidate for Science-Art Centres

Factors/Priority	1. degree	2. degree	3. degree	4. degree	5. degree
Teacher	58	67	101	27	5
Environment	5	25	63	159	6
Family	17	112	74	54	1
Self-willingness	178	47	20	11	1
Other	0	3	2	7	246

5. Conclusion

From the findings, it can be said that the number of male and female students at these centers are approximately the same (*male 126-female,132*). In the past, only gifted students in art areas were supported in Turkey (Enç, 2005). However, this study showed that currently 46.5% of the students of science-art centers are gifted in intellectual areas, and, 51.5 of them are gifted in art areas. This should be viewed as a positive change. The present identification system determines talented students mostly in cities. Thus, other talented students, especially living in towns and villages are ignored.

The findings showed that 96.5% of the sample stay with their parents and 97% of their parents live together. Winner (2000) stressed that this factor is very effective to be aware of the students' talents.

It was concluded that all the gifted students continue their ordinary school programmes in Turkey. However, to enhance these students' talents and increase their potentials, mostly acceleration and enrichment programmes are implemented (Gallagher, 1998). One of these applications is to promote students to a grade that is more appropriate to their intellectual levels. However, these kinds of methods are not implemented systemically in Turkey.

While 55% of the sample's fathers are officials, nearly 55% of the sample's mothers are housewives. It is concluded that environmental factors and family qualities are important in the determination of talented students. In addition, some other studies support our findings (Marland, 1972; Tannenbaum, 1986; Winner, 2000). It is interesting that 55% of the student's fathers and 36% of the students' mothers are university graduates, while 16% of the population in Turkey is university graduates (OECD, 1995). It would be concluded that parents' training level is an important factor to be aware of their children's talents.

While 35% of the students do not receive any help from their family members, 65% of them accept some amount of help from their family members. Most of the students regularly study lessons, have a good learning environment, and have a high social-economical opportunity and they also have high average academic scores at their schools.

The sample usually prefer to read adventure books. It is thought that this is because of the curiosity in their nature. Students have different hobbies out of class time, so it is concluded that gifted students enjoy differences (Tannenbaum, 1986).

Sample's preferences show that willingness is the first factor to join science-art centers. Thus, it may be claimed that they are motivated and ready for an advanced level of training. While the sample are willing to come to these centers, they do not know exactly what these science-art centers' aims are.

6. Implications

Students may have talents in more than one area (Ford, 1998), so, the current systems or models for giftedness in Turkey should be re-arranged. In order to find out and solve the problems gifted students face in developed countries, some kinds of projects were implemented (Winner, 1996). These kinds of studies should also be conducted in Turkey. There are support-groups established to help gifted children and it has been stressed that these kinds of groups have an enormous effect on gifted children (McMahon, 1996). It is necessary to establish these kinds of groups to help Turkish gifted students.

Gifted students are placed in grades according to their intelligence levels. In some countries they promote upwards (Gallagher, 1998). This kind of promotion should also be implemented in Turkey.

The present gifted student identification system of Turkey is based on just determination of the students who usually live in city centers. However, gifted students can also be found in towns or villages. For this reason, this identification system should be expanded all over the country.

From the data it was concluded that in Turkey mostly gifted students from high social-economic levels are determined. However, a system is required to determine all gifted children regardless of their socio-economic level. Teachers and parents should be informed about the characters and special needs of gifted students and they should be aware of the aims of the science-art centers.

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