

Examination of the Opinions of Gifted Students on Psychological Counselling and Guidance Services

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to reveal the perceptions of gifted students about psychological counseling and guidance services. In this study, which was conducted using phenomenological design, one of the qualitative research methods, a semi-structured interview form was used as a data collection tool. The data collected with the semi-structured interview form were analyzed with the content analysis technique. The study group of the research consists of 25 middle school students enrolled in BİLSEM, eighteen male and seven female students. In the research, the need for psychological counselling and guidance services, the status of the institution's psychological counselling and guidance services to meet the requirements, guidance and psychological counselling services needed, reasons for not needing guidance and psychological counselling services, expectations on the development of psychological counselling and guidance services were included. The results of the research draw attention to the fact that gifted students' perceptions of psychological counseling and guidance services are problem-oriented. Another important finding of the study is that gifted students generally seek psychological help for academic needs such as course/field selection, career indecision. For this reason, the importance of psychological counselors informing gifted students about preventive guidance activities and their academic needs was emphasized. The results of the research were discussed based on the relevant literature. Recommendations for future theoretical and practical research are presented.

Keywords: Gifted Student, Psychological Counselling, Guidance, Science and Art Centre.

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INTRODUCTION

It is widely accepted that social and scientific changes bring with them some limitations. Especially rapid urbanisation, change in working life conditions, transition from extended family to nuclear family and other similar social factors are reflected in the lives of children and adolescents and may negatively affect their psycho-social development. In this context, it is a necessity for students to receive psychological counselling and guidance (PCG) services in their school life. Psychological counselling and guidance services are defined as a systematic and professional psychological help service for individuals to know and understand themselves, to discover their hidden powers and to realise themselves by actively adapting to the society to which they belong (Yeşilyaprak, 2016). Expectations from guidance and psychological counselling units may vary depending on the school, the social environment of the school, and the needs and expectations of the students. On the other hand, the guidance and psychological counselling needs of students differ depending on their individual differences. In order for gifted students to be beneficial to the society, it is significant to reveal their personal characteristics and to include the reasons behind their behaviours (Çitil ve Ataman, 2018). When the Ministry of National Education Science and Art Centres (BİLSEM) Directive is examined, it is seen that the definition of a gifted individual includes the following statements: "An individual who learns faster than his/her peers, is ahead in creativity, art, leadership capacity, has special academic ability, can understand abstract ideas, likes to act independently in his/her fields of interest and performs at a high level" (MEB, 2019). The National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC, 2019) defines a gifted individual as the one who has different abilities or areas of ability compared to his or her peers and has the ability to perform and realise at a high level.

From the perspective of gifted students, it is known that arrangements have been made for the identification of these students and the educational environment, and studies on this subject are included in the literature (Brown et al., 2015; Karadağ, 2016; McClain & Pfeiffer, 2012; Şahin & Zorlu, 2022). However, it is noteworthy that studies on the psychological counseling needs of gifted students are limited (Ağaya, Akçayır, & Çitil, 2023; Altun & Yazıcı, 2018; Ishak & Bakar, 2010; Yoo & Moon, 2006; Zaffran & Colangelo, 1977). However, it is known that gifted students differ from their peers due to their social, emotional and academic needs (Kregel, 2015). When the different characteristics of gifted students are examined, characteristics such as having multiple potential (Kerr & Sodano, 2013), perfectionism (Ishak & Bakar, 2010), intense curiosity (Glück & Tischler, 2021), and developed independence skills (Saurenman & Michael, 1980) stand out. It is supported by different research findings that gifted students have problems in social and emotional issues (Blackett & Webb, 2011; McRae, 2002). At the same time, it is supported by research findings that they sometimes suffer from loneliness at school and are excluded from the social environment

(Brandisauskiene, 2019) and are exposed to peer bullying (Allen, 2020; Gonzalez-Cabrera et al., 2023; Oğurlu & Sariçam, 2018; Jumper, 2019) due to their different characteristics. It is known that individual development differs according to some basic characteristics. In this context, it is noteworthy that the psychological and social development of gifted students differs from other students in some respects. Gifted students come to the forefront with their superior talents or abilities in terms of performance results. In addition, it should not be forgotten that talent development continues throughout the life of individuals. In the process of individual development, within the framework of maturation in the transition from childhood to adolescence, the achievements of gifted individuals in certain fields or areas and high levels of motivation become the main characteristics of these individuals (Chen & Wong, 2013; Colangelo ve Wood, 2015). Psychologists have long recognised the importance of early identification of children with developmental delays and disabilities and have been conducting their practice within this framework. Early diagnosis offers families the opportunity to receive much-needed early intervention services. When the early diagnosis of gifted individuals is taken into consideration, it is seen that there is a similar approach. Therefore, school psychological counsellors working with gifted students are expected to have knowledge about appropriate screening tools and to be familiar with the relevant literature in order to work with children in early childhood. For instance, school psychologists and counsellors should have knowledge about early signs such as advanced vocabulary, increased curiosity, keen observation skills, and preference in order to recognise signs of intellectual precocity in preschool children (Pfeiffer, 2021).

Individual talents come to the fore in the process of school education. In general, talent is understood as the potential for individual success. Especially in social psychology-oriented talent theories, it is acknowledged that social and cultural learning environments play an important role in talent development and talent disclosure. On the other hand, learning psychologists concentrate on the use of learning opportunities for individual achievement, learning and achievement motivation for individual achievement, as well as personal dispositions and interests in achievement or specialisation (Heller, 2005). It is understood that learning psychologists, in the context of school success, focus on the areas of interest in which students are successful. From this point of view, it is critical to identify the talents and interests of students in guidance activities for gifted students and to carry out studies in this context. It is known that gifted students need social, economic and technological environments where they can develop their talents. These students live in different socio-economic environments. Socio-economically advantaged students are able to fulfil their intellectual, creative and artistic needs outside school. Some students have families who can support dance or music lessons, microscopes, telescopes, computers, art supplies and frequent trips to libraries and museums. The less fortunate try to manage the process as best they can, silently paying the price for what they do not understand or what others ignore. Problems in academic development, lost creative potential, and sometimes

individual and societal limitations as a result of possible educational and professional failure are considered as examples of this (Rimm, Siegle & Davis, 2018).

Guidance activities for gifted students should be differentiated and enriched. In particular, the prominence of guidance counsellors' specialisation in educational assessment and planning, career counselling for adolescents, child and school issues is emphasized (Yu & Jen, 2021). The practices carried out within the scope of this process should be organised in accordance with the developmental needs of gifted students. An analysis of the research in the related field reveals that gifted students may need differentiated educational guidance throughout their school life and that parents of these children tend to prefer schools that offer such services. On the other hand, it is stated that if guidance or psychological counselling services appropriate to the needs of gifted students are not provided, existing problems will continue to increase (Yoo & Moon, 2006).

In this context, Science and Art Centres (BİLSEM) were established by the Ministry of National Education (MEB) to provide supportive education services for gifted students in Türkiye. Science and Art Centres (BİLSEM), where gifted students get education, have an undeniable effect on the Turkish education system (Güneş, 2015). Students enrolled in BİLSEM are added to training programmes for (1) adaptation, (2) support education, (3) individual talent recognition, (4) special talent development, (5) project production and management. Within the scope of developing special talents, education programmes are carried out in BİLSEM centers in order to develop the special talents of students who have completed the adaptation programme in the fields of music and visual arts talent and the individual talents awareness programme in the field of general mental talent. It is seen that scientific and artistic activity-based studies for students' special talent area or areas are intensified during the special talents development programme period (MEB, 2016).

It can be stated that students' anxiety differs in proportion to their developmental periods and grade levels. Similar approaches are also valid for students attending BİLSEM. As a matter of fact, different studies show that when students decide to get help from psychological counsellors working in their institutions, this is mostly related to career and academic counselling (Datu et al., 2002; Sürücü, Konaş, & Bacanlı, 2018), while personal issues (interpersonal relationships, individual development, family problems, etc.) are in the second plan. This is thought to be due to the fact that gifted students (1) are more concerned about their careers and their performance in their academic studies, (2) hesitate to talk about personal issues and worry about being perceived as problematic, (3) are worried about standing up to the expectations of others and hesitate to disclose their problems to others - the expectation that gifted students will not have personal problems or will have very limited personal problems within the framework of the traditional approach. On the other hand, it is observed

that gifted students' concerns about career development and academic success come forward instead of personal subjects (Edwin & Fisher, 2023).

Within the scope of the subject, the quality of the guidance service provided in BİLSEMs steps forward in a prominent way. Students attending these institutions may have different characteristics and expectations from other students. On the other hand, the fact that individuals in their social environment, especially parents, have different expectations from gifted students highlights the importance of the guidance service provided in BİLSEMs. Psychological counsellors have important duties and responsibilities in order for gifted students to benefit from the opportunities and chances where they can develop their talents and realise themselves (Colangelo & Wood, 2015). For this reason, it is important to address the views of gifted students on counselling services. It is noteworthy that more comprehensive studies have been conducted abroad on the subject, but the research in Türkiye is more limited. In this context, it is thought that this study, which aims to examine the views of gifted students on guidance services, can contribute to eliminating the limitations in the related field. From this point of view, it is aimed to examine the views of gifted students on counselling activities. For this purpose, answers to the following questions are sought:

1. Do you think that guidance and psychological counselling services offered in your institution are necessary?
2. Do you think that the existing guidance and counselling services in your institution meet your needs?
3. For which of your needs do you apply to guidance and psychological counselling services the most and why?
4. If you have not benefited from any of the guidance and psychological counselling services in your institution so far, could you please explain your reasons for not receiving any services?
5. What are the services you would like the counselling service to perform in addition to its current practices? Can you explain with justifications?

METHOD

In this part of the study, research design, study group, data collection tools and data analysis are given.

Research Design

This research is carried out with a phenomenological research pattern, one of the qualitative research methods. The phenomenological pattern focuses on the phenomena of being aware but having an in depth and detailed understanding (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). Phenomenology focuses on

exploring how people make sense of experience and how they transform that experience into consciousness (Patton, 2014).

Working Group

The study group of the research consists of 25 secondary school students enrolled in BİLSEM in the 2023-2024 academic year. The study group of the research is determined by the convenience sampling method. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with the students who agreed to take part in the study. Before the interview, the participants are informed about the purpose of the research and it is stated that personal information is not included. In accordance with the ethics of scientific research, the names of the participants are kept confidential and named with the codes S1,S2.....,S25.

Data Collection Tools

The research data are collected through the interview method (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016), which is frequently used in qualitative research. In this sense, a semi-structured interview form is used. It is known that the interview method is an advantageous method because it gives the opportunity to ask detailed questions about a specific subject, to repeat the question by identifying missing or unclear points in the answer, and to complete the answers by making them explanatory (Çepni, 2009). While creating the form for the opinions of gifted students about psychological counseling and guidance services, the studies in the literature are utilised and the questions in the interview form are determined in this context. The research questions were developed by the researcher after a detailed literature review. The questions in the interview form are replied as a result of face-to-face interviews with the students.

Data Collection and Analysis

The research data is obtained as a result of interviews with 25 students enrolled in BİLSEM in the 2023-2023 academic year. The purpose of the research is explained to the participants in the study and it is explained that participation in the research is voluntary. The necessary information is given that the records kept as a result of the interview is only used as research data, personal information is not shared and code names is given. The questions in the interview form are asked to the students in the study group and they are encouraged to explain their short answers.

Content analysis technique is used to analyse the data within the scope of the research. Content analysis provides the opportunity to conceptualise and interpret the data by determining the important concepts in the research (Büyüköztürk et al., 2011). In the analysis of the research data, firstly, the interviews are transcribed and the students in the study group are given codes as T1,

T2,...T25. During the research process, coding procedures were carried out by the researcher. Based on the records created, the answers given by the participants to the questions are meticulously read and coded. Themes are formed based on the codes and frequency values and direct quotations are given.

Research Ethics

This research is decided to be ethically appropriate by Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University Ethics Committee with the decision dated 23.11.2023 and numbered 14/01.

FINDINGS

In this part of the study, the findings obtained regarding the views of gifted students on psychological counselling services are presented. The participants are coded as S1, S2, ... S25 without giving their names in line with the confidentiality principle. Within the scope of the sub-problems of the research, the need for psychological counselling and guidance services; whether the studies carried out within the scope of psychological counselling services overlap with the needs of the students; guidance services according to the areas of need, opinions on students' use of counseling and guidance services, and issues related to the improvement of existing counseling and guidance activities are included.

The Need for Psychological Counselling and Guidance Services

Table 1. Students' Views on the Need for Counselling and Psychological Counselling Activities

Opinions on the need for psychological counselling services	f
I think it is necessary	18
I do not think it is necessary	7

As seen in Table 1, 11 of the students participating in the study stated that they needed guidance activities in BİLSEM and 6 of them stated that they did not need them. However, they express that they need psychological counsellors working in BİLSEM in the fields of producing solutions for the field of need and course selection. Some of the participant views on counselling services are as follows:

"I think it should be necessary. Especially there are students who have special problems and need individual support, it would be good for them." (S25)

"I think it is necessary. They support me in choosing a course. " (S2)

"I think it is not necessary because the students who come here are gifted." (S5)

"I have never received psychological counselling service before, but I think it is necessary for those who need it." (S3)

The Status of the Institution's Psychological Counselling and Guidance Services to Meet the Requirements

Table 2. Students' Views on the Need for Counselling and Psychological Counselling Activities

Opinions on the need for counselling services	f
Guidance and counselling activities are carried out according to my areas of need	10
Guidance and counselling activities are not carried out according to my areas of need / I do not think they are carried out	3
Never attended	11

When the students' views on the need for guidance and counselling activities are examined, it is seen that most of the participants use statements that they are carried out, as well as the number of students who have never been to the guidance service before is remarkable. Sample participant views on the theme in Table 2 are given below.

"I have not needed it, I only needed it when I was choosing my courses and they were very helpful in that regard" (S5).

"I do not have any need. I do not know there is a counsellor at Bilsem. I have never met the counsellor."(S25)

Guidance and psychological counselling services needed

Table 3. Opinions on Guidance Activities according to Areas of Need

Guidance services according to areas of need	f
Course selection	7
Course programme	1
Never been there	11

When Table 3 is reviewed, it is seen that students generally need to apply to a psychological counsellor in line with their academic needs such as course selection, efficient course study, etc. However, it is seen that there are students who have not applied to a psychological counsellor before. Students express their views on guidance activities related to their needs as follows:

"I have not applied specifically, if there is a need, they already meet it" (S2).

"I have never applied to the counsellor at Bilsem, I do not know him/her" (S25).

"I have not been there before, but I will go if I have a problem" (S8).

"I needed it when I was choosing Öyg courses" (S5).

"I apply if there is a problem with the school" (S4).

"I apply for my lesson programme, we follow up my success" (S10).

"I applied because I had distractibility before."(S11).

"When I experience a bad event in the group or when I have problems with my friends" (S18). "I apply for the problems I encounter in educational institutions" (S26).

Reasons for Not Needing Guidance and Psychological Counselling Services

Table 4. Opinions on the Use of Counselling and Psychological Counselling Services

Opinions on the Use of Counselling and Psychological Counselling Services	f
I applied for/benefited from the psychology service	9
I have not applied for/used the psychology service	16

When Table 4 is analysed, it is seen that students do not apply to the Psychological Counselling service mostly because they do not need it individually. As can be seen in the participant opinions below, it is noteworthy that they did not justify this situation or that they did not need to apply because they did not experience a psychological distress and that they thought that it would not be useful.

"I applied for course selection" (S1)

"I did not think it would be very useful" (S7).

"I have never met or come together with our guidance counsellor. For this reason, I did not receive service. I may not have met him/her because I did not have serious problems." (S25).

Expectations on the Development of Psychological Counselling and Guidance Services

Table 5. Opinions on the Improvement of Counselling and Psychological Counselling Services

Students' opinions on the improvement of existing counselling activities	f
Lesson follow-up summer holiday suggestion	1
Creating a daily routine	1
Studies on course selection and indecision	1
Individual interview and activity	1
In-class activities	1

When Table 5 is examined, it is seen that academic needs come to the forefront similar to the previous research finding when the studies to be carried out in addition to the existing counseling activities are examined. However, the research finding reveals that students need studies such as organising their daily routines and integrating guidance activities with different applications in in-class activities. Sample participant opinions are given below:

"Guidance counsellors should get to know the students closely and for this purpose they should conduct individual interviews and activities with the students. Because it ensures that people who are afraid or embarrassed to talk about their problems are counselled by guidance counsellors. I do not trust guidance counsellors very much because they tell teachers and parents what is said there" (S25).

"They can enter the classes and have more dialogue with the students. In this way, students can feel more valuable and secure" (S26).

"I would like course follow-up and summer holiday suggestions to be made in Bilsem" (S10).

"I have the most problems with course selection, so there could be an application about course selection (to decide) and indecision" (S12).

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

When education systems around the world are examined, it is seen that the prominence of identifying and supporting the individual strengths and interests of all students is emphasized instead of focusing on encouraging "gifted" individuals independently of the education of gifted students. However, when the current situation of the world is taken into consideration, it is stated that the focus should be on strengthening gifted individuals and providing better opportunities and facilities instead of making a comparison between gifted individuals in existing education systems (Glück & Tischler,

2021). When the evaluations regarding the characteristics of gifted individuals are considered, it is seen that they have a wide knowledge capacity and high performance skills unlike their peers (Camcı-Erdoğan & Güçyeter, 2019). Hence, guidance services have an undeniable importance in the education-training activities performed for gifted students. In this context, the aim of this study was to examine the views of gifted students on counselling services. When the research findings are analysed, it is noteworthy that students need counselling activities. However, there is a need to emphasize an unrealistic belief about gifted students based on the opinion of the student coded S5: "I think it is not necessary because the students who come here are gifted." It is accepted that gifted students have the power to struggle with many problems brought by life owing to their high ability and knowledge (Chen & Wong, 2013). Such unrealistic beliefs create pressure on gifted students and cause them to face different obstacles in their educational life (Stewart, 1999). At the same time, it is seen that the participants stated that counseling activities are carried out in accordance with their needs. The student coded S25 said, "I do not have any needs. I did not know that there was a counsellor at BILSEM. I have never met with the counsellor." Based on his opinion, the importance of psychological counsellors working in BILSEM to inform students in line with their talent areas and to provide information about guidance activities emerges. In the study conducted by Duruğa and Doğan (2021), the perceptions of gifted students about psychological counsellors were examined, and it is seen that the categories of 'problem solver' and 'trust' come forward. Yeşilyaprak (2016) emphasises that there is an unrealistic understanding that psychological counselling and guidance activities are "corrective and remedial". In the current study, it is seen that gifted students perceive counselling and guidance services as problem or problem-oriented and it is noticeable that there are similar participant opinions. Therefore, there is a need to provide preventive guidance activities for gifted students. When the views of gifted students on guidance activities according to their areas of need are examined, it is seen that they mostly need studies on course selection and curriculum. From the perspective of school psychological counsellors, it is evident that gifted students do not apply to the guidance service, and those who do usually apply for reasons such as socialisation and career counselling (Ersoy & Uysal, 2018).

When the findings related to the students' utilisation of counseling services are reviewed, it is seen that they are similar to the findings related to the areas of need, and it is seen that they generally apply in line with their course selection and academic needs and receive services in accordance with their needs. Another outstanding feature that draws attention in gifted students is that they tend to hide their abilities in order to establish close relationships with their peers, which is the most common strategy they use (Coleman, 2012). However, behaving as someone they are not leads to their alienation from themselves (Silverman, 2013). For this reason, it is necessary and important for psychological counsellors working with gifted students to have a high level of competence about students' talent areas and character traits and to carry out guidance activities accordingly. In other

words, without waiting for a problem or need to arise, it is necessary to inform students about counselling activities, especially during the orientation period, and to include activities that will serve their social and emotional well-being (Levent & Baş-Doğan, 2022) to support their character development and education.

The findings of the research show that the academic needs of gifted students are at a high level. So much so that when their views on the guidance activities available in their institutions are examined, studies on planning the summer holiday period effectively, course selection and indecision are noteworthy. The ability of gifted students in different fields causes them to have difficulty in decision-making (Chen & Wong, 2013). It is supported by different research findings that this situation occurs mostly in career decisions (Green, 2006; Jung, 2012). In the developmental PCP programme, it is emphasised that studies to improve decision-making skills should be included (Nazlı, 2011). Therefore, psychological counsellors should have knowledge about the career development of gifted students and inform students and parents about this matter.

An important finding that draws attention in the research conducted will be explained with the opinion of an example participant. When student opinions regarding the improvement of existing counseling activities in the institution are examined, *"Counselors should know the students closely and, for this purpose, they should hold individual meetings and activities with the students. Because it allows people who are afraid, shy or embarrassed to talk about their problems to seek guidance. The statement "I don't trust counselors very much because they tell teachers and families what is said there" (S25) is noteworthy. The most basic principle when carrying out counseling activities is to ensure confidentiality. Students want to know that confidentiality is protected under all circumstances. This is a very natural need. Thus, the student should be made aware that all these conditions are met during the interviews. It is very significant to provide this condition, especially when it is thought that the adolescent is in conflict with family members and is in search of trust.*

When the research findings are evaluated in general, it is noted that students' perceptions of guidance services are generally problem-oriented. The statements of the students in the study group, such as "There has been no situation that required me to seek guidance" etc., once again reveal the importance of preventive guidance services. In the study conducted by Yüksel-Şahin (2008), counseling services are evaluated according to the opinions of students in secondary education, and it is seen that the recognition of the school psychological counselor by the students is an important predictor on the evaluation of counseling services. Consequently, school psychological counselors interacting with students and carrying out guidance activities appropriate to their needs will lead to a significant change in the students' perspective. When viewed from the perspective of positive psychology, it is seen that emphasis is placed on how character strengths and virtues such as curiosity,

love of learning, honesty, perseverance, leadership, and self-control (Peterson and Seligman 2004) contribute to personality development. At the same time, it is supported by different research findings that gifted students have these character traits (Gür, 2011; Sak, 2010; Salmela and Uusiautti, 2015; Tucker and Hafenstein, 1997; Vötter and Schnell, 2019). Therefore, when working with gifted students, these character traits should be taken into consideration and counseling activities should be carried out accordingly.

Based on this research, in order to look at the counseling activities of gifted students from a broad perspective and to present studies on this subject in the literature, in addition to this study including student opinions, it is also necessary to carry out research including parents and psychological counselors, and also to determine whether some gifted students do not need psychological counseling and guidance services. It may also be recommended to investigate the reasons.

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