

CY-ICER 2014

## Inequality in Educational Opportunities of Gifted and Talented Children in Türkiye

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### Abstract

Gifted and talented children are the ones that should have great importance and they should be given great attention in terms of social, emotional, cognitive adequateness, interests and abilities. For that reason, the education they took is one of the priorities for their developmental needs so as to provide them the opportunities they need in educational environments. Moreover, the education should be seen as a critical processes consisting of identification, assessment and guidance. Gifted education in Turkey, is taken into consideration for the students needing special education and for normal developed children and this issue has been recently an issue for educational environments and decisions. Due to the fact that most of the gifted and talented students in Turkey spend their time in regular school environments with other normal developed children, the opportunities they can benefit or not is a critical point in that sense. Hence, the purpose of this study is to handle educational opportunities of gifted and talented children in Turkey and to discuss inequality in these opportunities. The opportunities are analyzed and criticized as in terms of having qualified teachers, strategy usage of differentiation. Additionally, depending upon these inequality educational opportunities, some possible solutions are given as a general frame suitable for the cultural and social structure of Turkey.

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Peer-review under responsibility of the Organizing Committee of CY-ICER 2014.

*Keywords:* Gifted, talented, needs, opportunity, inequality, student, parent, teacher

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### Introduction Gifted Education in Turkey

In Turkish history, the education of gifted students goes back to the Ottoman Empire where the gifted and talented students are gathered and educated in the Enderun or palace. Moreover, the establishment of Village Institutes in 1948 is another act for the educational opportunities of gifted and talented children (Baykoç, Uyaroglu, Aydemir,

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2012). In the identification processes, RAMs (Guidance and Research Centers) serves officially; however, these centers do not provide education, instead they are only in order to identify a child and give report in accordance with the test results and these identification processes. They are the other types of the schools that can be considered as a way to provide differentiated educational opportunity to these children that Science High Schools and the Anatolian High Schools; however, most of the high schools in country become Anatolian Schools that all of these Anatolian schools do not carry that potential and qualifications as in the past. However, especially in school curriculum when it goes to the applications in schools in terms of gifted and talented education, there are not enough systematic efforts in Turkey (Eris B, Seyfi R. & Hanoz, S., 2009).

In addition to these, Education Programs for Talented Students (EPTS), The Center for Gifted and Talented and Inonu Children's University, Ford Otosan Beyazıt Primary School, TEV İnanç Türkeş Private High School (TEVITOL) and Prof. Dr. Necate Baykoç Gifted and Talented Institute and Center are the other schools and the foundations giving gifted and talented education. (Baykoç, Uyaroglu, Aydemir, 2012)

Most importantly, Science and Art Centers (BİLSEM) are the institutions that gather the students identified as gifted and talented in some cities throughout the country. They are established in 1994 by Prof. Dr. Necate BAYKOÇ. Apart from classical curriculum, some studies and activities requiring high level thinking, creativity and hands on activities are carried out according to students' interest and ability domains (Baykoç, N., 2010). Through the country, there are about 70 Science and art centers in various cities. However, this limited number can be barrier for some students living apart from these cities in terms of accessing to these centers. Hence, some of the gifted and talented students deprived of taking such a free education they need; the inequality occurs among these students in that sense.

Additionally, recently, some private schools have some enterprises to provide opportunities to gifted and talented students. For example, application of NB Interest and Ability Domain Programs, which is the first and unique program applicable to the sociocultural and economic backgrounds of Turkey, is a way to reveal the interest, abilities and real potential of not only gifted children but also all children in the school (Baykoç, Uyaroglu, Aydemir, 2012). This is done by adopting this program to their own curriculum; hence, no need to worry about the exact curriculum determined by the Ministry of Education. Furthermore, some private schools include arts, sports, special science and math classes in their activities apart from curriculum and even; recently, some of them open gifted and talented courses and classes apart from the exact classes children are attending with other students.

## 2. Educational Opportunities of Gifted and Talented Children

The general purpose of the schools is to gain the signified objectives to each child in a certain period of time; however, when it is thought that the ones having already gained that objectives prior to that class or grade level, it can be seen they cannot sufficiently benefit from the opportunities provided. Moreover, these students need greater challenges and variety of detailed concepts. However, due to the fact that they are in the same environment with other normal developed children, their needs and potentials are not be fulfilled in these regular classroom environments (Gadanidis, Hughes & Cordy, 2011).

It is the fact that, failure to provide the needed and essential education to students needing special education causes to inequal opportunities in education (Celkan 1991, as cited in Levent, 2011). In contemporarily world, the needs of gifted students has had a crucial importance (Hannah, James, Montelle & Nokes ). In learning settings, they should have tasks enabling to question, inquire and to participate in constructive dialogues; hence they can interpret and review their ideas (Deizmann & Watters, 2001). However, when it is considered in the point of view that these regular and typical classroom settings and tasks they engage has some limitations for gifted students (Deizmann & Watters, 2001). Moreover, for some, their desire to struggle and involving interesting, new knowledge will remain untouched while making them lost in these settings. Hence, although it is known that most of the gifted students have higher attention and enthusiasm (Uyaroglu, 2011), this regular classroom setting makes them bored (Gadanidis, Hughes & Cordy, 2011). They need differentiated educational programs that reveal and develop their potential, creativity and skills (Baykoç, 2010; Levent, 2011) and it is their natural right to take these differentiated education according to Convention on the Rights of the Children (Levent, 2011).

On the contrary, the lessons are mostly designed for the ones having difficulty in understanding and low achievers so as to get the basic objective. However, these students complain about that situation as “ teachers make lots of exercises although we understand it very well and give lots of similar homework and I get bored from doing the same things”(Baykoç, Aydemir, Uyaroglu 2013); hence, they suffer from the unequal opportunities they are provided.

However, the exact case in all over the country is such that to make a systematic action we are in fact too late (Gökdere M., Küçük M. (2003). Additionally, gifted students are seen as one of the member of the students needing special education. This categorization is helpful and meaningful. However, much more emphasize in this category is given to the disabled ones, because gifted students are seen as the lucky one, intelligent one (Eriz, Seyfi & Hanoz, 2009). Furthermore, for most of the people, because of their superiority, they do not need extra support; even, it is believed that they are advantageous. However, in reality, having a child as gifted is a disadvantage and needs to more attention and support; especially in Türkiye.

Moreover, the opportunities recently given from public schools are not so easily affordable for the most of students in the country. Hence, the more the parents have high socioeconomic levels, the more opportunity they can find to increase their children’s potential, discover their interests and abilities. Although as a recent struggle carried by Hacettepe University covers the all of the students, rumors about the limitations in number of students again cause a difficulty for an only affordable opportunity in terms of economic level of students. Therefore, drawbacks of gifted education are much more than the advantages and this idea goes parallel with the parents of these students views as found in Eriz, Seyfi and Hanoz (2009)’s study.

### 3. Educational Opportunities in Terms of Qualified Teachers

According to Westberg, Karen and others (1993), in these environments gifted students have little opportunity for taking different instructional and curricular practices suitable and needed for their nature and skills; in addition, even gifted program exist in a school, there are variety of reasons not to implement these programs such as teacher inadequacy, classroom environments, curricula and needs of normal developed students.

According to the reports of “Little Genius Workshop (Küçük Dahiler Çalıştayı)” (2012), which is conducted in Ankara with the participation of children, parents, teachers and educators in the field, the most crucial and emergent need of the Turkish Education system so as to give the needed opportunity to gifted and talented children is to raise the qualified and specialized teachers in terms of giftedness. The fact that due to the lack of knowledge about the emotional, cognitive and social developmental priorities of these students, most of the teachers have difficulty so as to know, diagnose and lead the gifted children in their classroom, on the contrary, they sometimes label children as “naughty” or even “hyperactive” or as “unsocial”. Additionally, it is concluded in this workshop that lessons and curriculum are not planned by taking gifted and talented students into consideration although most of them take part in the activities and programs in their regular classrooms and spend their time in these classrooms with other normal developed children (Westberg, Archambault, Dobyns, & Salvin, 1993).

Teacher qualifications are the one of the crucial issues preventing the gifted students’ taking preferred and needed education. However, it is the fact that there is only one undergraduate program training the teachers of gifted students which is in İstanbul University. Most of the teacher training programs for other branches and even classroom teaching programs do not have such a course introducing the properties of the gifted and talented students and how they should plan and shape their lesson in accordance with their properties and needs “Little Genius Workshop (Küçük Dahiler Çalıştayı)” (2012).

Furthermore, parents see the situation as violating the equality of opportunity and suffers from the “lack of well-equipped teachers” and as one of the parents states “If these children are different and if they are to contribute to their country and to the world, they must be provided with appropriate teachers and with special education status” and they suggest the meditation of the gifted education Programs to all teachers, classroom, branch teachers as well as guidance teachers. (Eris, Seyfi and Hanoz, 2009, pp.59).

When it comes to view the equality of opportunities in a general perspective, it is the fact that it can also lead to the inequality among students. In Türkiye, mostly due to lack of knowledge about giftedness and how to be behaved to these students, it constructs hierarchy among children due to labeling and classifying children by using some adjectives such as intelligent, superior, etc. (Eris, Seyfi and Hanoz, 2009, pp.59).

#### 4. Educational Opportunities in terms of Strategy Usage of Differentiation

The differentiation strategies that can be used for the educational needs of gifted and talented children can be classified as acceleration, grouping and enrichment. The term as, radical acceleration , can be defined as the entrance of gifted and talented students to the high schools or universities before three or more years earlier and commonly used in countries such as, mostly in US, China, Korea, UK, Austria, Poland and Russia. Moreover, radical acceleration is applied to the gifted students as having IQ scores greater than 160 (Gross & Vliet, 2005).

While Ministry of Education is tend to be educated with their peers for gifted and talented students , application of promoting as an acceleration is allowed if the students are qualified enough within the views and permissions of their teachers, parents and school administration. Furthermore, it is the fact that there is a limitation on this promotion that only one year promoting is allowable. Hence, although lots of benefits on both children and on both countries are seen in some other countries applying this strategy, it can be seen that there is no such an application indicating radical acceleration, which needs to three or more years promotion. With the help of this strategy, children can enter their occupations and promote in their lives quickly; for example, the ones used radical acceleration benefited from “in specialization at a young age” benefit or making researchers in their young age and leading their interest in their work field opportunities. Hence, due to the fact that lack of these opportunity and the fact that educational opportunities for these children is common in the dimension of supporting their formal education, children are deprived of these benefits and opportunities (Tortop, H.S., 2012).

#### 5. Suggestions for Possible Solutions

Although it is extensively known that gifted students’ excessive potential to be successful in variety of the areas, whether or not this potential will be revealed or not mostly rely on variety of factors (Vlahovic, Vidovic & Arambasic , 1999).). In order not to lose and rust the creativity of the gifted students in classrooms, they should be supported creative environments where they need to use their skills and make meaningful inferences while enhancing their creative potential (Emilia, Lopez, Giselle, Esquive, John & Houtz, 1993). Hence, in gifted students’ learning, giving importance to use various student based teaching methods can be a remedy to advance and improve their special abilities and to reveal their full potential (Deizmann & Watters, 2001). In fact, any action should begin with the training of the teachers. Gifted education programs should be integrated into already applied teacher training programs and new courses in each teacher training programs for each branch should be developed. By this way, the ones graduated from universities can be well equipped and qualified in terms of gifted and talented education and rights and opportunities of these students as well as having enough knowledge about how they should behave to these students.

Additionally, organizing seminars and encouraging both teachers and parents to participating in these seminars, workshops, and congress can be a useful way to inform them about cognitive emotional, social and physiological developments and needs of these gifted and talented students. Moreover, these can help to guide which approaches they should use for these students, how they design their lessons and how they can lead their gifted and talented students to other centers for both identification and education.

Furthermore, books and resources indicating related research studies can be another options to increase both the awareness and the sensitivity of the issue. However, although there is a real lack for such resources and research studies, both studying in that area and encouraging the people working and studying in that area as well as encouraging them to read the available resources may be helpful.

Moreover, the fact that in these days, most endeavors made in the private sectors and private schools who are too

costly, scholarship both from organizations and foundations should be encouraged and generalized such as provided by TÜBİTAK as summer camps, encouragements, etc.. Educational Opportunities in terms of Preparation of the educational programs in accordance with in an individualized format developing their interest and abilities (Ataman, 2003; Davis & Rimm, 2004; van Tassel-Baska, 2005).

In addition, These are their rights that gifted and students can benefit from acceleration programs more consciously by beginning school earlier, promoting, taking later courses; grouping as involving in special classes, special schools, grouping part time or after school, grouping at some centers and enrichment programs as supporting ones in terms of arts and academics, project competitions, visits, learning centers. (Ataman, 2003; Davis & Rimm, 2004). Hence, due to the fact that acceleration programs improves the motivation, school achievements, self-confidence and especially prevents them to intellectual and cognitive laziness (Tansel-Baska, 1986, as cited in Tortop, 2012) this conscious usage and awareness should also be generalized all over the country.

By taking these suggestions into consideration, we may prevent to lose of these students in traditional learning settings by revealing their full potential and we may prevent them to think school as a boring environment by enabling them a more challenging, creative and beneficial, and joyful environment. Moreover, we may prevent brain drain which is great danger for the country's future in this way.

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