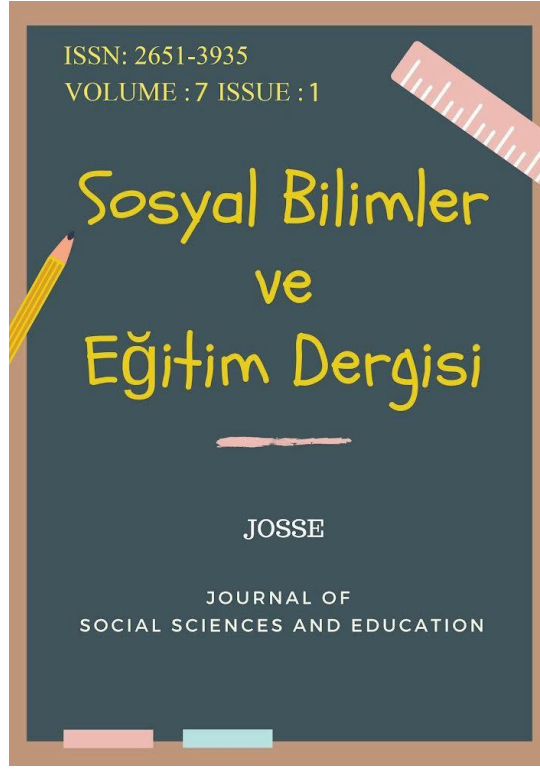


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**An Investigation of Graduate Theses on Gifted Students Based on
"Differentiated Instruction"**

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Abstract

The aim of this research is to reveal the general status of graduate theses written on the basis of “differentiated teaching” with gifted students in Turkey. In this study, where basic qualitative research method is used, data were obtained by document technique examination. Descriptive analysis method was used in the analysis of the obtained data. In the determination of the graduate theses to be used in the study, the electronic environment of the Higher Education Institution (HEI) thesis screening was used. In line with the findings of the study, most of the theses related to the differentiated teaching in the field of gifted people in Turkey were concluded within the Institute of Educational Sciences in 2014, where the most thesis was doctoral theses. The most studies are written within the Istanbul University. In addition, the methods used in research are mostly quantitative research patterns. The most used models in the theses are the parallel curriculum model and integrated curriculum models respectively. Again, the most differentiated disciplines are mathematics, science and social knowledge respectively. The majority of the sample/working group of the research are 5th grade. When the results of the research are examined, it is recommended that differentiation models related to the superior talents be carried out with the courses at the secondary level (high school) level and with the students, qualitative and mixed method researches are also focus attention and studies are carried out at the graduate level.

Keywords: Gifted, graduate thesis, differentiated instruction, thesis research, differentiation models

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Introduction

Regarding the past process, the definition of superior intelligence seems to change from conservative definitions to more liberal definitions. Conservative definitions attempt to define the concept of superior intelligence within certain limits by numbers, whereas liberal definitions are characterized as high-level capacity or high potential in any performance area (Sak, 2017). Gifted children differ from typically developing children in the areas of physical, cognitive, linguistic, and social/emotional development (Manning, 2006). Additionally, these differences can be characterized by specific interests, resilience to adverse situations, a need for recognition through task performance, self-confidence, a desire to spend considerable time in areas of interest, and the ambition to achieve high-level goals in those areas (Bloom, 1985; Csikszentmihalyi et al., 1993; Hebert and Reis, 1999; Bildiren, 2011).

In the directive of the Ministry of National Education, Science and Art Centers (SAC), special talented student expression was used instead of the concept of gifted students and special talented students: intelligence, creativity, art, he defined it as a student with a high level of leadership capacity or high level of performance in private academic fields according to their peers (MEB, 2022). This definition is similar to the definition adopted by the United States Department of National Education (Marland, 1972), which defines the gifted child as a child with extraordinary success or success potential (Sak, 2017). These characteristics that distinguish gifted students from their peers have required different educational interventions for them. While students who are different in various aspects are taught in the same classroom, not taking these differences into account prevents all students from developing equally. In addition, new approaches are needed to raise individuals with different skills (Özer & Yılmaz, 2016). These educational interventions have come to the forefront as differentiated teaching in the field writing. The differentiated teaching model requires that rather than waiting for students to change themselves for the curriculum, teachers should be flexible in their approach to teaching and adapting the curriculum and in providing information to students. Differentiated teaching is a teaching theory based on the premise that teaching approaches should be diversified and adapted according to individual and diverse students in classrooms (Hall, 2002).

Tomlinson and Imbeau (2010) define differentiated teaching practice as the modification of curriculum-related elements such as content, process and product based on student readiness, interest, and learning profile. The readiness, interest and learning profile of the students constitute the basic elements of differentiated teaching. Preparedness in

differentiated teaching encompasses the skills, level of knowledge, and abilities that students have to begin their learning process. The differentiation of readiness aims to provide all students with appropriately challenging learning experiences. This shows how much knowledge and experience students have in relation to a particular subject or skill (Santangelo & Tomlinson, 2009).

Student interest refers to the interest and motivation students have towards a subject or course content. Learning environments designed for students' interests can provide more effective learning and increase student engagement (Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2010).

A learning profile is a combination of features such as a student's learning style, strengths and weaknesses, learning strategies and learning speed. The learning profile of each student may be different. Therefore, in differentiated teaching, course content and learning methods are determined in accordance with the learning profiles of the students (Anderson, 2007).

Differentiating content requires teachers to change or adapt the way students access the material they want them to learn (Joseph et al., 2013). In other words, teachers allow students to select a major subject or a subtopic in the unit (Heacox, 2002).

In the dimension of differentiation of the process, students are tried to develop scientific research skills with high-level thinking skills such as problem-solving, critical and creative thinking skills to reveal various products (Falcon, 2018). Flexible grouping is used continuously in process differentiation. Strategies for flexible grouping are important. Students are expected to interact and work together while developing knowledge of new content. Teachers can conduct whole-class introductory discussions on big ideas in content and then do small group or dual work (Sylwester, 200).

In product differentiation size, the products that students create are the ultimate assessments that allow them to demonstrate how much they understand the content and how well they can apply their knowledge and skills after an important training section (Sylwester, 2003; Tomlinson2005a; 2005b).

The concept of enrichment is also frequently used in the education of gifted students with differentiated teaching. Enrichment is defined as the work of the gifted student by deepening and expanding on any subject area more than his peers. The scope of the curriculum is extended with enrichment and advanced topics are included (Sak, 2017). In summary, differentiation refers to the diversification of teaching content and methods to meet the different needs of students, enrichment is the in-depth expansion of the current program to enable students to experience more in-depth learning experiences (Feldhusen & Jarwan,

2000). Various models and designs related to differentiated teaching have been developed in the field of training of gifted people. These include (William Model, Maker Curriculum Differentiation Model, Parallel Curriculum Model, Integrated Curriculum Model, Curriculum Narrowing Model, Purdue Three-Home Model, Triple Enrichment and Revolving Door Model, Grid Model, Capabilities Unlimited Model, Autonomous (Autonomous) Learner Model, UKEP, UYUKEP models (Sak, 2017). Based on these models, the training programs are adapted to those with superior skills. It can be said that enrichment is also done in the activities and lesson plans made with this adaptation (Tortop, 2015). In other words, differentiation refers to change in elements such as content, product, process, and learning environment. With the introduction of these items, scientists were able to develop various frame models. It would not be wrong to say enrichment to differentiation without a model related to these items.

In the literature, there are studies that examined postgraduate theses on differentiated instruction without any limitation such as normal development or high level development (Kula & Karakuş, 2023; Karadağ, 2014). Kaya et al. (2022) analyzed the theses on differentiation and enrichment in the field of giftedness within the framework of author, year, thesis level, purpose of the study, method, participants, and findings. However, in the theses examined in particular, no analysis of differentiated teaching models was found. The cases of the theses examined in this research according to differentiated teaching models have also been examined and it will be easier for the researchers who will carry out new studies in this field. In this framework, it is aimed to reveal the general status of graduate theses written on the basis of “differentiated teaching” about gifted students in Turkey.

Problem Statement

What is the general situation of the graduate theses written on the basis of “differentiated teaching” about gifted students in Turkey?

Sub Problem

1. What is the distribution of graduate theses written about differentiated teaching by year?
2. What is the distribution of differentiated teaching-related graduate theses according to their level?
3. What is the distribution of graduate theses written about differentiated teaching according to the universities?

4. What is the distribution according to the procedures in which the graduate theses written about differentiated teaching are made?
5. What is the distribution of the sample of graduate theses written about differentiated teaching by class level/age group?
6. What is the distribution of research methods used in graduate theses written about differentiated teaching?
7. What is the distribution according to the gender of researchers who write graduate theses written about differentiated teaching?
8. What is the distribution of differentiation models used in graduate theses related to differentiated teaching?
9. What is the distribution according to the discipline (field) in which the graduate theses written about differentiated teaching are made?

Method

Model

The model of this study is qualitative research design. Qualitative research is defined as research in which qualitative data collection techniques such as observation, interview and document analysis are used as data collection techniques (Patton, 2014). In addition, a qualitative process is followed to reveal the events and phenomena in their natural environment in a realistic and holistic way without any intervention (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011).

Data Collection Tool

In this study, where basic qualitative research method is used, data were obtained by document technique examination. Descriptive analysis method was used in the analysis of the obtained data. In the determination of the graduate theses to be used in the study, the electronic environment of the Higher Education Institution (HEI)' thesis screening was used. In determining theses, "superior talent and differentiation/differentiated instruction" keywords were used. As a result of the document screening, in July 2022 period, the Higher Education Institution (HEI), 31 graduate theses related to differentiated teaching in the field of superior talents in the electronic environment of ' thesis scanning have been reached and reached on 31 graduate thesis studies performed. The data were collected with the "Differentiated Teaching-Related Graduate Thesis Studies Review Form" in the Field of Outstanding Talents, which

was created by researchers. Within the scope of this form, the year in which the graduate theses are made, the type, the university in which they are made, the class level of the sample/age group, the type of research, the gender of the researchers, the differentiation models used, are, there are 9 articles, including the discipline (area) in which differentiation is performed. Collected findings are presented in tables as frequency (f).

Findings

Graduate theses made in the field of differentiated teaching in this part of the research; the year in which it is made, the type, the university in which it is made, the institute in which it is made, the level of the researcher in the sample/age group, the research models, their distribution according to the discipline (field) in which differentiation is done is included.

Table 1

Distribution of Graduate Theses Related to Differentiated Teaching by Year

Distribution of graduate theses by years	f	Total
2014	7	31
2017	5	
2013	4	
2012	3	
2018	3	
2021	3	
2016	2	
2004	1	
2019	1	
2020	1	
2022	1	

As seen in Table 1', when we examine the graduate theses written about differentiated teaching, the maximum number of theses were prepared in 2014 (f=7). Then in 2017 (f=5), in 2013 (f=4), in 2012 (f=3), in 2018 (f=3), in 2021 (f=3), respectively, In 2016 (f=2), it was found that it was prepared in 2004 (f=1), in 2019 (f=1), in 2020 (f=1), in 2022 (f=1). The fact that 2014 saw the highest number of postgraduate theses on differentiated instruction may indicate that it was a period of prominent research and interest in this field.

Table 2

Distribution of Differentiated Teaching Related Graduate Theses According to Their Level

Levels of theses	<i>f</i>	Total
Phd	25	31
Master's degree	6	

Table 2 presents the findings regarding the level of the postgraduate theses on differentiated instruction. When the findings obtained are examined, it is seen that most of the 31 theses published on differentiated instruction for gifted students are doctoral ($f=25$) level studies. At the master's level, there were only 6 theses. This may indicate that more comprehensive and in-depth research has been conducted in this field and that there is more interest at the academic level.

Table 3

Distribution of Postgraduate Theses on Differentiated instruction by Universities

Distribution of postgraduate theses by universities	<i>f</i>	Total
Istanbul University	13	31
Gazi University	4	
Uludag University	2	
Hacettepe University	2	
Bolu Abant İzzet Baysal University	1	
Ataturk University	1	
Inonu University	1	
Middle East Technical University	1	
Karadeniz Technical University	1	
Marmara University	1	
Yildiz Technical University	1	
Balıkesir University	1	
Amasya University	1	
Alanya Alaaddin Keykubat University	1	

Table 3 presents the findings regarding the universities where the postgraduate theses on differentiated instruction were prepared. When the findings were examined, it was found that the most studies on differentiated instruction for gifted students were prepared at Istanbul University ($f=13$). Istanbul University was followed by Gazi University ($f=4$), Uludağ University ($f=2$) and Hacettepe University ($f=2$). Bolu Abant İzzet Baysal University, Atatürk University, Hacettepe University, İnönü University, Middle East Technical University, Karadeniz Technical University, Marmara University, Yıldız Technical University, and Marmara University had one thesis each. The findings show that Istanbul

University is a prominent institution in studies on differentiated instruction for gifted students. This indicates that Istanbul University plays a pioneering role in this field and hosts important research and academic activities in this field.

Table 4

Distribution of Graduate Theses Related to Differentiated Teaching According to the Procedures

Distribution of graduate theses according to the procedures	<i>f</i>	Total
The Institute of Educational Sciences	21	31
The Institute of Social Sciences	7	
Institute of Science	2	
Graduate Education Institute	1	

Table 4 presents the findings related to the institutes where the postgraduate theses on differentiated instruction were prepared. When the findings obtained were examined, it was found that most of the 31 theses published on differentiated instruction for gifted students were prepared in the Institute of Educational Sciences ($f=21$). Then, theses were prepared in the Institute of Social Sciences ($f=7$), Institute of Natural and Applied Sciences ($f=2$) and Institute of Graduate Studies ($f=2$) respectively. The findings show that studies on differentiated instruction for gifted students are mostly conducted within the Institute of Educational Sciences. This indicates that this issue is prominent in the field of education and that more research and studies in this field are encouraged.

Table 5

Distribution of the Sample of Graduate Theses on Differentiated Instruction According to Grade Level/Age Group

Distribution of the sample by grade level/age group		<i>f</i>	Total
Grade level	5th grade	15	35
	4th grade	6	
	6th grade	5	
	7th grade	4	
	2nd grade	3	
	3rd grade	1	
	10th grade	1	
Age level	10 years old	2	6
	11 years old	2	
	12 years old	1	

Table 4 presents the findings regarding the distribution of the sample of the postgraduate theses on differentiated instruction according to grade level/age group. When the findings obtained were examined, it was found that the sample/study group of the 31 theses published on differentiated instruction for gifted students was 5th grade students (f=15). Then, theses were prepared at the 4th grade (f=6), 6th grade (f=5), 7th grade (f=4), and 2nd grade (f=3) levels respectively. However, it is seen that in some theses theses mentioned age level rather than class level are also present. According to the data obtained, it was determined that studies on differentiated instruction most commonly focused on 5th grade students. This finding indicates that differentiated instruction for students at the middle school level is an important area of interest for researchers and that active efforts are being made to meet the needs in this area.

Table 6

Distribution of Research Methods Used in Graduate Theses on Differentiated Instruction

Distribution of graduate theses according to research method	f	Total
Quantitative research method	19	31
Qualitative research method	7	
Mixed research method	5	

Table 6 presents the findings regarding the research methods used in graduate theses on differentiated instruction. When the findings obtained were examined, it was found that most of the 31 theses published on differentiated instruction for gifted students were prepared according to quantitative (f=19) method. This was followed by qualitative (f=7) and mixed method research (f=5) respectively. According to the findings, it is seen that quantitative methods are most commonly used in graduate theses on differentiated instruction. This shows that quantitative data collection and analysis techniques are generally preferred in research on differentiated instruction for gifted students.

Table 7

Distribution of Researchers Who Wrote Graduate Theses on Differentiated Instruction According to Their Gender

The gender of the researchers who wrote the graduate theses	<i>f</i>	Total
Female	26	31
Male	5	

Table 7 presents the findings regarding the distribution of researchers who wrote postgraduate theses on differentiated instruction according to their gender. When the findings were examined, it was found that 26 of the 31 theses published on differentiated instruction for gifted students were written by female researchers, while only 5 theses were written by male researchers. According to the findings, it is seen that the majority of graduate theses on differentiated instruction were written by female researchers. This indicates that female researchers show more interest in differentiated instruction for gifted students and are more active in this field.

Table 8

Distribution of Differentiation Models Used in Graduate Theses on Differentiated Instruction

Distribution of differentiation models used in graduate theses	<i>f</i>	Total
Parallel Program Model	7	45
Integrated Program Model	6	
General Content Differentiation Principles (Content-product-process-environment)	5	
Grid Model	5	
Enrichment	4	
Kaplan Model (Depth-complexity)	2	
Maker Model	2	
Uyep	2	
Differentiation According to Bloom's Taxonomy	2	
William Model	1	
Capabilities Unlimited Model	1	
Autonomous Learning Model	1	
Brain-Based Differentiation	1	
Computer Assisted Differentiation	1	
Differentiation with Literary Analysis	1	
Differentiated Scientific Research Methods	1	
Differentiation According to Blended Teaching Method	1	
Inquiry Based Differentiation	1	
Project Based Differentiation	1	

Table 8 presents the findings regarding the distribution of differentiation models used in graduate theses on differentiated instruction. More than one differentiation model was used

in one study. When the findings were examined, it was found that various differentiation models were used in differentiated instruction for gifted students. Among these models, the parallel curriculum model (f=7) was used the most. Afterwards, it was found that these were prepared based on the integrated curriculum model (f=6), General Content Differentiation Principles (Content-product-process-environment) (f=5), grid model (f=5) and enrichment (f=4). According to the findings, it is seen that various differentiation models are used in graduate theses on differentiated instruction. The most frequently preferred model is the parallel curriculum model, followed by the integrated curriculum model, general content differentiation principles, grid model and enrichment model. This diversity shows that researchers conducted their research by examining different different differentiation approaches and models.

Table 9

Distribution of Graduate Theses on Differentiated Instruction According to Discipline (Field)

Distribution of graduate theses by discipline (field)	f	Total
Science	9	31
Mathematics	8	
Social Studies	4	
Primary School	2	
Geometry	2	
Turkish	2	
English	1	
Chemistry	1	
Visual Arts	1	
Informatics	1	

Table 9 presents the findings regarding the distribution of postgraduate theses on differentiated instruction according to the discipline (field). When the findings were examined, it was found that the theses on differentiated instruction for gifted students were mostly in the fields of science (f=9), mathematics (f=8), social studies (f=4), primary school (f=2), geometry (f=2), Turkish (f=2), English (f=1), chemistry (f=1), visual arts (f=1), informatics (f=1). According to the findings, graduate theses on differentiated instruction vary according to the disciplines. Most theses were conducted in the fields of science and mathematics, indicating that differentiated instruction for gifted students is an important focus in these fields. This indicates that the differentiated instruction needs of students in the fields of science and mathematics have been investigated more and more studies have been conducted in this field.

Results and Discussion

With this research, it is aimed to reveal the general situation of the graduate theses written on the basis of “differentiated teaching” about gifted students in Turkey. In addition, the general trends, differences and deficiencies in these theses were revealed and new perspectives were tried to be presented to the researchers who will work in this field.

The findings of the study indicate that out of the 31 theses prepared in Turkey on differentiated instruction for gifted students, 25 are doctoral theses and 6 are master's theses. Kaya et al. (2022) found in their research that out of the 31 theses they examined, 22 were doctoral theses and 9 were master's theses.

The reason for the difference here is that in all of the theses considered in this research, the application of differentiated instructional programs and activities of orientation can be shown to gifted students. However, studies with non-applicative and program development proposals related to differentiated teaching and studies with teachers were not taken into account. In addition, the vast majority of the studies are doctoral theses. Kula and Karakus (2023) found that the distribution of graduate thesis according to the types of graduate theses conducted on the differentiated teaching approach that does not only cover the superior talents, and only a small part of the doctoral thesis it can be seen to come out. The reason why differentiated teaching studies related to gifted people are more complex than training gifted people and may be due to the need for expertise in differentiated teaching programs and activities to be prepared for these students. In other words, it is thought that the systematic of differentiation models based on the programs prepared in the theses in this research and the adaptation of the related courses take time and expertise to reveal the result of more doctoral studies.

In the study, it was revealed that the most thesis studies were conducted in 2014. However, Kula and Karakuş (2023), in their study examining the research on differentiated instruction that does not only include gifted students, concluded that the theses they conducted were concentrated in recent years such as 2018, 2019 and 2020. Most of the sample/study group of the study consisted of middle school students, especially 5th graders. Kula and Karakuş (2023) point out in their study that the students who make up the research sample are mostly middle school students. Karakuş (2016) examined the theses written on differentiated instruction in the world and Turkey. Similarly, the study found that theses on differentiated instruction in Turkey were generally conducted at the 5th grade level. In the analysis of the theses in the ProQuest database in the world, it was found that these studies

mostly focused on study groups consisting of primary and secondary school students and teachers. These findings suggest that more research is needed on the implementation of differentiated instructional approaches at various levels from pre-school education to high school and higher education in Turkey. Özüdoğru et al. (2021) found that most of the studies were conducted at the secondary and primary school level, with secondary school students and teachers.

It was concluded that they were conducted within the Institute of Educational Sciences. When the universities where postgraduate theses on differentiated instruction were conducted were examined, it was seen that theses on differentiated instruction were written in 11 different universities. The most studies were written in Istanbul University. In addition, the methods used in the studies were mostly quantitative research designs. Kula and Karakuş (2023) concluded that the postgraduate theses conducted on differentiated instruction approach were predominantly designed according to mixed method as a research method and most of them were prepared in the experimental design model with pretest-posttest experiment control group.

It was also found that the differentiation models used in the theses varied and more than one differentiation model was used in one study. The most commonly used models are parallel curriculum model and integrated curriculum model, respectively. Theses prepared according to the Gifted Education Program (UYEP) Model, which is a Turkey-based differentiation model (Sak, 2009) were also found. Again, mathematics, science and social studies are the disciplines in which differentiation is most common. In addition, studies on Turkish, English, visual arts, chemistry, informatics and geometry were also found. However, there are no studies on secondary level courses such as history, geography, literature, physics and biology. Kaya et al. (2022) stated in their study that thesis studies on differentiated instruction were mostly conducted in the fields of mathematics, geometry and science, while fewer studies were conducted in the fields of social studies, Turkish, English and fine arts. When we look at the other findings of the study, it is seen that the majority of the theses were written by female researchers. Karakuş (2016) reveals that theses conducted abroad on differentiated instruction mostly focus on language skills and mathematics teaching. Özüdoğru et al. (2021) found that most studies on differentiated instruction were conducted in the fields of special education, mathematics education and foreign language education.

When we look at the other findings of the study, it is seen that the majority of the theses were written by female researchers. This indicates that female researchers show more interest in differentiated instruction for gifted students and are more active in this field.

In recent years, there has been a noticeable increase in the number of Science and Art Centers (SAC) where gifted students are educated, and the total number of these centers has reached 393 (MEB, 2024). This increase shows the growth in the number of students with different abilities. However, these research results reveal that the 31 theses on gifted education are insufficient. There is a need for more postgraduate theses on differentiated instruction in order to improve the quality of gifted education and to provide education appropriate to their individual differences.

In the introduction of the study, principles for planning differentiated instruction were stated. Gül (2014) defined a 14-step differentiation process for students with special needs in special and general education classrooms and suggested adaptations in content, process and product dimensions. She emphasized that the features that initially appear to be limitations actually have positive aspects and that these steps can be applied in classrooms with all students. This approach can guide teachers in effective teaching.

Recommendations

When the results of the research are examined, it is recommended that differentiation models related to gifted students should be conducted with courses and students at the secondary education (high school) level, qualitative and blended method research should be emphasized, and more studies should be conducted at the graduate level. It is also recommended that male researchers should conduct studies on differentiated instruction. Most theses were written in the fields of science and mathematics, but theses can be written in other fields as well. Parallel curriculum model and integrated curriculum model were mostly used in theses. Theses can also be written based on other differentiation models.

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