

The relationship between moral maturity and sense and behaviors of responsibility in gifted children

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Abstract

The main objective of the present study is to investigate the relationship between moral maturity and sense and behaviors of responsibility in gifted children. The secondary objective of the study is to compare the levels of moral maturity, sense of responsibility and behaviors of responsibility of gifted students (GS) and those of students with average intelligence level (SWAIL). The relational survey model has been employed in the study. The data was collected from 200 SWAIL attending the 6th and 7th grades in primary education schools in Ankara and 200 GS attending 'Science and Art Centers' (Turkish: BILSEM). The Scale for the Moral Maturity and the Sense and Behaviors of Responsibility was used as the data collection tool. In determining the differences between variables, the Independent samples t-Test was used for the variables which demonstrate normal distribution depending on the Kolmogorov Smirnov coefficients being insignificant at the $p < .05$ level. The correlation analysis was used in order to determine the correlations between the variables. At the end of the study, GS were found to be more mature in moral terms and to have a higher sense of responsibility compared to SWAIL. In the study, a statistical significant positive correlation ($p < .01$) was observed between moral maturity and sense and behaviors of responsibility in GS. In addition, a positive correlation ($p < .01$) was determined between the sense of responsibility and the behaviors of responsibility.

Keywords: Responsibility, moral maturity, gifted, superior abilities/intelligence.

1. Introduction

As a result of the unprecedentedly rapid advances in science and technology in today's world, the culture and standards of judgement in societies are also changing at a rapid pace. In many cases, resisting this change is almost impossible, and sometimes it results in various social problems which are hard to recover. Adaptation to these ever changing and developing conditions can only be possible by means of well-trained people in society. Internalization of the moral values of societies by individuals who live in that society results in the emergence of individuals who can assume responsibility for future generations.

There are many definitions of responsibility in the literature, especially in social sciences. Dokmen (2000) defines responsibility as the situation whereby an individual accepts that the behaviors and attitudes he/she demonstrates or does not demonstrate as part of his/her feelings and thoughts affect other people while assuming the responsibility of these feelings and thoughts. The sense of responsibility has been explained as not discriminating the responsibility of the individual towards himself/herself and his/her responsibility towards other individuals. From this viewpoint, individuals should wish what they wish for themselves for the other people as well. This emphasizes the fact that the sense of responsibility needs to be reciprocal (Ozen, 2009).

In a way, the individuals talking about the sense of responsibility are talking about the behaviors and phenomena within the scope of their own responsibility. In this regard, the phenomena within the scope of the responsibility of individuals are carried out under the very authority of these individuals. In other words, the fact that the events and phenomena take place under the authority of the individual creates the sense of responsibility in the individual. Thus, the individual feels the sense of the requirement for fulfilling the elements under his/her authority in a successful way (Ozerbas & Gunduz, 2014). The sense of responsibility can also mean sharing himself/herself with other people in a way that begins with the birth and develops with the first observations of the child (Altınkopru, 2004). The sense of responsibility has been explained as a feeling assumed by individuals such as an assignment. It can also be considered as a duty which needs to be fulfilled at any cost, and cause the individual to be in a willingness for being accountable in this regard (Aktepe, 2015; Abdi Golzar, 2006). There are also approaches claiming that responsibility is a reflection of morality. In case individuals are trained well in moral terms, values will take root among these individuals. In this regard, morality is all the rules formed to regulate the behaviors and attitudes of individuals and their relations with other people (Erdem, 2003). Thus, morality emerges as an element regulating the social relations as well as a regulator of human behaviors.

Morality is defined as the science of the ethical rules controlling the attitudes of individuals and an art ensuring the adaptation of these elements to the life (Baird & Astington, 2004). Thus, morality is an element both determining the rules and ensuring that these rules are implemented in life (Kaya & Aydin, 2011). On the other hand, moral maturity is a psychological feature which ensures that moral elements are adopted and become part of the conscience and that the individual prefers not to demonstrate immoral behaviors even when he/she is alone. People with such psychological qualities qualify acting immorally as an element contrary to human dignity. In this regard, individuals with moral maturity may perceive immoral behaviors as a threat (Sengun, 2008). Moral maturity is defined as having a certain degree of maturity in terms of ideas, thoughts, behaviors and attitudes and being at the highest level in these terms, as well as the combination of the moral features giving the best meaning to these elements in question (Cesur & Topcu, 2010; Unsal Seydoogullari, Ciftci Aridag, & Koc, 2014). In other words, moral maturity shows the level of moral perfection people have in their ideas, thoughts, decisions, and attitudes (Cekin, 2013). Moral maturity has a considerable part in the moral development theory of Lawrence Kohlberg (1984). Within the scope of this theory, moral development is addressed in three levels. These levels can be summarized as follows (Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977, 54-55):

1. Pre-Traditional Level: At this level, individuals consider moral events only on the basis of punishment and reward. In other words, they put the moral phenomena into practice only since they are afraid of being punished when they do not do this or since they will be rewarded when they do not.
2. Traditional Level: At this level, moral phenomena and values are adopted. Within this scope, in addition to complying with social elements, contribution is also made to the establishment of the social elements as well.
3. Post-Traditional Level: The individual within the scope of this level accept the moral rules and elements adopted by the society, and also accept that these moral elements can be changed and developed. In other words, an individual at the post-traditional level acts based on his/her own conscience. At this level, the individual adopts the universal moral values.

According to Kohlberg (1984), the majority of people are in the second level of moral maturity, namely the “traditional level” and many people can move on to the “post-traditional level”. According to Kant, however, being able to reach the third level, i.e. the post-traditional level, requires being able to judge the events in accordance with the universal principles accepted worldwide (Habermas, 1990).

The aforementioned outcomes can be obtained by well-trained and gifted individuals who can be raised under certain conditions in society. ‘Being gifted’ is defined as a set of abilities emerging as a result of the combination of intellectual and social elements and comprising many dimensions within its body (Sternberg & Davidson, 2005). For Renzulli (2005), being gifted is a phenomenon emerging in certain people under certain conditions and in certain periods of time. In this regard, Renzulli considers ‘being gifted’ as having abilities above the average. Thus, ‘being gifted’ can be described as a phenomenon resulting from the concurrence of the task responsibility, creativity and the general or specific field abilities.

Gifted children are the children who put in a better performance compared to their peers in specific areas or in terms of creativity, intelligence, leadership and arts, and whose abilities in these fields have not been provided by school education (Cakir & Kocabas, 2016; Ogurlu, 2015; Ogurlu, Kaya, Ercan Yalman, & Ayvaz, 2016; Ozbey & Sarıcam, 2016). In this regard, these children need a different education than others (Turkish Ministry of National Education Science and Arts Center Directives, 2007). In another perspective, ‘being gifted’ means having faster learning capabilities comparing to the peers of the individual in question. Within the scope of this definition, the potentials of young individuals are focused on as well. Gifted individuals are dispersed among the general population and only small parts of the population have the ability to learn faster. In addition, the definition above also implies that various abilities may emerge depending on the advancing age of the individuals. In other words, while giftedness is likely to emerge in the fields of general abilities and specific skills among younger individuals, it tends to emerge in a specific area depending on the increasing age (Cross & Coleman, 2005).

2. The Present Study

Besides the effects of external factors (family, school, environment), internal factors such as morality and character can also be effective in the development of the concept of responsibility (Sarıcam et al., 2014). Training individuals who are beneficial to the society and have the sense responsibility is very important in terms of character and values education. Developing gifted children and equipping them with various universal values is of vital importance in terms of the sustainability of the society. In this regard, an utmost level of care is necessary when the moral training of these children is addressed (Ozbey & Sarıcam, 2016).

In training gifted children as individuals beneficial for the society, the high level of their moral maturity and sense of responsibility perception is important, since superior people exhibiting

moral behaviors in terms of their character and being aware of their responsibility is among the important factors in training them as beneficial individuals for the society (Ay, 2014:213). The present study is important in terms of investigating and comparing the moral maturity and sense of responsibility of GS; and as a reference for educators. It is also important in terms of determining the effect of the moral maturity perception on the sense of responsibility. In order for individuals to be beneficial for the society they need to be provided with good education and the distinctly important part of the moral education in this education is an undeniable fact. It can be said that, the situation gains even more importance when the individuals prominent in terms of intelligence and abilities are in question.

The main aim of the study is to examine the relations between the sense of responsibility, behaviors of responsibility, and moral maturity in gifted children. The secondary objective of the study is to compare the sense of responsibility, behaviors of responsibility, and moral maturity scores of gifted children and those of their normal peers. Along this point, the following hypotheses have been claimed.

- GS will have statistically higher scores of moral maturity than SWAIL.
- GS will have statistically higher scores of sense of responsibility than SWAIL.
- GS will have statistically higher scores of behaviors of responsibility than SWAIL.
- There will be some positive relationships between the sense of responsibility, behaviors of responsibility, and moral maturity in gifted children.
- Moral maturity will be an important predictor for sense of responsibility and behaviors of responsibility.

3. Method

The relational screening model has been employed in the study. The relational survey model is a general screening model. General survey models are screening regulations applied on the whole of a population composed of many elements or on a sampling taken from that population in order to make a general judgement on the population (Karasar, 2006). The relational survey models, which are included in this group, are considered to be suitable for such studies since they are used in research aimed at determining the existence and degree of the covariance between two or more variables (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000).

3.1. Participants

The data was collected from 200 SWAIL attending the 6th and 7th grades in primary education schools in Ankara/Turkey and 200 GS attending BILSEM in Ankara/Turkey. Of the normal students, 84 are females and 116 males. As of the GS, 128 are females and 72 males.

3.2. Instruments

Moral Maturity Scale: Developed by Şengün and Kaya (2008), the Moral Maturity Scale is a 5-point Likert type scale composed of 66 entries and aims to measure the moral maturity level of individuals. The rating of the entries have been designed in the form of "Always; Most of the time; occasionally; rarely; Never". There are 52 positive (e.g., "I also feel sorry when I hear that someone I know suffers") and 14 negative (e.g., "I take advantage of the naivety of other people") expressions. In positive entries, the scoring is made by giving 5 points to the option "Always", 4 to "Most of the time", 3 to "Occasionally", 2 to "Rarely"; and 1 to "Never". In negative entries,

the scoring is made in the opposite direction. In the studies on the validity and reliability of the Moral Maturity Scale, it was found out based on the Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) conducted on the data obtained from the 830 students that the entries accumulated in a single factor and that the entry-total score correlation coefficients were significant at the ($p < .01$) level. The test-retest reliability coefficient of the scale was found to be .84, the test-split-half reliability coefficient to be .89, and the Cronbach Alpha internal consistency reliability coefficient to be .93. The highest possible score that can be obtained from the Moral Maturity Scale is 300, while the lowest score possible is 60. While higher scores are an indication of higher moral maturity, lower scores show lower moral maturity levels. In the present study, the Cronbach Alpha internal consistency reliability coefficient was found to be .93 for secondary school students.

The Scale of the Sense and Behaviors of Responsibility (SSBR): In determining the level of the sense and behaviors of responsibility among the students, the Scale of Sense and Behaviors of Responsibility developed by Ozen (2013a) was used. SSBR is a scale developed for Turkish society. The scale is composed of two distinct forms, namely the sense of responsibility form and the behaviors of responsibility form. In each form, the respondents were required to answer 18 entries as either "I feel responsibility" or as "I don't feel responsibility". 4-point system was used in answers ("1"=Never; "4" Always). The reliability coefficient of the SSBR, which was calculated by Cronbach Alpha, was found to be 0.82. The correlation between the Personal and Social Responsibility Scale and the SSBR was observed as .69. In the present study, the Cronbach Alpha internal consistency reliability coefficient was found to be .93 for the sense of responsibility and .92 for the behaviors of responsibility.

3.3. Procedure

At the stage when the scales were applied, the first permission was obtained from the owners of the Scale for Sense and Behaviors of Responsibility and the Moral Maturity Scale via e-mail, and then they were duplicated together with the Personal Information Forms. After the official correspondence with BILSEM schools and regular schools, each school was visited and the questionnaires were applied on students in person at the hours determined by the managers of these institutions. Before applying the questionnaire, the objective of the study was explained to the students and it was emphasized that it was being made on the basis of volunteerism. At the end of the application of the questionnaires, the participating students were given various gifts. The questionnaires were collected at the end of 40 minutes allocated for answering them, and then the data they included were transferred to the computer environment and was evaluated by the SPSS Software Package. The relational survey method, which is a quantitative research technique, as employed in the study. The data demonstrating normal distribution based on the Kolmogorov Smirnov coefficients being insignificant at the level of $p < .05$ was applied Independent Samples t-Test in order to determine the differences between the variables; and correlation analysis and regression analysis were used in order to determine the level and quality of the correlations between the variables.

4. Results

4.1. Comparison Findings

An independent samples t-test was carried out in order to compare the levels of sense of responsibility, behaviors of responsibility and moral maturity in GS and those in SWAIL, the results of which are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. The comparison findings concerning the levels of sense of responsibility, behaviors of responsibility and moral maturity of the students

| Variables | Student | N | Mean | SD | t | p |
|-----------------------------|---------|-----|--------|-------|--------|-----|
| Moral maturity | Gifted | 200 | 255.15 | 25.70 | 2.69** | .00 |
| | Normal | 200 | 246.47 | 37.62 | | |
| Sense of responsibility | Gifted | 200 | 64.33 | 6.37 | 2.52* | .01 |
| | Normal | 200 | 61.93 | 11.87 | | |
| Behaviors of responsibility | Gifted | 200 | 62.41 | 6.19 | 2.34* | .02 |
| | Normal | 200 | 60.27 | 11.39 | | |

**p<.01; *p<.05

As can be seen in Table 1, the average score for moral maturity among the gifted children (\bar{X} =255.15) is higher than that of the SWAIL (\bar{X} =246.47). This difference is statistically significant with a significance level of p<.01 (t=2.69; p<.01). Similarly, the average score for the sense of responsibility among the gifted children (\bar{X} =64.33) is higher than that of the SWAIL (\bar{X} =61.93). This difference is statistically significant with a significance level of p<.05 (t=2.52; p<.05). On the other hand, the average score for behaviors of responsibility among the gifted children (\bar{X} =62.41) is higher than that of the SWAIL (\bar{X} =60.27). This difference is statistically significant with a significance level of p<.05 (t=2.34; p<.05).

4.2. Correlation Findings

Pearson product-moment correlation analysis was conducted in order to determine whether there was any correlation between the moral maturity, the sense of responsibility and the behaviors of responsibility in gifted children, and the results of the analysis are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Correlation result about relation between the moral maturity, the sense of responsibility and the behaviors of responsibility in gifted children

| Variables | 1 | 2 | 3 |
|--------------------------------|--------|-------|-------|
| 1. Moral maturity | - | | |
| 2. Sense of responsibility | .39** | - | |
| 3. Behaviors of responsibility | .48** | .61** | - |
| Mean | 255.15 | 64.33 | 62.41 |
| SD | 25.70 | 6.37 | 6.19 |

**p<.01, *p<.05

As can be seen in Table 2, a positive correlation $r=.39$ at the significance level of p<.01 was determined between the moral maturity and the sense of responsibility; and a positive

correlation $r=.48$ at the significance level of $p<.01$ was determined between the moral maturity and the behaviors of responsibility in the gifted children (please use either gifted students or gifted children consistently). In addition, a positive correlation $r=.61$ at the significance level of $p<.01$ was determined between the sense of responsibility and the behaviors of responsibility, as well.

4.3. Regression findings

For the last hypothesis of this study, simple linear regression analysis was applied; sense of responsibility and behaviors of responsibility were regarded as dependent variables whereas moral maturity was considered to be independent variable. The results are shown in Table 3 and Table 4.

Table 3. Simple Linear Regression Analysis for Sense of Responsibility

| V | R | R ² | F | B | β | t | p |
|----|-----|----------------|-------|------|-----|------|-----|
| MM | .39 | .15 | 36.43 | .098 | .39 | 6.04 | .00 |

Dependent variable: Sense of Responsibility (SR)

Independent variable: Moral Maturity (MM)

According to Table 3, regression model can be identified as statistically significant and also moral maturity is a positive explanatory for sense of responsibility. Moral maturity explains 15% of the total variation of sense of responsibility.

Table 4. Simple Linear Regression Analysis for Behaviors of Responsibility

| V | R | R ² | F | B | β | t | p |
|----|-----|----------------|-------|------|-----|------|-----|
| MM | .48 | .23 | 59.43 | .116 | .48 | 7.71 | .00 |

Dependent variable: Behaviors of responsibility (BR)

Independent variable: Moral Maturity (MM)

According to Table 4, regression model can be identified as statistically significant and also moral maturity is a positive explanatory for behaviors of responsibility. Moral maturity explains 23% of the total variation of behaviors of responsibility.

5. Discussion, Results and Recommendation

The main aim of the study was to investigate the correlation between the moral maturity, the sense and behaviors of responsibility in gifted children. The analyses conducted on the data obtained suggest that gifted children are more mature in moral terms and have more sense of responsibility comparing to their peers with average intelligence level. The findings of the study suggest that the foremost reason why the GS have a higher sense of responsibility and behaviors of responsibility are the fact that they have a higher degree of moral maturity. It has been determined by many studies in the literature that there is a correlation between the levels of intelligence and moral maturity (Tan-Willman & Gutteridge, 1981; Rest & Narvaez, 1994). Silverman (1994) emphasized that honesty, fairness, moral issues, global concerns, and sensitivity to others are common themes in the lives of gifted children. The study handled by Sager and Workman (1983) through using six pairs of stories found out gifted children to have higher levels of moral maturity comparing to the children with average intelligence level. In their

study investigating the development of moral judgement, Howard-Hamilton (1994) determined that the gifted children had higher moral judgement values comparing to those of the children having average intelligence. Similarly, other studies which illustrated that the moral judgment development of the gifted is more advanced than their peers with average intelligence (Derryberry, Wilson, Snyder, Norman, & Barger, 2005; Narvaez, 1993; Tirri & Pehkonen, 2002).

Another result of the study is that there is a correlation between moral maturity, sense of responsibility, and behaviors of responsibility. Many studies in the literature have determined the correlation between moral maturity and responsibility (Lopez & Lopez, 1998; Ihtiyaroglu, 2016; Ozgulec, 2001; Derryberry et al., 2005). Kohlberg (1984) and Rest (1979) stated that there was a correlation between moral standards, sense of responsibility and social interaction perceptions of children. Likewise, Cesur (1997) also found out that there was a correlation between moral development and sense of responsibility and that moral maturity affected the cognitive level in a positive way. Based on these statements and findings, it can be said that all five hypotheses of the study have been verified.

There are certain limitations in the study. The first limitation is that the sample group included only the 6th and 7th grades of the secondary school. The second limitation is that the study comprised only one province. The third limitation is that the number of the gifted sample is limited to 200. The last and important limitation is that output of ANCOVA (In the first place, moral maturity should be controlled and then sense and behaviors of responsibility should be compared. However, data did not have assumptions of ANCOVA). If the limitations are eliminated and a descriptive study with a high level of generalizability is conducted, the results to be obtained from such studies can be used as the basis of experimental studies aimed at improving the sense of responsibility, behaviors of responsibility, and moral maturity. Finally, based on these, a more effective character and values education can be provided to young generations and the gifted individuals in the society, who are the guaranty of the future for the society.

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