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Investigating of the subjective well-being of gifted adolescents

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Abstract

As highly gifted adolescents both maintain their personal development salubriously while coping with the differences caused by being highly gifted and adapt to quick changes in every field of teenage life, they are thought to be a group that has to be specially emphasized. This study aims to analyze the subjective well-being in terms of giftedness, gender and age. The participants of the study consisted of 80 students studying in the 5-6-7-8th grades of secondary schools in Ankara. 32 of the students were diagnosed as gifted while 48 of them were in the regular group. Data was collected using a personal detail form and Adolescent Subjective Well Being Scale. The research is a descriptive study in a survey model. The data was analyzed by using Pearson Correlation Coefficient, t-test and ANOVA. It has been found that the points of subjective well-being of the normal group and gifted children group (supported and unsupported) have differentiated. Both of the gifted groups have considerably high levels of subjective well-being comparing with the normal group.

Keywords: Subjective well-being, giftedness, adolescents.

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1. Introduction

Gifted individuals are thought as people who have no problems in anything, more positive than others in every way and able to accomplish everything. For instance, their self-concept is more advanced in regard to their peers, they are more popular in social groups, they enjoy whatever they do and they are interested in daily or scientific problems (Ozbay, 2013).

It is known that gifted individuals are in a different development process compared to their peers in the areas of cognitive, social, emotional and physical progress (Clark, 2007). Gifted children display high performance in cognitive or special academic areas and they need special education to improve their talents (Davasligil, 2004). However, recent studies show that the characteristics of gifted students bring out some complications. Even though the needs of gifted children seems the same as their normal peers to a large extent, the developmental stages of these children take shape at earlier ages (Webb & Kleine, 1993). Some needs and issues usually show up especially in highly gifted students (Webb, 1994; Neihart, 1999). These characteristics may be their strengths, but, potential problems also may be associated with them. The combinations of these features bring out some behavior patterns. Uneven Development is one of these patterns. Since motor skills in gifted children lag behind the cognitive development, they may have difficulty in motor activities and this may result in emotional outbursts (Webb & Kleine, 1993). Strip and Hirsch (2001) also states that the cognitive abilities of gifted children are ahead of their other abilities, emotional and social development which is overshadowed by cognitive development may result in "time disharmonious development" concept and some problems may occur in these areas.

Furthermore, following the rules in peer relations and being insistent on consistency may cause problems. Excessive self-criticism (Adderholt-Elliott, 1989; Powell & Haden, 1984; Whitmore, 1980), perfectionism (Silverman, 1993; Rimm & Maas, 1993; Parker & Adkins, 1994; Webb, 1994), avoidance of risk taking because they see the potential problems (Whitmore, 1980) are other difficulties of gifted children (Webb, 1994).

The complex and high level thinking ability of gifted children causes them to feel different (Silverman, 1993) and it may bring out some emotional difficulties such as low self-esteem (Delisle, 1990), academic failure (Reis, 1987), depression (Delisle, 1990; Webb, Meckstroth & Tolan, 1994), and anxiety (Kline & Short, 1991). Because the emotional characteristics and needs of gifted children are more intense than their peers of normal intelligence (Strip & Hirsch, 2001), meeting the differentiating emotional needs of these children is significant in terms of their experiencing emotional and social development phases healthily (Silverman, 1993). Lack of understanding or support for gifted children and sometimes ambivalence in implementation or hostility creates significant problems (Webb & Kleine, 1993).

Due to the different social and emotional needs of mismatching between cognitive development and the pace of psychological and social development areas, that is, non-simultaneous development, support and special education are needed. Due to mismatching between pace of cognitive development and psychological-social development areas, that is, different social and emotional needs arising from non-synchronized development, support and special education are needed (Kaya, 2013). Due to gifted individuals' discrepancies (Schuler, 2000), being aware of their characteristics and providing appropriate support and education are necessary for them to use their potential (Kurtkan, 1987). They usually need supportive education and activities apart from their school education programs. That supportive education may be done by applying individualized education program in enriched education form in the classroom and it may be done in the form of group work with other gifted individuals and in some institutions of special purpose such as Science and Arts Centers (BILSEM) outside the classroom (Kaplan, 1986; Catalbas, 1998; Camdeviren, 2014; Sahin & Sahin, 2016). It is thought that gifted children who use this supportive education and who do not would become different from each other.

There are studies about subjective well-being of gifted individuals because of their distinctness. Diener (1984) approaches intelligence as a variance to personality and states that there should be a positive correlation with intelligence level and subjective well-being. Sun-Mi and Mi Hyun (2013), have found that as one of the dimensions of subjective well-being, life satisfaction of gifted individuals are higher in comparison with their peers.

Subjective well-being means that individuals make a subjective judgement by evaluating their lives with an emotional and cognitive point of view (Diener, 1984; Myers & Diener, 1995). Subjective well-being is formed of affective dimension containing positive and negative affectivity and cognitive dimension containing life sensation (Diener, 2009). The concept of subjective well-being is treated with happiness which is the most important purpose that people would like to reach in their lives in the psychology field. Individuals' being highly subjective is possible when they experience positive feelings frequently and negative feelings rarely and get high satisfaction from their lives (Eryilmaz, 2011).

Subjective well-being have sub-dimensions such as life satisfaction, satisfaction in significant fields like job and marriage, positive feelings (such as joy, pride, pleasure, delightfulness) and negative feelings (such as guilt, shame, stress, depression) (Diener, 2009). Subjective well-being in adolescents is affected through positive communication and acceptance in the family (Rask, Kurki & Paavlianien, 2003) and it is stated that it is also affected by income, education and gender in a lower level (Lyubomirsky, 2001).

The superior characteristics of gifted individuals create differences in their moods and that is thought to make a difference in their subjective well-being. Since having appropriate support for gifted individuals affects their social and emotional characteristics; (Heller, 1999) it is very important to evaluate the subjective well-being of adolescents who have normal intelligence, identified as gifted but not having supportive education and identified as gifted and having supportive education.

The purpose of this study is to compare the subjective wellbeing of gifted and normal adolescents. In this study, it is evaluated that whether the level of subjective well-being of participants who have normal intelligence, who are gifted and having support education, and gifted but not having support education changes or not.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

In this research, the study group is determined by purposive sampling. Erkus (2012), states that purposive sampling should be preferred in research that is planned to be carried out on people who have specific, restrictive and unapproachable characteristics. Individuals who are gifted and who have normal intelligence studying in a middle school in Ankara have participated in the research.

The identification of the gifted participants is done by considering the document their parents present that indicates they got 130 scores and more from WISC-R test while the rest of the participants are considered as normal group. Totally 68 children joined the study. 22 of them are gifted and have supportive education (% 32, 3), 19 of them are gifted but do not have supportive education (% 27, 9) and 27 of them are children who have normal intelligence (% 39, 7). The sample consisted of 23 (33.8%) students in 5th grade, 17 (25.0%) in the 6th grade, 3 (4.4%) in the 7th grade and 25 (36.8) in the 8th grade. Gifted and having supportive education group studies at Science and Arts Center and they are supported by enriched education program in the classroom. Gifted but not having supportive education group is recently identified as gifted but not having a supportive education yet. Participants attend different schools.

2.2. Instruments

The data of the research was gathered by Adolescent Subjective Well Being Scale. The following gives detailed information about the scale.

Adolescent Subjective Well Being Scale: Adolescent Subjective Well Being Scale has been developed by Eryilmaz (2009). The scale is formed of 15 items that consist of adolescents' various satisfaction in life and their positive affectivity. The scale has four sub factors. They are satisfaction in family relations, life satisfaction, positive feelings and satisfaction in relations by special people. The explained variance of these four dimensions is 61.64. The reliability value of Cronbach alpha is .87 and Spearman-Brown value is .83. In this study group, the harmony validity of the scale is evaluated by Life Satisfaction Scale and Pearson Product Moment Correlation technique. The result of the analysis shows that the Adolescent Subjective Well Being scale has a .63 level of cohesion with the Life Satisfaction scale. Based on this finding, the scale is concluded to have enough reliability.

2.3. Data analysis

Whether the subjective well-being differentiates or not meaningfully in terms of gender has been analyzed by independent samples t-test. Whether subjective well-being differentiates or not depending on age groups and identification status, has been examined by one way variance analysis technique. At least 0.05 significance level has been adopted in analyzing the data. The statistical resolution of the data gotten from the analysis has been done by using SPSS 22.00 package software.

2.4. Procedure

Research data has been gathered in Ankara province in February, 2017. Implementing the scales has lasted approximately 20-25 minutes. The data in the research has been gathered as individual and group implementation. While gathering the data, voluntariness has been based and the participants have been given information about the purpose of the research and approval of the families has been received. Personally identifying information hasn't been asked.

2.5. Findings

Research findings were discussed under four titles. First of all, whether subjective well-being differentiates with regard to gender or not, and then whether it differentiates with regard to the grades or not were discussed and comparative findings of gender and grades were included. After that, findings about whether identification conditions (gifted and having supportive education, gifted but not having supportive education and normal) explain subjective well-being in a meaningful way or not were presented.

2.5.1. Investigation of subjective well-being according to gender

Whether subjective well-being differs with regard to gender in a considerable level was analyzed by t-test technique. When the values belong to all groups were examined, subjective well-being doesn't change meaningfully with regard to gender. ($t=-1.75$; $p >.05$; $\bar{X}_g=52, 92$; $\bar{X}_b=49.23$). However, it differentiates in gifted and supported group in terms of gender. ($t=2.63$; $p <.05$). In addition to this, for the individuals in other identification groups (gifted but not supported and normal), no significant difference were found between subjective well-being and gender. T-test results applied to the gifted and supported group in terms of gender and subjective well-being were shown on Table 1.

Table 1. The result of T-Test on subjective well-being of supported gifted according to gender

Gender	N	Mean	Std.deviation	p-value	t-value
Girls	9	58.11	4.93	.016	2.63
Boys	13	50.00	9.39		

* p<.05

When Table 1 analyzed girls' average point of subjective well-being (\bar{x} =58.11) in gifted and supported group is seen to be higher than the boys' (\bar{x} =50.00).

2.5.2. Investigation of subjective well being according to grade

Whether subjective well-being differentiates according to the grade was analyzed by The One-way Analysis of Variance technique. The whole group's subjective well-being average point doesn't differentiate with regard to grades [F (1.88(3)), p>.05]. Subjective well-being doesn't change according to grades in identification groups.

2.5.3. Investigation of subjective well being according to gender and grade

Whether subjective well-being differentiates according to gender and grades was analyzed by The One-way Analysis of Variance technique. Average point of subjective well-being of girls in different grades differentiates while it doesn't happen for boys. According to the results of Scheffe Multiple Comparison Test results done to find between which groups' average point are different, girls in the 5th grade (N= 11, \bar{x} = 58.36, p<.05) have considerably higher average point than the girls in the 8th grade (N=19, \bar{x} = 49,63). There are 4 participants in 6th grade (\bar{x} =53, 50), but there is no participant in the 7th grade.

The results of The One-way Analysis of Variance technique of girl participants of different grades' subjective well-being points are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. The Results of the One-Way Analysis Of Variance on Subjective Well-Being Scores

Variables		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Subjective Well Being	Between Groups	532.769	2	266.384	4.522	.019*
	Within Groups	1825.967	31	58.902		
	Total	2358.735	33			

* p<.05

2.5.4. Investigation of the subjective well being according to identification groups

Whether subjective well-being differentiates according to identification groups was analyzed by the One-way Analysis of Variance Technique. In Table 4, the average points of subjective well-being differentiate with regard to identification groups. According to the results of Scheffe Multiple Comparison Test results done to find between which groups' average point are different, individuals in gifted and supported group (p<.05) as well as the individuals gifted but not supported group have considerably higher average than individuals in the normal group (p<.05) as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. The results of descriptive statistics according to diagnostic groups

Variables	Diagnostic Groups	N	\bar{x}	S.S.
Subjective Well-Being	Gifted and supported group	22	53.31	8.74
	Gifted and not supported group	19	53.73	4.40
	Normal group	27	47.37	10.01
	Total	68	51.07	8.79

3. Results and Discussion

In this part, study findings were discussed in two titles that are gender and grade and identification groups.

3.1. Evaluation of the relationship between subjective well being and gender and grades

In this study, the subjective well-being of only the adolescent girls in gifted and supported group was found to be higher compared to the boys. When the relationship between gender and subjective well-being is examined, study findings overlap with the literature for the individuals of unsupported gifted and normal groups but it doesn't overlap with the individuals of supported gifted group. In most of the studies done in literature, individuals' subjective well-being doesn't differentiate considerably in terms of gender (Andrews & Withey, 1976; Fujita, Diener & Sandvik, 1991) while some studies assert gender has a little effect (Acock & Hurlbert, 1993; Diener & Diener, 1996; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). The cause of the result obtained in this study may be that the group with the difference may differentiate from the general group due to both the presence of gifted identification and the support for this identification. Gifted individuals generally feel differently (Roeper, 1982), and they need social and emotional support because of their asynchronous development (Kaya, 2003). It is thought that being together with their peers who have similar characters may have removed the feeling of being different in individuals of gifted and supported group. The puberty is a period in which many changes happen evolutionarily. Because of the fact that gifted adolescents develop more rapidly in their developmental areas (Clark, 2007) and that girls are more interested in social relationships during adolescence (Sanrock, 2017), girls in gifted and supported group are more affected by the environment they are supported and it may differentiate their subjective well-being. Examinations of class grades showed that subjective well-being did not differ. The relationship between the class level, i.e. age and subjective well-being, is in harmony with the literature. Studies show that there is no relation or a very low correlation between age and subjective well-being (Diener et al., 2002; Lyubomirsky, King & Diener, 2005). However, when subjective well-being was examined with regard to gender and grade, subjective well-being of 5th grade girls was found to be considerably higher than the 8th grade girls'. This is thought to be related to the decline in variables such as self-esteem in adolescence (Sternberg, 2005; Sanrock, 2017).

Findings related to subjective well-being in terms of age and gender in the literature generally belong to Western societies and the lack of studies on these relations in Turkey is noteworthy (Eryılmaz & Ercan, 2011). For this reason, it is considered that the results that are incompatible with the literature can be evaluated as culture specific.

3.2. Evaluation of the relationships between subjective well-being and the identification groups

It has been found that the points of subjective well-being of normal group and gifted children group (supported and unsupported) have differentiated. Both of the gifted groups have considerably high

levels of subjective well-being compared with the normal group. It is obvious that this result has been accepted by the literature. It has been mentioned that the subjective well-being levels of the gifted persons are higher than the ones of the persons who has normal intelligence (Diener, 1984; Sun-Mi & Mi-Hyun, 2013). Nevertheless, the lack of the significant difference between the supported and unsupported groups among the gifted persons has caused some contradictions in the field. Besides, we have no research comparing the subjective well-being levels of the supported and unsupported gifted persons in literature, some researchers think that the gifted persons should be supported with the people who have similar qualities with them in order to be in a good emotional mood (Heller, 1999). Hence, the supported group may be expected to be emotionally more positive than the other group. The fact that there is no significant difference between both of the groups regarding subjective well-being levels has been considered as a new finding in the literature.

Having carried out only among a limited group of individuals is the main handicap of this study. It is obvious that doing research on wider groups would contribute to the literature. One of the other limitations of the study is that the gifted group in this study only contains the adolescents attending to school and living in the city center. In the future, some studies may be carried out with the gifted adolescents who don't attend school, live in the countryside, psychiatrically diagnosed or criminalized.

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