

## Career decision-making of the gifted and talented

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The purpose of this study is to determine how gifted and talented students think about future careers with regard to both the awareness and especially process of such career decision-making. Particular attention is given to their perceptions about having the best career they can imagine. A qualitative research model is used in this study. The study group consists of eleven gifted and talented high school students, studying in congregative gifted class in a private college. Students were contacted via phone or email, and appointments for interviews were arranged. The interviews were conducted by the researcher within a two-month period. Participation in the study was voluntary. A semi-structured interview form was used as data-collection tool, and data analysis was conducted through a content analysis. According to the results of the research, occupation that gifted and talented students want to have mostly expressed as doctor. As factors influencing their decisions regarding preferred occupation, gifted and talented students stated that their families, academic achievements, sense of social responsibility, and desire to manage the world, are the factors affecting their career decisions. Expectations of gifted and talented students regarding the countries in which they want to work were: feeling secure, offering business environment and opportunity, being developed, economically stable, a rich history, and affordability. The meaning of having good career for gifted and talented students was stated to be spending money and having prestige. Gifted and talented students visualise themselves in terms of their career ten years later as being tortured by their occupation, becoming the leader of their occupations and working overseas.

**Keywords:** career; career decision-making; gifted and talented

### Introduction

Gifted students are a special population of students identified as having IQ scores of 130 or higher, or as being in the top 2.5% of a normal intelligence quotient distribution (Karataş & Sarıcam, 2016; Peterson, 2015). The National Association for Gifted Children redefined giftedness as those who demonstrate outstanding levels of aptitude (defined as an exceptional ability to reason and learn) or competence (documented performance or achievement in top 10% or rarer) in one or more domains. Domains include any structured area of activity with its own symbol system (e.g., mathematics, music, language) and/or set of sensorimotor skills e.g., painting, dance, sports (National Association for Gifted Children [NAGC], n.d.)

Aside from the added complexities of cognitively advanced individuals such as gifted students, research also demonstrates that various social and emotional complexities often accompany giftedness, many of which could potentially impact the career decision process (Gysbers, 2013). There is often an assumption that gifted students are more intellectually, emotionally, and behaviourally advanced, or more mature than typical students (Berman, Schultz & Weber, 2012; Maxwell, 2007), and gifted students require little guidance in a broad range of career-planning and exploration (Greene, 2006; Maxwell, 2007).

Belasco (2013:782) expressed the importance of school counsellors in the college planning process, where he stated, “there is no school professional more important to improving college knowledge than the high school counsellor [*sic*].” Similarly, school counsellors play a valuable role in assisting diverse students and ensuring that all students have supports and guidance to promote successful graduation from high school and entrance to college, with opportunities for future careers (Bridgeland & Bruce, 2011; Hart, 2012).

The world of gifted children encompasses a constellation of factors including people, concerns, beliefs, and activities. The career or vocational counselling issues most discussed in the broader literature relate to gifted and talented individuals is multi-potentiality (Colangelo & Assouline, 2000). Some of the primary concerns with multi-potentiality, as it relates to career concerns, include: a) difficulty narrowing career options due to multiple viable options; b) outside pressure in pursuing high status (or high earning) career; c) the necessity to make long term commitments to education and training (i.e. graduate or professional school), even in the face of indecision about career path, or decisions related to other priorities (i.e. starting a family); and d) perfectionist tendencies (i.e. looking for the “perfect” career) (Rysiew, Shore & Leeb, 1999). These concerns illustrate the interconnectedness of intra- and interpersonal challenges faced by talented people. Depending on how congruent one’s career goals are with the expectations of others, as well as with one’s own self-concept, a student could find her or himself struggling with challenges such as depression, and serious relational problems, in addition to their multi-potentiality (Barker & Satcher, 2000; Muratori & Smith, 2015).

Although most educators of the gifted and talented endorse the concept of multi-potentiality, a serious challenge has been made by Achter, Benbow and Lubinski (1997). Achter et al. (1997) found in a large sample of gifted adolescents widely varying patterns of abilities and interests. They suggest that the problem lies not within the person (i.e., multipotentiality), but rather in the theoretical framework in which talented individuals’ abilities and interests are conceptualised. They suggest that the Theory of Work Adjustment (TWA; Dawis &

Lofquist, 1984) provides an extremely useful model for addressing the educational and vocational needs of gifted adolescents (Achter et al., 1997; Lubinski & Benbow, 2000).

Several practical suggestions have been offered to aid in career counselling with gifted and talented clients (Colangelo & Assouline, 2000; Rysiew et al., 1999). One suggestion is to explore one's career as a lifestyle or way of life, rather than as a job. Also, it is not necessary to limit oneself to a single career, but as one develops, one may change career focus and direction. In addition, other interests and skills may manifest in terms of leisure activities separate from one's career. Finally, career counselling should not be used simply as a job placement service, but should be a "value-based activity, exploring broad categories of life satisfaction" (Kurt & Chenault, 2016).

Career planning and the choices that result from it have a greater impact on a person's life than most other decisions made. It therefore becomes important to help students make career decisions and plan how they will achieve their goals. While career education and guidance ought to be provided for all students, it does not necessarily follow that all should consider the same options, process the same information, and proceed through the decision-making steps. The gifted and talented have special needs that have gone largely unrecognised, and are unlikely to be accommodated in the development and implementation of career education programmes (Jung, 2014).

It is most important to understand the differences among gifted children with respect to their need for special counselling and guidance, as well as the timing of its provision. No two children are exactly alike, particularly in terms of personality and emotional make-up. Many gifted students encounter no difficulty with establishing social relationships. Others, particularly the highly gifted, may find this a difficult area. Some gifted students are naturally gregarious; others may prefer to pursue solitary endeavours. Some gifted students are highly self-confident and secure in their ability, while others lack self-esteem to the extent that patterns of under-achievement can develop (Muratoro & Smith, 2015).

Although parents and teachers may be concerned about academic planning for gifted and talented young people, they often assume that career planning will take care of itself. Students may have many choices available, due to multiple gifts, or a particular talent, where a career choice in that area seems inevitable. There is no need for career planning: The student is simply expected to make decisions regarding their occupation around the sophomore year of college, and then to follow through on the steps necessary to attain that goal.

Unfortunately, evidence is mounting that youthful brilliance in one or more areas does not

always translate into adult satisfaction and accomplishment in working life. Studies with such diverse groups as National Merit Scholars (Watley, 1969), Presidential Scholars (Kaufmann, 1981), and graduates of gifted education programmes (Kerr, 1985), have shown that the path from education to career is not always smooth, and may be complicated by social-emotional problems and needs of gifted students that differ from those of more typical students.

Students may develop a strong identity in the talent area (the 'computer whiz', 'artist', or 'fix-it person', for example). They may express a desire for help with planning a career in an area of interest. A desire to test skill in competition with or in concert with peers in the chosen talent area and continued high performance in the talent area to a degree that causes neglect of other school subjects or social activities, constitutes an additional sign of a focused interest and passion. College students and young adults make an early, but not hasty or arbitrary, choice of career or major. They often show a desire for completion of a training period in order to 'get on with work', seek out mentors, continue intense focus, and often neglect social and extracurricular activities as Gysbers (2013) noted.

It is not uncommon for the gifted to regard their work as a major means of self-expression. It is possible to take this one step further, that is, to say that career choice is ultimately a choice of lifestyle, in which time and energy will be consumed in work-related activities. As a result, the decision-making process is especially crucial for these students. Hoyt and Hebel (1974) stress that the gifted and talented need to experience the interaction between educational, occupational and lifestyle choices. Decision-making will be made somewhat easier if the students can see how they combine in an interactive fashion. The task of guidance counsellors is to provide these gifted children with the skills needed to help them to be aware of themselves, make decisions, and reach their potential. In Turkey, there are no formal public institutions save for the Anatolian Fine Arts High Schools (secondary level) and Science and Art Centres, which are reliant upon Ministry of National Education (MEB, 2013). As private institutions, there are colleges using differentiated education programmes for education of gifted children. They choose these students via exams and grant scholarships for their education. It is estimated that there are nearly 400 thousand gifted and talented students in Turkey. However, it is worth noting that there is a restricted number of institutions, and that there is not any construction for these children, starting from primary level in formal education, as in the case of Western countries. Guidance and psychological counsellors only apply the IQ and developmental texts in

guidance research centres, and do not follow the any developmental process of these students.

An important key to successful counselling for gifted students lies in helping them develop a strong sense of their overall potential, as well as an understanding of their special areas of talent. In order to achieve this, both teachers and parents ought to work cooperatively. Various studies have been carried out on this in different countries, including Turkey and South Africa, most of which place focus on the perceptions of teachers of the education of gifted students and services for families (Baglama & Demirok, 2016; Oswald & De Villiers, 2013; Pomortseva, 2014). These researchers have shown that teachers and families from Turkey and South Africa report that it is important to develop programmes for gifted students to meet the unique academic needs and interests. However, the number of studies focusing on career counselling of gifted students is limited in the literature. It is therefore expected that the present study might provide preliminary results for these countries on career counselling of the gifted. Alternatives should always be offered, along with the rationale supporting the appropriateness of each option to the individual. Career choices ought to reflect life-planning models that allow for appropriate development and growth at various junctures in the life cycle.

#### Aim of the Research

The aim of this study is to determine the way in which gifted and talented students think about future careers with regard to both the awareness, especially when it comes to the process of such career decision-making. Particular attention is given to their perceptions about having the best career. To reach this aim, the study seeks to answer the following questions.

- 1) What occupation do gifted and talented students desire to have, and what are the factors that affect gifted and talented students' career decisions?
- 2) What kind of counselling service activities have gifted and talented students participated in about their career decisions?
- 3) What are gifted and talented students' expectations from the countries that in which they want to work?
- 4) What does it mean for gifted and talented students to have a good career?
- 5) How do gifted and talented students visualise themselves in terms of their career 10 years later?

#### Methodology

A qualitative approach is used in this study. Qualitative research is designed to reveal a target audience's range of behaviour and the perceptions that drive this behaviour with reference to specific topics or issues. It uses in-depth studies of small groups of people to guide and support the construction of hypotheses. The results of qualitative research are descriptive, rather than predictive (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

#### Participants

The study group consists of 11 gifted and talented high school students studying in congregative gifted class in a private college in Turkey. While six of the students are female, five of them are male. They are 17-year-old high school students with an IQ greater than 120. These students were selected as a result of success scholarship exam among hundreds student candidates.

#### Data Collection Tools and Analysis

A semi-structured interview form was used as a data-collection tool. Interviews are frequently used in qualitative studies to investigate opinions, emotions, or experiences in-depth. This technique requires the researcher to structure an interview form consisting of questions, and, depending on the outcomes of the interview, the researcher incorporates follow-up questions to enhance understanding of the data (Türnüklü, 2000; Yıldırım & Simsek, 2008).

The issues that recur in the literature have generated a basis for a list of questions for structuring the interview form used as the data-collection instrument in this research. To enable clear and efficient interaction with the students, questions are designed to attain open and detailed answers from participants. After the first draft of the interview form was composed, eight guidance counsellors, three assessment and evaluation specialists, and three teachers were consulted for their opinions. A pilot study was applied to provide content validity. A pre-application was conducted with 15 participants, and through analyses of the obtained data, unnecessary items were removed from the interview form. In addition, alternative questions were prepared for cases in which communication ambiguities occurred during interviews.

Permission was obtained to implement for the application of the interview form from the Ministry of National Education. Students were contacted via phone or e-mail, and appointments for interviews were arranged. The interviews were conducted by the researcher within a two-month period. Participation in the study was voluntary.

Content analysis was used in the analysis of the data collected in the research, defined as summarising a text with specific encoding and smaller content categories (Büyüköztürk, Kiliç Çakmak, Akgün, Karadeniz & Demirel, 2010). According to Tavşancıl and Aslan (2001), content analysis is defined as a scientific approach that investigates social reality through objectively and systematically classifying the message, meaning, and linguistic information, including verbal, written, and other materials, by converting to numbers and making inferences. In the research, categorical analysis was used from the types of content analysis. In general, categorical analysis

refers to the division of a given message into units and then grouping these units into categories according to certain criteria (Bilgin, 2006).

In this study, data was presented considering the questions used in the interview. Messages (coding data) have been taken from responses to each question. Later, similar codes were collected under the same group, and categories were created (finding themes). Thereafter, in the final phase, the findings were interpreted, and the data were analysed within the framework of the pre-identified codes and themes.

The frequencies were not given according to the number of teachers involved, but presented according to what the teachers reported. The reason for this is that the teachers presented multiple codes (messages) in some questions, while not answering others. Direct quotations were frequently used to reflect the views of participants in a striking way. Participant names were not used in the study, it is coded as student 1, 2, 3 (S.1, S. 2, S.3 ...).

Reliability of themes: the researchers refrained from directing the teachers during the interview. The role of researcher has been to enable teachers to talk about the subject matter of the research. In the study, the data obtained through interviews were resolved by the researcher and categorised into themes. In order to find the reliability of the coding (themes) used in the research, 11 papers were also evaluated by the two different experts in the field so as to ensure consistency between data processors (Tavşancıl & Aslan, 2001). The consistency between data processors was found to be 80%, where reliability is ensured by a 70% consensus of opinion among data processors (Karaman-Kepeneci, 2005).

## Results

This section reports on findings of the research regarding which occupation gifted and talented students desire to have, as well as what those factors are that affect gifted and talented students' career decisions.

### Preferred Occupations Gifted and Talented Students Desire to have and Factors Affecting Gifted and Talented Students' Career Decisions

Most students wanted to be medical doctors, some wanted to become industrial engineers or hackers, and only two stated that they wanted to become pilots. Stated factors impacting their decisions on preferred occupations were: family; academic achievement; a sense of social responsibility; and the desire to have a positive impact on the World:

*S.1. I want to become a doctor. In my family, no one is a doctor. When one of the family members is ill, my parents always say: 'we wish one of us would become a doctor, then we could solve the health problems more easily.' These kinds of conversations encouraged me to choose this occupation. Moreover, the feeling one gets saving*

*a life and helping sick people makes it seem good to prefer such a job. Although my hobbies are gymnastics, playing piano and reading books, I'm good at science and mathematics; I'll be able to study in the faculty of medicine. [trans.]*

*S.5. Flying is one of my areas of interest, so I want to become a pilot. In addition to this, we are living on an island, people can reach their family members living abroad thanks to pilots, and I want to be one of these pilots. [trans.]*

*S.9. I want to become an industrial engineer, since energy controls the lives of all the world. I'm good at science and mathematics, and my family support me to study in this field, because solar energy can be used more effectively in my island, Cyprus. However, my island needs people to become industrial engineers to make it possible. [trans.]*

### Counselling Service Activities Gifted and Talented Students Have Participated in Regarding Their Career Decisions

Counselling service activities in which these students had participated are categorised under three themes.

Gifted and talented students have stated that attendance at career days, watching videos, visits to working places activities organised by their school counsellors, and teachers for the presentation of careers, as evidenced in the following notable responses:

*S.3. Our school counsellors took us to fairs; there were occupation presentations there. We were informed about their advantages and disadvantages. In addition to this, we visited hospitals, banks, universities, companies, and factories, and met the people working there, and asked questions about their working life. It was really impressive to see the virtual flight application in the department of pilotage. [trans.]*

*S.9. Our teacher and counsellor made us watch the videos of people working in different occupations. They shared their experiences with their tasks. We visited different places to see their work circumstances. We also visited career days' organisations to become informed about occupations. [trans.]*

### Expectations of Gifted and Talented Students regarding the Countries in which They Desire to Work

The expectations of the students from the countries in which they desired to work were: sense of security, the availability of a business environment and relevant opportunities, being developed, having highly developed industry and a rich history, and being affordable, as evidenced in the following notable responses:

*S.6. The country in which I want to live to work must have a low crime rate and must be economically robust. [trans.]*

*The country in which I want to live to work must have rich business environment and working opportunities. Moreover, it must have rich industry and history, so that it is possible to spend free time in an interesting way. [trans.]*

S.8. *It must be developed and large country with a low crime rate, where it is cheap enough to shop freely.* [trans.]

### The Meaning of a Good Career

The meaning of having a good career for gifted and talented students was indicated to be, firstly, spending money, and secondly, having prestige, as evidenced in the following responses:

S.1. *In my environment, people with good careers have a high living standard, since they earn so much money, and also enjoy status.* [trans.]

S.6. *If you have a good career, you can have a higher standard of living and have a respectable life.* [trans.]

### How Gifted and Talented Students Visualise Themselves in terms of Their Career in Ten Years' Time

Students visualise themselves in terms of their career after 10 years as being tortured by their occupation, becoming a leader in their occupations, and working overseas, respectively. This is evidenced in the following responses:

S. 1. *After university, I visualise myself as working harder and harder to be able to live well and become the best in my occupation.* [trans.]

S.4. *To become the best in my career, I will be working all day and night, like a slave in overseas countries.* [trans.]

### Conclusion

According to the results of the research, gifted and talented students desire to become medical doctors. Only two reported wanting to become pilots, while the preferred list of occupations includes industrial engineers and hackers. As factors influencing their decisions as to preferred occupations, gifted and talented students stated that their families, academic achievements, sense of social responsibility, and desire to manage the world to be the factors affecting their career decisions. Furthermore, attendance to career days, watching videos, visits to working places activities have been organised for gifted and talented students by their school counsellors and teachers for the presentation of the careers as counselling service activities. Expectations of gifted and talented students from the countries in which they desire to work were reported as: feeling a sense of security; offering a business environment and opportunity; being highly developed; having advanced industry and rich history, and being affordable. The meaning of having good career for gifted and talented students was stated to be having and spending large amounts of money, and having prestige. Gifted and talented students visualise themselves in terms of their career in 10 years' time as being tortured by their occupation, becoming the leader of their occupations, and working overseas.

### Discussion

According to the results, occupational preferences mostly depends on cultural belief. In Turkish culture, medical doctors, pilots and engineers are considered the most prestigious occupations to adopt. Moreover, students' families, academic achievements, and a sense of social responsibility seem to be important factors influencing their career decisions. Accordingly, this can be related to Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. Also, activities organised by counsellors and teachers affect their career planning. Feeling a sense of security, offering a business environment and opportunity, being developed, having a developed industry and a rich history, and being affordable are among the criteria of countries that desire to work as all people from all over the world desire. The meaning of a good career comes under similar cultural influence, as evidenced by the following sentiment: 'earning and spending a lot of money and having status.' In addition to these, some of the students have promising and hopeful visions of the future, while some are rather hopeless.

When working with gifted students, it is important to consider the demographics as a component of assessing student needs as racial, cultural, and economic variables play a role in student perceptions, feelings, and aspirations (Repeckiene, Kvedaraite, Stanikuniene & Zvireliene, 2016). Therefore, it is expected that this study provided crucial findings on this issue, since teachers and researchers in most contexts would benefit from the findings in terms of how they may assist in providing insight appropriate to education and career counselling for gifted students. As mentioned before, studies carried out in Turkey or South Africa might also focus on other aspects of career counselling for gifted students, so as to support them in choosing a career for themselves.

Career counselling helps students to reflect on the self as well as their choices, restructure their beliefs, and deepen their character, to answer the all-important existential questions regarding who they are and want to be. Transition and change over time play prominent roles in career development and should, therefore, also be emphasised in career counselling for gifted and talented students. Unfortunately, high school and college programming for gifted students almost exclusively focuses on addressing the individual's academic needs (Gladieux & Swail, 2000; Kelly & Colangelo, 1990; Peterson, 2015), even though academic ability constitutes only one variable in career development. In a review of current literature on career counselling for the gifted, several recurring themes emerge, including: multipotentiality (Clark, B 1992; Clark, G & Zimmerman, 2004; Kelly & Hall, 1994; Perrone, 1997; Silverman, 1993); high

expectations and perfectionism (Kelly & Hall, 1994; Novack & Novack, 1996); early cognitive maturation (Fredrickson, 1986); and unique needs of talented females (Arnold, Noble & Subotnik, 1996; Hollinger & Fleming, 1992; Kerr, 1985; Reis, 1998).

Literature in this field reveals a paucity of research on career decision-making and career outcomes of gifted individuals, with virtually every available article decrying a lack of research and calling for more attention in this area. Just because someone is “smart” doesn’t mean that their career decision-making and career development will progress automatically or smoothly, and there are issues pertinent to gifted adolescents and adults which ought to be addressed. It is not unusual for gifted individuals to experience anxiety and frustration in relation to their career (Milsom & Peterson, 2006).

Career self-management is key when facing some of the issues of giftedness in the workplace. Picking the wrong career can lead to lifelong dissatisfaction, even burn-out, and waste the potential of the gifted child. To conclude with another cliché, “knowledge is power”, in this case, the power to avoid just such a situation. Csikszentmihalyi (1996:186) believes that entering a career and achieving success in it requires not only determination, but also “a good dose of luck.” This does not imply that everything is left to chance, but that career counselling must train individuals to generate, recognise, and incorporate chance events into their career development by remaining open minded and adopting an exploratory attitude. Curiosity, persistence, flexibility, optimism, and risk-taking are as important to development as domain-specific knowledge and skills in gifted and talented students, such that they may actively seize any unexpected career opportunities (Grothaus, McAuliffe & Craigen, 2012).

When school counsellors have a scholarly understanding of giftedness and the unique characteristics of gifted students, they are then able to offer information germane to helping gifted students in making sense of themselves, others, and life challenges (Peterson, 2015) and the role of school counsellors is crucial at this point in all levels of education (Enache & Matei, 2017; Yaman & Eryiğit, 2016). Kerr and Ghrist-Priebe (1988:367) suggested a “combination of assessment, individual counselling, and group counselling [*sic*] activities that: (a) clarify needs, interests, and values; (b) encourage goal setting; and (c) provide support for unique concerns of the gifted.” Ultimately, to best deliver career-counselling services to gifted populations, counsellors must maintain awareness of contemporary research-based practices designed to help deliver optimal service to gifted students. In the career decision process of gifted people, career coun-

selling services ought to address cognitive ability, complexity, and performance of the student as interrelated components (Wood, 2010).

#### Note

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