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IEWS OF PRE-SERVICE PRESCHOOL TEACHERS ON GIFTED CHILDREN

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Abstract: The objective of the study is to identify the views of preschool pre-service teachers on gifted children. Sample of the study included 57 pre-service preschool teachers attending Firat University Faculty of Education. Qualitative research method was utilized in the present study. Data collection tools was a semi-structured interview form developed to identify views on gifted children by the authors. Content analysis on obtained data was conducted to describe the views of pre-service preschool teachers that participated in the study on gifted children. Results demonstrated that pre-service teachers had general knowledge on the identity of gifted children. Pre-service teachers stated that gifted children were significantly different than other children vis a vis certain characteristics. To develop the skills of these children, they argued that a different curriculum should be implemented and the teachers that would instruct that curriculum should be trained in a specialized education and possess adequate knowledge about gifted children. Pre-service teachers stipulated that it would be better to identify gifted children as earliest as possible, and thus, preschool period is the most appropriate time to identify the gifted children.

Keywords: Preschool, education of gifted children, gifted children

Introduction

Gifted children are young individuals that demonstrate higher performance in different areas such as intelligence, creativity, arts, leadership capacity or academic fields when compared to their peers and defined as such by the field experts (MEB, 2006). Characteristics of gifted individuals are their distinctive abilities in different studies, academic fields, visual arts and psycho-motor areas, fast learning abilities, ability to use an advanced vocabulary, ability to concentrate on the fields of interest, early reading and an interest in reading, curiosity, being a good observer, advanced analysis and synthesis capacity, enjoying discussions, wide imagination, and having original ideas and solutions (Marland, 1972; Silverman, Chitwood & Waters, 1986; Gross, 1993). These characteristics necessitate a special education for gifted individuals at an early age. The different and superior characteristics of gifted children when compared to other students could be observed in appropriate educational environments. It is imperative for gifted children to start education at early ages specific for them to develop the level of abilities they possess (Ataman, 2005). Thus, starting a special education appropriate for gifted children in pre-school age, which is the first stage of education and instruction, is very important in developing their abilities.

Studies conducted with pre-school teachers showed that teachers experienced difficulties in identifying gifted children when compared to parents and it was determined that this situation was due to teachers' insufficient or inaccurate knowledge on highly gifted characteristics observed during infancy or preschool age (Baykoç, 2011). Lack of teachers' awareness on gifted children could result in negative consequences such as misguidance of these students and disappearance of their abilities.

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An active education for gifted children during preschool period would only possible with teachers with ample knowledge about these individuals. Sufficient knowledge of pre-service preschool teachers about gifted children would be quite important in their professional lives. The objective of the present study is to determine the views of pre-service preschool teachers about gifted children.

Methodology

Research Model

The present study conducted to determine the views of pre-service preschool teachers about gifted children is a qualitative and descriptive study.

Study Group

The study sample included 57 senior students attending Firat University, Faculty of Education.

Data Collection Tool

A semi-structured interview form, developed by the authors to determine the views on gifted children, was utilized. In compliance with the ethics standards, codes such as OÖÖA1, OÖÖA2, ... OÖÖA57 were used to replace the actual names of participating preschool teachers.

Data Analysis

Data collected with the conducted interviews were analyzed with content analysis method. During the analysis of the data collected in conducted interviews, content analysis data for both researchers were coded separately and coherence between these two datasets was calculated using $[\text{Agreement} / (\text{Agreement} + \text{Disagreement}) \times 100]$ formula (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Consistency between the researchers who coded the data was calculated as .88.

Findings

Pre-service preschool teachers were asked to define the gifted children. Descriptions of obtained responses are detailed in Table 1.

Table 1. The views of pre-service preschool teachers on who the gifted children are

	Categories	F	%
Who gifted children are?	Individuals who are remarkably superior than their peers in different areas.	29	54,72
	Individuals whose intelligence levels are over a certain limit.	13	22,8
	Individuals who are more intelligent than their peers.	7	12,28
	Individuals who are successful in class.	5	8,77
	Individuals who use their intelligence better.	1	4,57
	Individuals with better problem solving skills and creative ideas.	1	4,57
	Curious individuals who ask many questions.	1	4,57

Majority of pre-service preschool teachers defined the gifted children as individuals who are remarkably superior in different areas when compared to their peers (54.72%). Some pre-service teacher responses are presented below:

“They are individuals who are remarkably superior in at least one areas when compared to their peers under similar circumstances. (OÖÖA43)”

“They are individuals with an IQ level of 130 or higher and superior in different areas such as cognitive, social and emotional when compared to normal individuals. (OÖÖA35)”

“They are individuals who study more in the classes when compared to their peers. (OÖÖA15)”

The responses given by pre-service preschool teachers to the question when education for gifted children should be started are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. The views of pre-service preschool teachers on when education for gifted children should start

	Categories	F	%
When should education for gifted children start?	It should start before school and in the family	28	49,12
	It should start during preschool stage	25	43,86
	It should start in the primary school	4	7,02

Most pre-service preschool teachers stated that the education of gifted children should be initiated by their families at preschool age (49.12%).

Pre-service preschool teachers’ responses on how the education of gifted children should be provided are given in Table 3.

Table 3. The views of Pre-service preschool teachers on how the education of gifted children should be provided

	Categories	f	%
How the education of gifted children should be provided	Education should be provided in special schools for gifted children.	47	82,46
	They should attend a regular school, but they should receive additional different applications.	10	17,54

Most pre-service preschool teachers argued that education of gifted children should take place in schools specifically tailored for their needs (82.46%).

Results and Discussion

The present study was conducted to determine the views of pre-service preschool teachers about gifted children. Content analyses were conducted on the responses provided by pre-service preschool teachers to posed questions and necessary categories were created.

Participating pre-service teachers were asked to respond to the question “who are gifted children,” and most responded that they were individuals who were remarkably superior in different areas when compared to their peers. This definition was parallel to a definition by Hemphill (2009). Furthermore, it was determined that the vast majority of pre-service teachers considered cognitive characteristics when identifying gifted children. This result was consistent with the findings of the study by Endephols-Ulpe and Ruf (2005).

Participating pre-service teachers were asked to respond to the question “when should the specific education for gifted children should start,” and most responded that it should start at home before they start the school. There are studies with similar findings in literature (Tezcan, 2012; Kildan, 2011). Participating pre-service teachers were asked to respond to the question “how should the education for gifted children should be,” and most responded that they should attend special schools designed for their needs. There are studies with parallel findings in literature (Tezcan, 2012; Kildan, 2011). However, there are other studies that object to the education of gifted children in mainstream schools with a different program, suggesting that these students should be educated in inclusive environment based on their levels (Tekbaş, 2004).

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