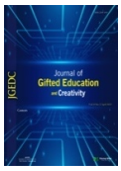

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Research Article

Examining sports talent in Turkiye from the perspective of Ecological Systems Theory and Matthew Effect

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Abstract

The focus of research on gifted education primarily on academic giftedness represents one of the significant challenges in the development of this field. In recent years, alongside the strengthening of discourses around world peace, interest in international Olympics showcasing athletic talent has also increased. This study represents a first in examining athletic talent in Turkiye through the lens of the Matthew Effect and the Ecological Systems Theory. Weightlifting has been chosen as the field of athletic talent. The research employs qualitative methods, including document analysis and discourse analysis techniques. A comparative analysis of Turkiye's success scores in various categories with those of EU countries was conducted. Additionally, 31 posts related to weightlifting, shared between 2020 and 2024 on the official Twitter (X) account of Turkiye's Ministry of Youth and Sports (@gencliksporbak), were identified and analyzed. The results of the in the European Championships, Turkiye ranked 2nd in women's team Olympic scoring and 4th in men's team Olympic scoring. Despite team success, individual athletes did not achieve a top-10 world ranking within the four-year period, and therefore could not secure the desired Olympic quotas. While there are 64 countries in Europe, 28 athletes from 16 European countries were invited to the Olympics, reflecting a 22% representation rate. Countries like Armenia, Bulgaria, Italy, and Georgia achieved notable success in weightlifting in Europe. In the Ministry of Youth and Sports' social media posts on X, themes such as “the excitement of lifting weights,” “pride,” “the second most successful branch after wrestling,” “desire to learn about weightlifting,” “introducing weightlifting in two words,” “congratulations from the Minister,” and “evoking new excitement for the country” were prominent. Other posts focused on medals won and successes achieved. These themes were found to include elements such as “national pride,” “ministerial appreciation,” and “social enthusiasm.” According to the Ecological Systems Theory, these findings can be interpreted as the sport of weightlifting functioning as a macro-system influence by linking gifted individuals to “social values” and “political structures.” Additionally, the sharing of posts featuring the names of successful athletes, in the context of the Matthew Effect, can be seen as a support mechanism for increasing the “social recognition” of successful athletes. However, no posts were found related to supporting early achievements in weightlifting, providing educational and financial support, or offering opportunities for emerging talents in this field.

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Introduction

In developing countries, giftedness is predominantly addressed with a focus on academic achievement, while other talent domains receive limited attention. This emphasis can be attributed to Tannenbaum's (1986) perspective on the societal value assigned to specific talent domains and the socioeconomic status that gifted individuals in those areas can achieve. Consequently, athletic talent remains an underexplored area in the field of giftedness research. Van Rossum (2009), in a chapter within a renowned handbook, comprehensively examined athletic talent. Unlike academic giftedness, athletic

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talent has not been prioritized due to the relatively smaller population engaged in this field. Nevertheless, national-level interest in athletic talent and the Olympics has been steadily increasing.

In recent years, Turkey has emerged as a remarkable success story among developing countries by achieving significant accomplishments in various sports disciplines. The establishment of the Ministry of Youth and Sports of the Republic of Turkey in 2014 may have played a crucial role in this development.

This study aims to explore athletic talent within the conceptual framework of giftedness by utilizing two theoretical perspectives that explain the transformation of high potential into exceptional ability through environmental factors. The role of parents, the environment, and schools is particularly critical in identifying young individuals with exceptional athletic talent and in fostering their ability to showcase their potential (Cular et al., 2024).

The findings of this research are significant in understanding the influence of genetics and the environment on the achievements of gifted athletes (Hsu et al., 2024)

Weightlifting

Weightlifting has been an essential part of the modern Olympic Games since their inception. As a sport featured in the Olympic Games, weightlifting is a highly competitive discipline with ever-expanding and growing international participation (Storey & Smith, 2012). Olympic weightlifting consists of two fundamental movements: the snatch and the clean and jerk (Garhammer & Takano, 1992).

The snatch movement involves lifting the barbell from the platform overhead using the proper technique. This can be achieved either with the hip and knee joints not fixed (power snatch technique) or with these joints fixed (squat snatch technique). The snatch consists of several stages, including the start position, pull, bar catch, lockout, and rising to a standing position while holding the bar overhead with a wide grip (Gough et al., 2018).

The clean and jerk technique involves two coordinated movements: the clean and the jerk. The clean entails lifting the barbell in one motion to the shoulder area, while the jerk involves pushing the barbell from the shoulders to an overhead position with arms fully extended in a single movement (Erdağı, 2022).

In weightlifting competitions, athletes are allowed three attempts for the snatch and three attempts for the clean and jerk, making a total of six attempts. Athletes must successfully complete at least one lift in both the snatch and the clean and jerk. The competitors achieving the highest combined total weight are awarded Olympic rankings. Athletes who place in the top three receive medals (Chiu & Schilling, 2005).

If a weightlifter fails all three attempts in either the snatch or the clean and jerk, the athlete cannot earn points for the team. Moreover, if competing in the Olympics, the athlete also forfeits their individual ranking. Since failed attempts in the snatch and clean and jerk can significantly affect the team's total score, achieving success in these lifts is crucial (McGuigan & Kane, 2004). To achieve successful results, it is vital for weightlifters to train within a competitive framework.

Photo 1. Ahmet Temel's snatch lift at the Senior Turkiye Championship held in Kayseri (2010) (Ahmet Temel's personal archive)

Photo 2. Ahmet Temel's clean and jerk lift at the Senior Turkiye Championship held in Antalya/Serik (2012) (Ahmet Temel's personal archive)

The development and establishment of weightlifting in Turkiye began with Naim Süleymanoğlu's defection from Bulgaria. At the 1988 Summer Olympics held in Seoul, South Korea, Naim Süleymanoğlu secured Turkiye's first-ever gold medal outside of wrestling, convincing all authorities of Turkiye's potential for sports development (Temel et al., 2021). Subsequently, he achieved championships at the 1992 Olympics in Barcelona, Spain, and the 1996 Olympics in Atlanta, USA, becoming Turkiye's first athlete to win three Olympic gold medals (TMOK, 2024).

Naim Süleymanoğlu's defection also accelerated immigration to Turkiye, bringing talented young athletes such as Halil Mutlu, Taner Sağır, and Reyhan Arabacıoğlu to the country. Halil Mutlu followed in Süleymanoğlu's footsteps, winning Olympic gold medals at the 1996 Atlanta, 2000 Sydney, and 2004 Athens Games, becoming the second athlete from Turkiye to achieve three Olympic championships (Temel et al., 2021).

The 2000s marked a significant turning point for women in weightlifting, with Nurcan Taylan becoming the first female athlete from Turkiye to win an Olympic gold medal at the 2004 Athens Games. As a prominent figure for women in sports, Taylan played a vital role in popularizing weightlifting among the masses. In the same year, Taner Sağır, at just 19 years old, claimed the Olympic championship, setting a record as the youngest champion in the history of the Games. In addition, Sedat Artuç and Reyhan Arabacıoğlu secured bronze medals at the 2004 Athens Olympics.

After this period, Turkiye's success in Olympic weightlifting began to decline, with the most recent achievement being Daniyar İsmayilov's third-place finish at the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Games (TMOK, 2024).

Identifying gifted children at an early age and training them under knowledgeable, skilled, ethical, and professional coaches is one of the fundamental responsibilities of sports federations to achieve international success (Bullock et al., 2009). Failure to recognize potential talent by coaches may result in losing a champion athlete and tarnishing national prestige (Baker et al., 2012). A genetic predisposition for weightlifting observed in a child signals that the child could reach optimal performance levels with proper training regimens (Epstein, 2013).

The definition of giftedness may vary depending on the needs of the specific sport. Morphological, physiological, psychological, motor, technical, and tactical elements, as well as the level of open or closed skills required for the sport, are critical factors in assessing giftedness (McCarthy & Collins, 2014). Individuals exhibiting superior muscularity, speed, and explosive athletic abilities compared to their peers are considered gifted in weightlifting (Arabatzi et al., 2010; Chaouachi et al., 2014).

It is crucial for coaches to observe these factors, identify the right athletes, encourage them to pursue weightlifting, and convince their parents and teachers. Gifted athletes respond positively to training regimens, allowing their development to progress to desired levels.

Theoretical Framework

The Ecological Systems Theory is a socio-psychological framework aimed at comprehensively understanding individuals' developmental processes, behavior formation, and environmental interactions (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This theory defines developmental processes through various environmental systems: the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. While the microsystem encompasses an individual's immediate surroundings (e.g., family), the mesosystem examines interactions between these environments (e.g., school) (Bronfenbrenner & Morris,

2006). The exosystem includes external factors that indirectly affect the individual (e.g., urban institutions), and the macrosystem focuses on broader cultural and societal structures shaping the individual's environment (García Coll et al., 1996).

By emphasizing the impact of environmental factors on individual development, this theory provides a vital framework for understanding the influence of social and educational policies on these interactions (Lerner, 2005; Orenstein, 2013). When evaluating the development of athletic talent, it is crucial to assess the role of family, school, immediate environment, and society's perspective and support within this theoretical framework. Hence, this study is designed to analyze athletic talent development from the perspective of this theory.

The Matthew Effect is a concept that can be succinctly summarized as "the rich get richer, and the poor get poorer." In gifted education, it argues that gifted individuals will further develop their talents if placed in environments that support their social and academic success. This effect enhances success by providing additional opportunities and resources to successful individuals (Merton, 1968). Gifted children who exhibit academic success at an early age can benefit from specialized education programs, scholarships, and mentorships that support their talent development (Gottfredson, 2003). This phenomenon exemplifies the Matthew Effect, where success breeds further success (Ceci & Williams, 1997).

Furthermore, gifted individuals often benefit from increased societal recognition and support, which boosts their self-confidence and contributes to greater achievements (Simonton, 1999). However, this effect may deepen social inequalities, as such opportunities are often inaccessible to less advantaged individuals (Sternberg, 2005). Thus, the dual impacts of the Matthew Effect must be carefully considered.

In the context of athletic talent, this theory is employed to evaluate the outcomes of supporting or neglecting talent throughout childhood and adulthood in various environments and situations.

Significance of the Study

A notable gap exists in research analyzing the factors that promote the development of high-level athletic talent through a detailed examination of Turkiye's success in weightlifting. This study not only aims to offer a fresh perspective on gifted education by focusing on athletic talent in Turkiye but also evaluates the compatibility of achievements by weightlifters across different age groups with international standards. By comparing performance data with those of EU member states and European averages, the study provides a comprehensive assessment of Turkiye's competitive standing in sports.

Additionally, analyzing the social media messages of the Ministry of Youth and Sports sheds light on the official discourse regarding the support and encouragement of athletic talent. This analysis could reveal the impact of such messaging on athletes' motivation and the societal perception of sports. Discourse analysis (Gee, 2014) is utilized as a critical tool to understand sports policies and supportive narratives developed by official institutions.

Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this study is to analyze Turkiye's participation and success data in international Olympic weightlifting events, along with the social media posts of the Ministry of Youth and Sports on the X platform, within the theoretical frameworks of the Ecological Systems Theory and the Matthew Effect. While examining Olympic achievements, differences across age groups will be considered, and the alignment of these achievements with international standards will be evaluated.

Given the recent rise in Turkiye's sports achievements, understanding which age groups these successes originate from and comparing these results with international accomplishments constitute a key research question. The discourse analysis of the Ministry of Youth and Sports' social media posts holds significance for evaluating the support provided for athletic talent. In this context, discourse analysis has been identified as an appropriate methodology for this aspect of the research (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Method

Research Model

This study employs a mixed-methods research model to compare the weightlifting achievements of different age groups in Turkiye. It integrates document analysis and discourse analysis methods to examine the athletes' performances and official support discourses.

Data Collection Tools

Document Analysis

The focus is on the Olympic results of Turkish weightlifters across U-15, Youth, Junior, U-23, and Senior levels. These results were analyzed based on annual performance statistics provided by the Turkiye Weightlifting Federation and the European Weightlifting Federation. Performance rankings and success levels were evaluated to compare Turkiye's achievements with those of EU member states and the averages of other European countries (Bowen, 2009).

Social Media Posts

The data includes messages published on the official Twitter account of the Ministry of Youth and Sports of the Republic of Turkiye (@gencliksporbak) between 2020 and 2024. This analysis was conducted within the frameworks of the Ecological Systems Theory and the Matthew Effect. Social media messages were analyzed using coding techniques to evaluate supportive and encouraging discourses aimed at gifted athletes (Gee, 2014). Data was gathered from the official Twitter account of the Ministry, focusing on its supportive and motivational statements.

Olympic Results

The data was collected from datasets provided by the Turkiye Weightlifting Federation and the European Weightlifting Federation. These datasets included annual performance rankings and success levels of athletes.

Analysis

Frequency distributions and averages were calculated for the performance data. Social media messages were coded using content analysis methods. Themes were identified within the frameworks of the Ecological Systems Theory and the Matthew Effect (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Results

In this section, Turkiye's achievements in international Olympic weightlifting events are analyzed based on scores and numbers across different age groups. Additionally, the statements made by the Ministry of Youth and Sports of the Republic of Turkiye on the X platform are examined.

Table 1. Women's weightlifting countries ranking according to the scoring system

Row	**U-15**	**Youth**	**Junior**	**U-23**	**Senior**	**Olympic Result**
1	Poland	**Turkiye**	Poland	Ukraine	Ukraine	Ukraine
2	**Turkiye**	Poland	Ukraine	Poland	**Turkiye**	**Turkiye**
3	Romania	Ukraine	**Turkiye**	Romania	United Kingdom	Poland
4	Ukraine	Spain	Armenia	**Turkiye**	Spain	Romania
5	Spain	Armenia	Finland	Finland	Romania	Finland
6	Italy	Finland	Romania	Russia	Norway	Armenia

When looking at Table 1, it is seen that Turkiye has very tough competition with Poland, Ukraine, and Romania in the women's category at all age levels. In terms of stability, it can be said that women's weightlifting is successful in these countries. When we look at other countries, although they are ranked in terms of success, they have not been able to take part in every age category.

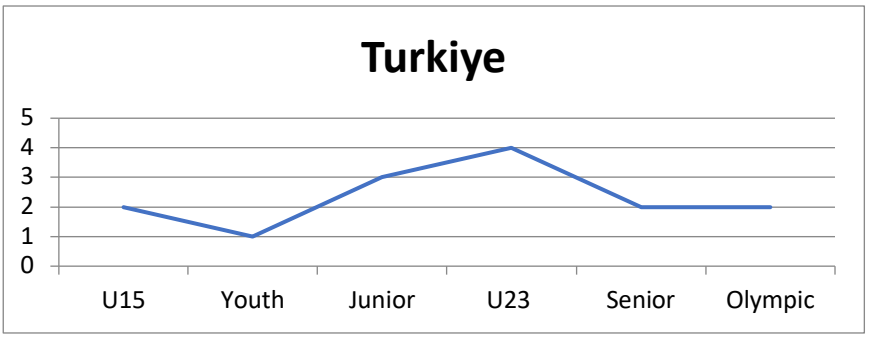

Figure 1. Ranking of success of Turkiye women's weightlifting team according to scoring system

Figure 1 shows the success graph of Turkey's women's weightlifting according to age levels. Accordingly, the Turkish women's weightlifting team showed its best success in the youth category. The women in second place in the u15, senior, and Olympic results could not achieve the expected success in the junior and u23 categories.

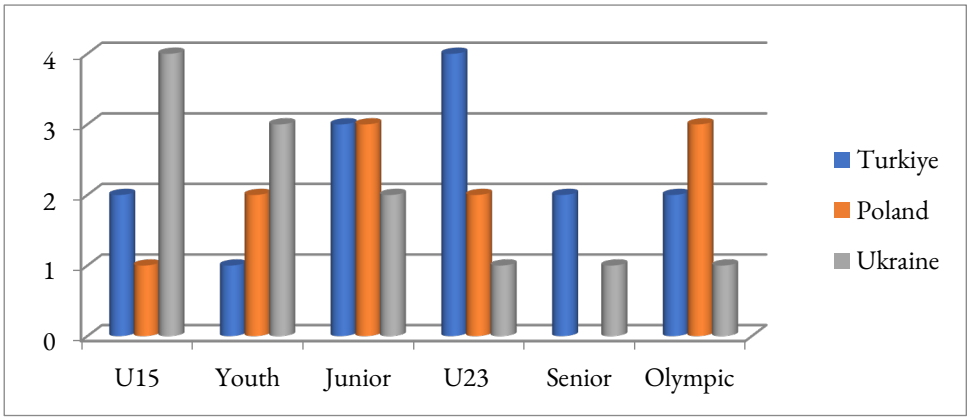

Figure 2. Comparative success ranking of the Turkish women's weightlifting team according to the scoring system

Figure 2 shows the countries' success graphs in women's weightlifting categories. Ukraine ultimately achieved first place in the Olympic Games rankings, with Turkiye and Poland following close behind. Ukraine, which could not reach the desired ranking in the u15, youth, and junior categories, may lose the top spot to other countries in the coming period.

Table 2. Men's weightlifting countries ranking according to the scoring system

Row	**U-15**	**Youth**	**Junior**	**U-23**	**Senior**	**Olympic Result**
1	Poland	Armenia	Armenia	Georgia	Armenia	Armenia
2	**Turkiye**	Poland	Georgia	Armenia	Bulgaria	Georgia
3	Ukraine	Georgia	**Turkiye**	Ukraine	Georgia	Ukraine
4	Georgia	Ukraine	Ukraine	Poland	**Turkiye**	**Turkiye**
5	Bulgaria	**Turkiye**	Poland	Romania	Czechia	Poland
6	Azerbaijan	Bulgaria	Finland	Czechia	Ukraine	Bulgaria
17				**Turkiye**		

Table 2 shows that Turkey is in very tough competition with Armenia, Georgia, Ukraine, Poland, and Bulgaria at every age level in the men's category. In terms of stability, it can be said that men's weightlifting is successful in these countries.

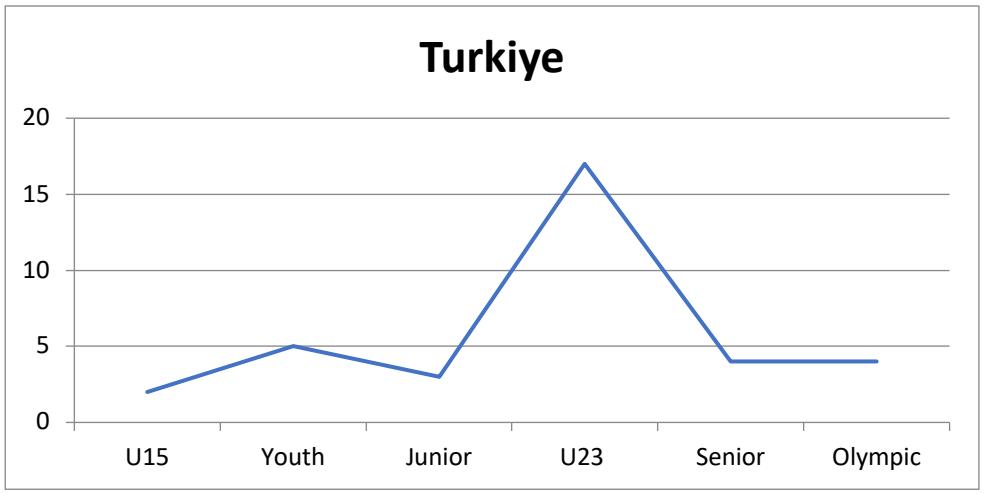

Figure 3. Ranking of success of Turkiye men's weightlifting team according to scoring system

Figure 3 shows the success graph of Turkish men's weightlifting according to age levels. Accordingly, the Turkish men's weightlifting team showed its best success in the u15 category. Turkey, which came third in the junior category, came fourth in the senior and Olympic results. It could not achieve the desired success in the youth category and achieved very poor results in the u23 category.

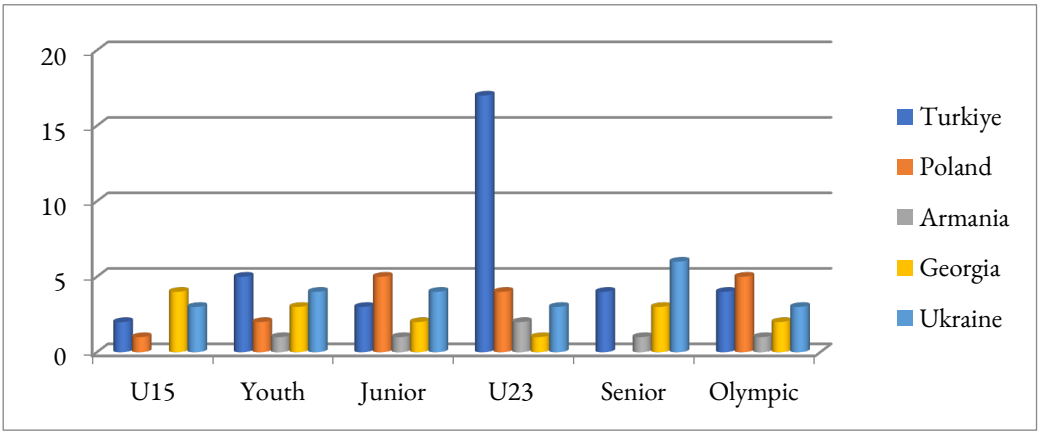

Figure 4. Comparative success ranking of the Turkish men's weightlifting team according to the scoring system

Figure 4 shows the success graphs of the countries in the men's weightlifting categories. Armenia ultimately took first place in the Olympic Games rankings, with Georgia and Ukraine following close behind. Turkiye could not take the top three places due to fluctuations in its success graphs in the youth and U23 categories. The fact that Armenia was dominant in the success graphs in every age category for men indicates that Armenia's success will be talked about for many years.

Table 3. Points received by Turkish women's athletes and their place in the European rankings

Country Category	**U-15 (x̄)**	**Youth (x̄)**	**Junior (x̄)**	**U-23 (x̄)**	**Senior (x̄)**	**Olympic Result (x̄)**
EU member states	494,60	485,60	374,04	301,95	649,36	1360,28
European country	401,55	468,45	384,30	338,88	729,10	1408,05
Turkiye	2470	2609	1395	923	2492	4810

When Table 3 is examined, it is seen that the average points of the countries that are members of the European Union in the women's weightlifting u15 and youth categories are higher than the European countries. We see that starting from the junior age level, European countries have clearly surpassed the European Union countries. Turkiye has shown above-average success in both groups in these rankings.

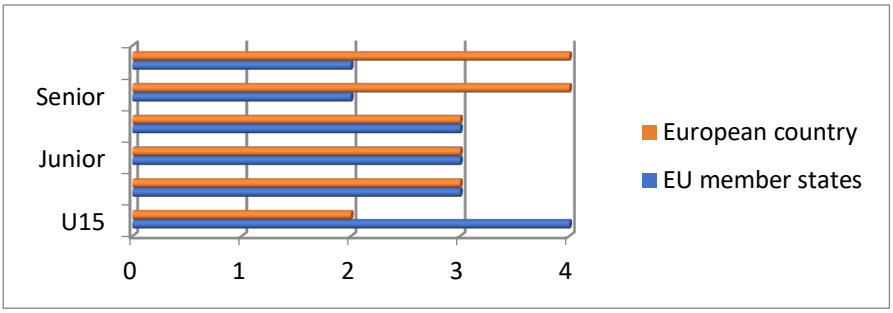

Figure 5. Categorical ranking of the top 6 women's teams in the European Championships

When looking at Figure 5, the categorization of the countries in the first 6 rankings is seen. European Union member countries have left European countries behind only in the u15 category in women's weightlifting. In the youth, junior, and u23 categories, countries are equally represented in the first 6 rankings. In the senior and Olympic rankings, European countries have shown qualified success by leaving behind European Union member countries.

Table 4. Points received by Turkish men's athletes and their place in the European rankings

Country Category	**U-15 (x̄)**	**Youth (x̄)**	**Junior (x̄)**	**U-23 (x̄)**	**Senior (x̄)**	**Olympic Result (x̄)**
EU member states	370,20	514,60	329,64	278,72	571,48	1179,84
European country	520,90	604,70	507,50	411,70	756,65	1675,85
Turkiye	2246	1756	1419	**346**	2088	3853

When Table 4 is examined, it is seen that European countries have left behind European Union member countries in the men's weightlifting rankings. While Turkiye received a higher score than the average score of European Union member countries in the u23 category, it reversed the success graph by remaining below the average score of European countries. In general, Turkiye was above average success.

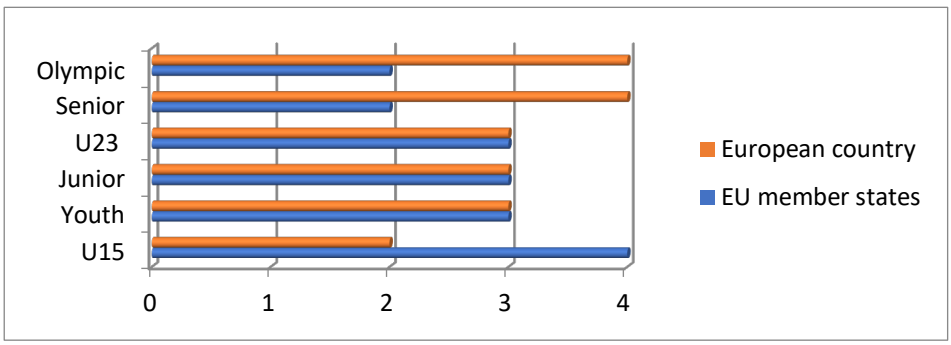

Figure 6. Categorical ranking of the top 6 men's teams in the European Championships

When looking at Figure 6, the categorization of the top 6 countries in men's weightlifting is seen. In the U23 category, European Union member countries and European countries have achieved equal success. In all other age categories, European countries have achieved more successful results than European Union member countries. It can be said that European countries are more successful in men's weightlifting.

For the 2024 Paris Olympics, 122 athletes from 57 countries have been invited through qualification quotas. Among them, 28 athletes from 16 European countries successfully secured their spots. These quotas were allocated to athletes who ranked in the top 10 across European, World, and select specialized tournaments. Athletes who consistently maintained their ranking in the top 10 within Junior, U23, and Senior categories during the four-year period between two Olympic events were selected as Olympic competitors (IOC, 2024).

The results suggest that other continents may outperform Europe in weightlifting. European countries, predominantly consisting of developed nations, achieved a 22% participation rate in Olympic weightlifting. This percentage raises questions regarding athletic talent development. Many European countries, including developing or fully developed ones like Turkiye, failed to secure participation rights in the Olympics.

Countries that field complete teams (n=10) in weightlifting events typically secure the championship trophy in team rankings. However, individual success, representing athletic talent, takes precedence at the Olympics. An athlete who consistently remains in the top 10 over four years earns the right to compete in the Olympics as an individual (IOC, 2024).

Turkiye, along with Romania and Poland, serves as an example of countries with a high number of athletes and significant team success in European championships. However, when examining the athletes invited to the Olympics, the same level of success is not evident. These countries have directed their young populations into sports environments, taking necessary steps to cultivate athlete identities. These nations will need to exert greater efforts to identify talented athletes qualified to compete at the Olympics and ensure they remain engaged in sports. Countries such as Norway, Latvia, and Estonia participated in events with one or two athletes and failed to achieve any team success. However, their athletes, being of elite caliber, qualified directly for the Olympics as European or World champions. As the analyses indicate, achieving success at the Olympics requires a focus on athletic talent. Turkiye is in a favorable position in terms of athlete numbers and team rankings, but it is evident that quotas are earned individually. A concerning trend is apparent in the U-23 men's category, where performance levels are alarmingly low. Athletes selected for the Olympic roster must rigorously prepare for tournaments and compete consistently over four years. The same athletes should avoid setbacks such as injuries or disengagement from the sport to remain at their peak.

To achieve peak performance, athletes must start training at an early age and commit to weightlifting for several years. The literature provides evidence that peak performance occurs at the age of 26 for men and 25 for women (Huebner & Perperoglou, 2019; Huebner & Perperoglou, 2020). While Turkiye performs well in the U15 category, the number of athletes and performance levels decline significantly by the U23 category. Athletes face challenges such as dropping out of the sport during the critical ages of 25-26, when they are expected to reach peak performance. If these negative trends are not addressed, it will be no surprise if the desired level of Olympic success remains unattained. Training athletes systematically with methods aligned with the principles of weightlifting can produce successful athletes in Turkiye. Regularly incorporating speed and quickness exercises into strength-based training, along with sufficient and balanced nutrition, effective rest, and mental preparation, will bring athletes closer to Olympic success (Arabatzi et al., 2010; Chaouachi et al., 2014).

Table 5. European countries and number of athletes invited to the 2024 Paris Olympic Games

Country	Number of athletes
France	4
Armenia	3
Bulgaria	3
Georgia	3
Italy	3
Romania	2
Belgium	1
Czechia	1
Estonia	1
United Kingdom	1
Latvia	1
Moldova	1
Norway	1
Poland	1
Turkiye	1
Ukraine	1
Total	28

Note: Number of athletes invited from EU member countries: 17, Number of athletes invited from European countries: 11 France has been given a +2 quota due to being the host of the 2024 Olympic Games.

As seen in Table 5, only one weightlifting athlete from Turkiye was invited to the Olympics.

Findings on Twitter (X) Posts

An analysis of the official Twitter account of the Ministry of Youth and Sports of the Republic of Turkiye (@gencliksporbak) between 2020 and 2024 revealed 31 posts related to weightlifting. When these posts were subjected to content analysis within the frameworks of the Ecological Systems Theory and the Matthew Effect, specific codes emerged, such as "weightlifting excitement," "feeling proud," "the most successful sport after wrestling," "would you like to know more about weightlifting?," "introducing weightlifting in two words," "the Minister's congratulations," and "bringing new excitement to the country." Other posts focused on medals won and achievements.

Messages such as "nationwide excitement," "the Minister's congratulations," and "feeling proud" can be interpreted, within the framework of the Ecological Systems Theory, as addressing the macrosystem level of weightlifting talent. These messages suggest a connection between talented individuals and the broader societal and political structures. On the other hand, messages like "introducing weightlifting" and "the second most successful sport" are more focused on institutional structures, indicating a mesosystem level. Interestingly, no messages were observed at the microsystem level, which would directly relate to an individual's immediate environment, such as family or local authorities.

The Matthew Effect, highlighting the social recognition of successful individuals, was observed in posts where successful weightlifters were introduced by name. However, no messages were found regarding the support of young athletes demonstrating early success in weightlifting, provision of educational and financial support, or opportunities offered to talented individuals in this field.

Results and Discussion

An examination of developed and developing countries reveals that gifted education predominantly focuses on academic talent, while research on athletic talent remains limited. For instance, Jung's (2022) systematic review of the identification and development of athletic talent analyzed only 101 articles published between 2001 and 2021, a relatively small number. As Stoeger (2009) noted, the history of gifted education has prioritized intellectual talent over the last two centuries, often driven by the need for success during global wars and economic competition. However, areas like the Olympics and physical talent, which play crucial roles in promoting world peace, have received limited attention. The reasons for this require further research.

Achieving success in gifted domains is often associated with economic stability. However, in the context of gifted education, it remains unclear whether clear definitions, recognition standards, or evidence-based rewards exist for physical talent in sports. Clarifying the primary objectives of athletic talent identification could be beneficial. For example, distinguishing and developing an "elite" group from the "sedentary" population could be prioritized (Datson et al., 2020). Providing access to rewards and a comfortable lifestyle for this elite group could also be considered a goal (Mann et al., 2017).

Frameworks such as Renzulli's Three-Ring Model (1978, 1988) and Gagné's Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent (DMGT) (2003, 2009) could serve as tools for identifying athletic talent. Renzulli's areas of above-average ability correspond to Gagné's transformation of talent into ability. Specifically, Gagné's concept of environmental catalysts could be interpreted in this study as the "Sports Olympics." Additionally, the Matthew Effect, initially conceptualized by Merton (1968) as a macro-social catalyst for talent development among elite academics, is now observed in various gifted domains, including athletic talent.

For Turkiye, national championships, European tournaments, and the Olympics are critical for identifying athletic talent. However, within the framework of the Matthew Effect, issues such as the identification and categorization (identity formation) of athletic talent could hinder its development.

As shown in Table 1, the findings indicate that young athletes in Turkiye achieve high scores in weightlifting but experience performance declines as they age, particularly at the Olympic level. This trend is especially evident among male athletes as they transition from Junior to Senior and Olympic categories. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory explains this phenomenon, as decisions about shaping one's life around athletic talent are influenced by societal perceptions and values associated with sports.

The analyses highlight the need for Turkiye to prioritize athletic talent to achieve Olympic success. Despite performing well in terms of athlete numbers and team rankings, the individual quota system remains a reality. The U-23 male category shows a particularly concerning performance gap.

Turkish athletes aspiring to the Olympic team must undergo rigorous training and participate in competitions consistently over four years. Additionally, they must minimize setbacks such as injuries and disengagement from sports to remain at the peak of their careers.

The importance of nurturing athletes to peak performance, particularly during the ages of 25-26 and extending to 30, must be emphasized (Huebner & Perperoglou, 2019; Huebner & Perperoglou, 2020). Success in weightlifting can only be achieved by identifying talented athletes with growth potential and ensuring their continued engagement in the sport.

The decline in Turkiye's performance in the Junior and Senior categories reflects the inability of Turkish teams to secure a consistent position in the top 10 rankings at the Olympics. When athletic talent in weightlifting is evaluated through the perspectives of the Matthew Effect and the Ecological Systems Theory, the need to develop supportive environmental factors for talent becomes evident, particularly within age categories and concerning national conditions and support for athletic talent.

One of the reasons young athletes quit sports is the university entrance exam-focused structure of the education system, which affects their families (Ünsal, 2024). In this context, the influence and guidance of the Ministry of Youth and Sports are critical; the content analysis of the Ministry's posts on the X platform conducted in this study also highlights this significance.

The analysis reveals that the Ministry's posts predominantly address the macrosystem and mesosystem levels of the Ecological Systems Theory, with few messages targeting the microsystem level. When examining the success of young weightlifters, it is observed that the primary influence comes from the family and close surroundings—those who support the child's early achievements. However, as children grow older, families may distance them from athletic activities, prioritizing their overall well-being.

At this juncture, the role of state institutions, such as the Ministry of Youth and Sports, in providing support to these talented individuals becomes critical. The Ministry's announcements of "successful athletes" on the X platform align with the Matthew Effect, contributing to the social recognition of these athletes.

Recommendations

For Further Research

This study analyzed the role of society and the governing authorities' discourses on athletic talent, focusing on the sport of weightlifting. Future research could explore other sports disciplines and make comparisons among them. Additionally, while this study derived conclusions based on Olympic achievements and age groups participating in the Olympics, in-depth interviews with all stakeholders could be conducted in the future to examine the fundamental reasons behind success in these groups. The perspective on athletic talent was examined through the lens of the Matthew

Effect in this study. Future research could provide a more detailed examination of all variables that could be evaluated within the scope of the Matthew Effect. The Olympics serve as laboratories for the most observable and tangible research on athletic talent. It would not be incorrect to refer to athletic talent as "sports giftedness" in this context. Thus, increasing research on sports Olympics is recommended.

For Applicants

Given the limited number of studies on sports giftedness, collaboration between researchers in gifted education and those studying athletic talent is recommended. Seminars and awareness-raising activities could be organized to increase societal value and support for the development of athletic talent. Social media consultants could be provided with seminars to encourage them to craft messages and discourses that promote talent discovery and support, especially from individuals in sports administration.

Limitations of the Study

This research is limited to the sport of weightlifting in Turkiye, as well as the data included in the discourse analysis and Olympic data from 2020-2024.

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