

## **A LOOK AT DISSERTATIONS RELATED TO GIFTED STUDENTS' EDUCATION IN TURKEY BETWEEN THE YEARS 1995–2011**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Gifted education is a challenging area for educators since it is recently developing all over the world. Due to its developing aspects, gifted education policies of the countries and also researches about this issue are continuing to improve its deficiencies. This situation is also valid for Turkey. Hence, this paper aims to examine the graduate studies dedicated to gifted education in Turkey. For this reason, a total of 64 masters and PhD dissertations between the years 1995 and 2011 in the web site of The Council of Higher Education with the key word *gifted* in their titles were analyzed in term of document analysis. In data analysis process, dissertations were examined under four headings: (a) researcher patterns, (b) supervisor patterns, (c) topic patterns and (d) methodological patterns with their sub-titles. The results will be helpful to illustrate the present situation in Turkey and provide further ideas for future studies about this topic.

**Keywords:** Gifted students, dissertations in Turkey, document analysis.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Gifted education has been considered as a challenging area for educators since it has developing aspects. There are different applications for gifted students' education in the world as described by Akarsu (2004). To illustrate, in Europe, Holland, Germany and England are the main countries which conduct gifted education with the help of special schools, centers and associations. In England, in addition to special schools and centers, parents encourage supportive groups which organize summer schools and working opportunities with mentors for the enrichment of the gifted students. Russia is another country which has got prosperous outcomes since 1950s with special schools for the gifted and talented students. One group of those schools gives education in term of natural sciences and mathematics whereas the rest considers literature, music, foreign language, folklore and philosophy education. Also, Israel considers this situation's both governmental and practical sides by providing serious efforts to gifted education. It conducts identification process and gives education with special schools and programs.

In Turkey, the most dominant trend for gifted students' education is Science and Arts Center model which provides after school activities to identified gifted and talented students. In those centers, students are grouped according to their abilities such as mathematics, science, music, art and they are given project based learning opportunities to enhance their potentials. Yasemin Karakaya Science and Art Center in İstanbul is the first one opened in 1995. According to the reports of Turkish Republic National Ministry of Education, by the year 2010, the number of Science and Art Centers has reached 61 in 55 different districts of Turkey and the total number of students registered to those centers has been reported to transcend 9000. In addition, there is a governmental elementary school in İstanbul named as T.C. Beyazıd Ford Otosan Elementary School which has been conducted due to the protocole signed between İstanbul University and Ministry of National Education in 30.06.2002. In here, intellectually gifted ones are educated with their non-gifted peers. In some cases, gifteds are educated with special instructions for themselves whereas in some cases they get teaching with the others. Furthermore, there is a private foundation for the education of gifted and talented high school level students in Gebze, Turkey named as Turkish Education Foundation, İnanc Foundation.

As well as educating such students in schools and centers, the efforts in this area need to be supported by academic studies. And it is seen that gifted education has been considered as a significant research topic by the academic areas recently. By considering the significance of gifted students and their education, this paper aims to analyze the research conducted by graduate students in Turkish Universities from 1995 to 2011 and find out the trends about gifted students' education.

## METHOD

A qualitative study was conducted by means of document analysis in the research. Document analysis includes the examination of written materials related to the aim of the study (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2009). For this reason, dissertations in the National Dissertation Center with the term *gifted* in their title at the web site of the Council of Higher Education (<http://tez2.yok.gov.tr>) were searched. As a result of the simple search option of the web site, a total of 64 dissertations were reached. Dissertations whose researcher did not put any restrictions on them were downloaded in order to make necessary investigations. Restricted dissertations' investigation resulted in limited consequences.

Document analyses of the dissertations were collected under 4 themes (Çakıcı & Ilgaz, 2011). Firstly, researcher patterns were analyzed in term of researchers' dissertation type, research year and gender. Secondly, supervisor patterns were analyzed in term of their gender and title. Thirdly, topic patterns were analyzed. Finally, methodological patterns were analyzed in term of study design and sample type. The frequency and percentage distributions were provided for each case to see the trends on the researches about gifted education area.

## RESULTS

### (a) Researcher Patterns

Researcher patterns were analyzed in term of dissertation type, gender and study year of the researcher. According to Table 1, 82.8 % (53) of the dissertations consist of masters degree dissertations whereas 17.2 % (11) of them are PhD level dissertations. Since taking doctoral degree is more specific, dissertations at this level are far less.

**Table 1.** Distribution of the types of dissertations.

Type	n	%
<i>PhD</i>	11	17.2
<i>Masters</i>	53	82.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>100.0</b>

As demonstrated in Table 2, when the genders of the researchers are considered, 71.9 % (46) of the researchers are female whereas 28.1 % (18) are male.

**Table 2.** Distribution of the gender of researchers.

Gender	n	%
<i>Male</i>	18	28.1
<i>Female</i>	46	71.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Distribution of the dissertations with respect to their submission years are collected under 3 groups each of which elapse 5 year periods in Table 3. The results indicate that 10.9 % (7) of the dissertations belong to the years 1995-2000. 17.2 % (11) of the dissertations belong to the years 2001-2005. 71.9 % (46) of them belong to the years 2006-2011. The last group 2006-2011 covers 6 years. The reason for this one more year is that only two dissertations has been seen to submit in 2011.

**Table 3.** Distribution of the dissertations with respect to years.

Years	n	%
1995–2000	7	10.9
2001–2005	11	17.2
2006–2011	46	71.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**(b) Supervisor Patterns**

Supervisor patterns were investigated in term of gender and title. Three dissertations have been found to have co-supervisors which make the total number of supervisors different than the number of dissertations. Similar to researchers' gender results, female supervisors constitute 57.6 % (38) of the supervisors whereas male supervisors constitute 42.4 % (28) as can be seen in Table 4.

**Table 4.** Distribution of the gender of the supervisors.

Gender	n	%
Male	28	42.4
Female	38	57.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>100.0</b>

According to Table 5, 40.9 % (27) of the supervisors are titled as Prof.Dr.; 40.9 % (27) are Assist.Dr. and 18.2 % (12) are Assoc.Dr.

**Table 5.** Distribution of the titles of supervisors.

Title	n	%
Assoc.Prof.Dr.	12	18.2
Assist.Prof.Dr	27	40.9
Prof.Dr.	27	40.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>100.00</b>

**(c) Topic Patterns**

Distribution of the topics studied in the dissertations is demonstrated in Table 6. According to Table 6, most of the dissertations deal with psychological concerns of gifted students whereas few consider their special needs in specific subject areas.

**Table 6.** Distribution of the dissertations with respect to topics.

Topic	n	%
1. Psychological approaches	20	31.2
2. Identification processes	11	17.2
3. Science and technology education	9	14.1
4. Giftedness and gifted education	8	12.5
5. Creativity/problem solving skills/critical thinking skills	4	6.2
6. Mathematics Education	3	4.7
7. Parents' views	3	4.7
8. Teachers' and administrators' views	2	3.1
9. Program studies	1	1.6
10. Social sciences education	1	1.6
11. Foreign language education	1	1.6
12. Art Education	1	1.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>100.0</b>

31.2 % (20) of the dissertations have been found to focus on psychological issues such as achievement, moral issues, motivation, self efficacy, life satisfaction, emotional intelligence. Next, identification processes of gifted students have been studied with a percentage of 17.2 (11). For example, tests such as Cognitive Assessment System with pre-norm studies for different age level students have been investigated. Dissertations which have dealt with science and technology education constitute 14.1 % (9) of all. Topics which include giftedness and gifted education as a whole make 12.5 % (8) of total. Dissertations which focus on skills such as problem solving, critical thinking and creativity make 6.2 % (4) of all. 4.7 % (3) of the dissertations deal with mathematics education. 4.7 % (3) consider parents' views and 3.1 % (2) consider teachers' and administrators' views. Frequency of the dissertations related to art education, foreign language education, social sciences education and program development is 1 for each making 1.6 % of the total.

#### **(d) Methodology Patterns**

Methodological patterns were investigated in term of study design and sample type. According to Table 7, qualitative studies make 9.4 % (6) of the total whereas quantitative studies constitute 40.6 % (26) of them. The dissertations which conducted with mixed methods have been seen with a percentage of 17.2 (11). 32.8 % (23) of the dissertations were restricted by their researchers. Hence, they were not included in the analysis.

**Table 7.** Distribution of the study types.

<b>Study Design</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
<i>Quantitative</i>	26	40.6
<i>Restricted</i>	21	32.8
<i>Mixed</i>	11	17.2
<i>Qualitative</i>	6	9.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The samples of the dissertations were presented in Table 8. According to the findings; 7.8 % (5) of them focus on preschool level students. 43.8 % (28) of them investigate elementary level and 7.8 % (5) investigate high school level students. On the other hand, 4.7 % (3) of them deal with parents and 3.1 % (2) deal with the teachers, administrators. 10.9 % (7) of the dissertations have been conducted with more than one of those mentioned groups. And 3.1 % (2) have been conducted with documents. 18.8 % (12) were not analyzed due to restrictions.

**Table 8.** Distribution of the samples.

<b>Sample</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
<i>Elementary level students</i>	28	43.8
<i>Restricted</i>	12	18.8
<i>More than one group</i>	7	10.9
<i>Pre-school level students</i>	5	7.8
<i>High School level students</i>	5	7.8
<i>Parents</i>	3	4.7
<i>Teachers /administrators</i>	2	3.1
<i>Document</i>	2	3.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>100.0</b>

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

According to the results, females are seen to be more interested in this issue than males both in term of researcher and supervisor. When the study years are considered, there is an increasing trend from 1995 to present in this area. It can be concluded that gifted education has becoming more popular among educators with the significance of such people's education in today's conditions. On the other hand, due to the specificity of doctoral thesis, fewer dissertations are encountered in term of PhD level with respect to master's thesis. It can be suggested that conducting more doctoral theses in gifted education may result in more contributions to it. In addition, expansion of gifted students' education departments in education faculties may support the development of well qualified teachers and experts as in İstanbul University and Akdeniz University.

From the research topics, it has seen that there aren't enough investigations on several areas. To illustrate, specific learning areas for gifted students such as maths, arts, science have not been investigated sufficiently. According to the findings of the study, the total of dissertations related to physics, chemistry, biology and computer technologies education is nine whereas there is one dissertation for each of arts, foreign language and social sciences education. The reason for this may be explained that educators who are expert at one subject area do not have sufficient knowledge for the gifted. On the other hand, people who are familiar with gifted do not have enough knowledge for physics, chemistry etc. Therefore; educators, scientists in both areas may work collaboratively to enhance and improve gifted education. By this way, the quality and quantity of the works at this field can grow. Also, studies related to career perceptions of gifted students is another point of issue to consider at this respect. No study is present in the literature in Turkey regarding this issue. That topic's investigation may be contribute to shape guidance and counseling activities and also school instruction type for the gifted.

Another limitation in gifted students' education in Turkey is in the program development for gifted students. There is only one study among the dissertations which considers program development for developing emotional intelligence of the gifted children. Also, there is need for specific programs which can be utilized in term of school courses. With the help of such programs, gifted students learning can be supported with the instructional activities which are designed especially for them.

In addition, qualitative studies are still in the minority when compared to the quantitative ones. As the post paradigm highlights holistic look and qualification (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008), researches such as case studies may be conducted to get more efficient and detailed outcomes.

When the study samples are compared, elementary level students are the most popular sample whereas few studies focus on pre-school and high school level studies. Preschool studies are significant since the determination of gifted students can be meaningful when handled as early years possible. However, no college students were considered in such studies in Turkey. Olszewski-Kubilus (2010) discussed the secondary schools in the USA which focus on the education of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) considering college education of gifted and concluded that such schools were eligible for the students who desired careers in the related areas. Robinson (1997) discussed the effect of universities in gifted students' education in term of the interface between high school and college (programs that shorten high school and college, special college admissions, early identification and merit-based scholarships for entering students), advising highly able students, (academic advising, career planning, teaching the gifted undergraduate), special programs for highly able college students (honors programs, graduate classes and combined degrees, mentorships and research opportunities, recognition for high achievement), and described the reflections of K 12 controversies at the undergraduate level (identification, focus on highly versus moderately gifted, full time versus part time models and acceleration versus enrichment). The writer concluded with the accentuation of the significance of gifted students' post-secondary education. The deficiency of investigations in Turkey at the undergraduate level may be due to the limitations of follow up

activities of gifted students when they graduate from high school. On the other hand, investigations which deal with different groups of people such as students, teachers, parents altogether may utilize better findings because they consider different aspects of the topic and diversify the data gained. To sum, the followings can be suggested to consider for the future gifted education studies:

- Program development studies for gifted learners for specific learning areas
- Gifted students' career selections and interest areas
- Follow up activities for gifted students after high school
- College level gifted students

We believe that gifted education studies in Turkey will benefit from the findings of the present study. By this way, the deficiency and limitations can be assisted to be eliminated.

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