



## EFFECTIVE CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT QUALIFICATIONS FOR TEACHERS OF GIFTED STUDENTS<sup>1</sup>

ÜSTÜN YETENEKLİ ÖĞRENCİLERİN ÖĞRETMENLERİ İÇİN ETKİLİ SINIF  
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### Abstract

Gifted students are characterized by high cognitive skills, high learning motivation and creativity, compared to normally developing students. Also, there are some traits that are common in gifted students such as being energetic, perfectionist, and sensitive. Furthermore, gifted students who usually develop asynchronously, have leadership skills, high memory and long attention span. Thus, teachers of gifted students should be aware of the unique properties of gifted and take them into account in classroom management. Unless the teachers manage the classroom effectively, gifted students can show problem behaviors such as opposing authority, anxiety due to perfectionism, stubbornness, desire to become a leader and self-centeredness due to extreme self-confidence, jealousy among classmates, difficulty in accepting mistakes, rejecting to join unpleasant activities and day dreaming during activities. In this context, teachers of gifted students should have required qualifications. This study aims to discuss the effective classroom management qualifications for teachers of gifted students.

**Keywords:** Teacher, gifted, qualifications

### Öz

Üstün yetenekli öğrenciler, normal gelişim gösteren öğrencilere kıyasla yüksek bilişsel beceriler, yüksek öğrenme motivasyonu ve yaratıcılık ile özellikleri göstermektedir. Ayrıca enerjik, mükemmeliyetçi ve duyarlı olma gibi üstün yetenekli öğrencilerde ortak olan bazı özellikler vardır. Eş zamanlı olmayan şekilde gelişen üstün yetenekli öğrenciler, liderlik becerilerine, yüksek hafızaya ve uzun dikkat süresine sahiptir. Bu nedenle üstün yetenekli öğrencilerin öğretmenleri üstün yetenekli öğrencilerin kendine özgü özelliklerinin farkında olmalı ve sınıf yönetiminde bunları dikkate almalıdır. Öğretmenler sınıfı etkili bir şekilde yönetemezlerse üstün yetenekli öğrenciler, otoriteye karşı çıkma, mükemmeliyetçilikten kaynaklanan kaygı, inatçılık, lider olma arzusu ve aşırı özgüven nedeniyle benmerkezcilik, sınıf arkadaşları arasında kıskançlık, hataları kabul etmede zorluk, hoş olmayan aktiviteler yapmamakta ısrar etmede ve aktiviteler sırasında hayal kurma gibi problem davranışları gösterebilirler. Bu bağlamda üstün yetenekli öğrencilerin öğretmenleri gerekli niteliklere sahip olmalıdır. Bu çalışma, üstün yetenekli öğrencilerin öğretmenlerinde etkili sınıf yönetimi yeterliliklerini tartışmayı amaçlamaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Öğretmen, üstün yetenek, yeterlilikler

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## INTRODUCTION

Giftedness have been an important research area especially in the last century. It is a fact that gifted people play vital role in development of art, science and technology. Thus, countries have started to give importance to education of gifted individuals in order to come forward. Gifted students are characterized by high cognitive skills, high learning motivation and creativity, compared to normally developing students. Renzulli (1986) developed the 'Three Ring Theory' that define gifted as individuals who have the above-average ability, creativity, and task commitment and apply these three traits to one or more domains by combining them. Although gifted people are not a homogeneous group, there are some characteristics of gifted students that should be regarded while planning their education. In other words, gifted students have unique educational needs due to their common characteristics such as being energetic, sensitive, having high memory and long attention span (Webb, 1993). Moreover, perfectionism, leadership skills and asynchronous development of gifted students should be taken into consideration (Morelock, 1992). Since regular education programs are suitable for normally developing students, gifted students need appropriate education which enhance their special abilities. In this context, teachers play important roles in education process of gifted students. They should be aware of characteristics of gifted learners.

The purposes of gifted education can be summarized under three main headings. The first one is providing educational opportunities in which they are able to enhance maximum cognitive development and self-fulfillment (Sękowski & Łubianka, 2015). The second aim is educating them as beneficial and productive individuals for the society, such as scientists, artists, engineers or leaders (Renzulli, 1999). The third aim that is suitable with democratic philosophy of education, is the combination of the first two aims. In this context, Renzulli (2012) mention that creative and productive abilities of individuals play an important role to reach the first two aims; both having self-fulfillment gifted students, and providing benefits to society. The last aim can be restated as to enhance the gifted students' creative and productive abilities. Similarly, according to VanTassel-Baska (2003) a differentiated gifted curriculum as one which includes acceleration, complexity, depth, challenge and creativity. Furthermore Yurteri and Mertol (2018) mention that in a differentiated education, content must be meaningful to students and related to their world.

Gifted learners have special education needs in order to demonstrate their above-average cognitive skills. Therefore, in order to maximize the capacity of gifted and talented individuals, it is essential to employ differentiated instruction models such as accelerating, enriching, and grouping, as well as prepare well-designed learning environments (Sak, 2010). Thus, in gifted education programs, enrichment models and activities are commonly used (Reis & Renzulli, 2003). Enrichment programs are "richer and more varied educational experiences" that modify a curriculum "to provide greater depth and breadth than is generally provided" (Davis & Rimm, 2004, p.120).

### Characteristics of Gifted Learners

Gifted students constitute an important group among students with special educational needs. Since gifted students develop differently from their peers, they have unique educational needs. Unless the characteristics of gifted learners are taken into account in their education, they would underachieve contradictory to their potentials. Therefore, the teachers of gifted learners should be aware of these characteristics, their reflections on educational settings and appropriate teacher reactions towards them. In literature, there are some traits that are common in gifted students. These are explained below and summarized in Table 1.

**Asynchronous development:** Many researchers mention that asynchronous development is an important feature of gifted students (Hollingworth, 1942; Morelock, 1992; Silverman, 1997). As a pioneer in giftedness Hollingworth (1942) defined asynchronous development as a combination of the emotions of a child and the intellect of an adult within a child's body. In other words, their cognitive development is faster than psycho-social development. This causes a gap between their thoughts and emotions. A gifted student may behave age appropriate child despite being able to have a highly intellectual conversation with an adult. The adults who are in relation to gifted students, especially parents and teachers, should be aware of this. They should not forget that they are children. An appropriate teacher approach is tolerance to childish behaviors and avoiding unrealistic expectations.

**Rapid learning:** Gifted children have the potential to learn faster due to their superior cognitive development compared with their nongifted peers (Cross and Coleman, 2005; Cutts ve Moseley, 2004). Furthermore, they use more metacognitive abilities and establish faster and better connections between pieces of information (Saricam and Ogurlu, 2015; Sternberg, 1990). They are dissatisfied with the class pace (Vialle et al., 2001). Due to these differences, they dislike routine, notetaking, and repeating homework (Joffe, 2001; Park & Oliver, 2009; Samardzija & Peterson, 2015).

**Curiosity and observing:** According to Whitmore (1980) curiosity is one of the most significant traits of gifted students. Furthermore, Renzulli (1978) mentioned that gifted learners are alert and observant. The results of the research also indicated that curiosity levels of gifted students were higher than those of their normal peers (Henderson et al., 1982; Saricam & Sahin, 2015). Similarly, Delisle and Galbraith (2002) emphasize that gifted students often show persistent intellectual curiosity, ask searching questions, and show exceptional interest in the nature of humankind and the universe. Even at a young age, gifted children tend to exhibit interest in the universe and how the world works, and they often appease their curiosity by asking questions. All these traits affect the learning process of gifted students. Thus teachers of gifted, should be aware of their desires to learn and observe.

**Having long attention span:** Another character of gifted is having long attention span (Smutny, 1998). In other words, gifted students have long-term concentration ability compared to their peers. Thus, they benefit from opportunities and the provision of supports that develop their sustained attention and task persistence (Olszewski-Kubilius et al., 2015).

**Overexcitability and alertness:** One of the characteristics that gifted individuals have is overexcitability which was provided by Dabrowski (1967). A research conducted by Yakmacı-Güzel (2002) analyzed the emotional responses which are effective on the interaction of the individual with his/ her environment from the point of Dabrowski's hyperalertness domains. According to the results, gifted students obtained higher scores- Dabrowski's hyperalertness domains - than their peers in kinetic, emotional and intellectual domains while they obtained similar scores in affective and creativity fields. Furthermore, Whitmore (1980) mentioned that high alertness is one of the most significant traits of gifted students.

**Enjoying reading intensively:** Gifted students generally have an extraordinary reading ability. Many gifted children acquire literacy skills in early ages and are able to understand the complexities of language above their age (Mason & Au, 1990). Furthermore, they develop a positive attitude towards reading and enjoy reading in case they are adequately supported (Anderson et al., 1985; Martin, 2002; Smith, 1992). However, Gross (1993) mention that more than 70% of early readers radically modify their in-class reading performance, or stop reading altogether in class, within the first month of school because of

the feeling of strangeness and alienation. This research result emphasized the need of differentiated curriculum for gifted students.

**Creativity and divergent thinking:** Another feature of gifted students is creativity and divergent thinking. Runco (1993) described creativity as an important facet of giftedness. Milgram (1989) offered “Model 4X4 Structure of Giftedness”, which meets the above-mentioned requirements and represents creativity through the aspects of original thinking: general intellectual ability, specific intellectual ability, general original/creative thinking and specific creative talent. Each of these four processes is represented in an individual at one of four ability levels (profoundly gifted, moderately gifted, mildly gifted, and non-gifted).

One of the characteristics of gifted learners is well-developed thinking skills (Clark, 2008). A curriculum for gifted students should help to develop these skills further and give students opportunities to apply them. According to Sternberg and Lubart (1995) creativity includes intellectual skills to define and represent problems in new ways, analytical skills to evaluate ideas and select the best ones, practical intelligence to sell the value of the new idea to others, and divergent-thinking abilities to generate many diverse ideas.

**Imaginative:** According to Cropley (1994) imagination is one of the traits that are common in especially in creative gifted. However, this is not a welcomed behavior for the teachers. In order to give opportunity for gifted students to reveal their divergent ideas and thoughts freely, the discussion technique is appropriate (Coleman, 2003). Being an active participant is a good way to support imagination.

**Having high energy level:** Researchers mention that high physical energy is observed as well as cognitive energy in most gifted individuals (Özbay, 2013; Rogers, 1986; Silverman, 1998). Since they have unusual energy, they enjoy being active. However, Silverman (1998) mention that e disconcerting numbers of gifted children who have been diagnosed as having Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder.

**Perfectionism:** Many researchers stress that perfectionism is one of the major characteristics of gifted individuals (Öpengin, 2018; Özbay, 2013; Parker, 2000; Silverman, 2012). Perfectionism can be defined as desire to excel and avoid making mistakes. Unrealistic expectations and criticism from families and teachers foster perfectionism of gifted children and this situation causes high level of stress because of their impossibly high expectations from themselves in all areas in their lives (Wilson & Adelson, 2018). On the other hand, Hamachek (1978) made a distinction between normal and neurotic perfectionism. According to Hamachek, (1978) normal perfectionists derive pleasure from doing something that is difficult while neurotic perfectionists have unrealistic expectations and so unable to experience pleasure. Roedell (1984) argues that positive perfectionism can provide inner motivation to do better. In that sense, setting realistic targets that are appropriate to the children’s potential is healthier.

**Highly sensitive and empathic:** Gifted individuals are highly sensitive and have emotional intensity (Dağlıoğlu, 2014). Moreover, their empathy abilities have also improved (Davis, 2006) thus they have the ability to understand the thoughts, feelings, and wishes of others (Özbay, 2013). This feature may lead them to react social problems.

**Self-motivated and autonomous:** Gifted students have internal motivations and therefore they work persistently to achieve the goal they have set (Davis, 2006). Most of gifted students have unique interests in various areas. Giving responsibility and allowing for choice to study on their own interests will be helpful.

**Leadership skills:** Leadership, which is another feature of gifted students, can be challenging for teachers unless it is not directed in an appropriate way. Although leadership

skills are essential for development, it may turn to a power struggle such as always trying to be favorite, directing the group and setting the group rules. According to Tannenbaum (2003) gifted students usually show undesired behaviors such as insisting on having difficult and unscheduled tasks, rejecting borders, desiring independence and being out of order. Similarly, İnci (2014) stated, gifted students can show problem behaviors such as opposing authority and stubbornness. In order to prevent power struggle, teachers should let them to participate in decisions. Furthermore, setting classroom rules together will develop their leadership skills in a positive manner.

**Table 1.** Appropriate teacher reactions towards characteristics of gifted and their reflections

<b>Characteristics of Gifted Learners</b>	<b>Reflections to Educational Setting</b>	<b>Appropriate Teacher Reactions</b>
Asynchronous development	Feel as a child while think like an adult	Not forgetting that they are children
Rapid learning	Dislike routine, notetaking and repeating homework	Organizing projects in which they activity participate
Curiosity and observing	Asking many probing questions	Applying student-centered activities
Having long attention span	Studying tirelessly and focusing on details	Organizing enjoyable and active learning activities
Overexcitability and alertness	Interesting in various subjects and searching in detail	Fostering to study on various subjects and let to present their research
Enjoying reading intensively	Talking about the books	Organizing book discussions
Creativity and divergent thinking	Finding unusual solutions for problems	Organizing activities and discussions on unusual topics
Imaginative	Expressing divergent ideas	Giving opportunities to express their thoughts freely
Having high energy level	Being energetic	Applying activities including music, dance and drama
Perfectionism	Desire to excel and avoid making mistakes	Discussing the reasons and results of their behaviors instead of criticism or praise
Highly sensitive and empathic	Reacting to social problems	Encouraging them to express their feelings through art
Self-motivated and autonomous	Having unique interests	Giving responsibility and allowing for choice to study on their own interests
Leadership skills	Opposing authority	Letting them to participate in decisions, setting classroom rules together

### **Qualifications of Teachers**

Teachers are the most important factors in achieving the desired goals in the education of gifted students. According to Sak (2013) gifted students are more affected by teacher attitudes than others. Whether in the general education classroom, in a separate classroom or school, there are some qualifications that teachers who teach gifted students should have.

According to researchers who have studies on the subject (Ataman, 2004; Davis, 2006; VanTassel-Baska & Johnsen, 2007), teachers of gifted students should be qualified in aspects of their knowledge, skills and competencies. The teachers should have empathic understanding, enhance leadership capabilities, ability to influence others, communication skills, and collaboration. In other words, the teachers of gifted students are expected to be different positive from other teachers in terms of knowledge, abilities and competencies.

As mentioned above, gifted students can show problem behaviors such as opposing authority, difficulty in making friends, anxiety due to perfectionism, stubbornness, desire to become a leader and self-centeredness due to extreme self-confidence, jealousy, difficulty in accepting mistakes, insisting on not doing unpleasant activities and day dreaming during activities. However, a qualified teacher in gifted education can deal with these problem behaviors effectively. The effectiveness of teachers educating gifted children, a positive philosophical approach so that they can understand and meet their needs. In addition, they must have features adopting some characteristics in terms of personality, professional and teaching behaviors (Metin & Dağlıoğlu, 2004). Furthermore, Coleman (2014) stated that teachers should develop their professional practical knowledge through academic experiences. According to Ataman (2004), teachers of gifted children have extensive professional experience and must be capable of accepting mistakes. The teacher has extensive experience contributing to providing children with a more vibrant and more personalized learning experience. The most important characteristics that teachers have are being flexible, open to new ideas, interested in intellectual, literary and artistic subjects, democratic, cooperative, willing to develop and increase their knowledge.

One of the extensive studies is made by the American National Association of Gifted Children (NAGC). In this study, seventy competencies/principles that a qualified teacher should have were classified under ten subtitles such as characteristics and development of students, individual learning differences, teaching strategies, learning environments and social interactions, language and communication, planning, evaluation, professional and ethical practices, and cooperation (VanTassel-Baska & Johnsen, 2007). Also Sisk (1987) emphasized the importance of setting goals for gifted students, choosing teaching methods or strategies, helping for formation of values, and being a model. Observing the students, collecting information from different sources and should take into account the interests and needs of students is vital in setting goals for gifted students. According to Feldhusen (1997) teachers of gifted students should be well organized, flexible, enthusiastic, self-confident, highly intelligent, appreciative of giftedness, and broadly cultured.

### **Classroom Management and Learning Environment**

First of all, for gifted students, a student-centered approach is appropriate. Thus, teachers of gifted students should be democratic such as determining class rules together. Moreover, teachers qualified in gifted education, ensure a positive learning environment by actively incorporating the learners into the learning process, supporting the learning desires of the students and making the learning activities fun. In such an environment, students are less likely to show unwanted behaviors because they enjoy learning. In other words, teachers of gifted students should have superior features and requirements.

As mentioned before, unique characteristics of gifted students are required to be supported by appropriate education. Thus, gifted students need not only differentiated instruction models such as accelerating, enriching, and grouping, but also a well-designed learning environment (Sak, 2010). Like all students, gifted students can use their strengths in the educational environment where they feel comfortable and freely share their ideas to explore and develop and a psychologically safe classroom atmosphere (Maker & Nielson,

1996: 177). Creating a positive classroom atmosphere for the gifted students positively affects not only their academic success, motivation, cognitive development, but also their social relationships, social and emotional development. Bıçakçı and Baloğlu (2021) discussed gifted underachievement according to previous research findings. It is mentioned that inappropriate education settings may lead to motivation loss and underachievement of gifted students. In other words, if the needs of the gifted student in an educational environment are ignored, as a result of low motivation in the student, failure can occur.

Özyaprak and Deringöl (2013) found that teachers of gifted students emphasized the importance of knowing their characteristics and the factors underlying their behavior gifted students who have a high level of verbal ability. They were uncomfortable with dominating discussions with their knowledge and questions; thus stated that they should not turn the discussions into a power struggle. Gifted students need a positive classroom climate with an explanatory, persuasive and democratic attitude in order to develop their thinking skills and produce original solutions. Teachers should include the students in the rule-making process instead of following strict rules.

Another important point about the learning environment is using appropriate and technological methods. Technological developments affect educational settings as well as every area of life. Using various technological materials provide more effective and retentive learning. Zimlich (2017) emphasizes the importance of using technology in gifted educational settings. Using various technology provides rich learning environments and flexible access opportunities for gifted students (Çubukçu & Tosuntaş, 2018). Furthermore, according to Shavinina (2009), High Intellectual and Creative Educational Multimedia Technologies (HICEMTs) are needed in gifted education. In this context, fostering creativity is one of the vital roles of teachers of gifted students. In that sense, Tirri (2017) stated the importance of creativity in education as a means of cultivating 21st-century competencies in gifted students. Similarly, Karabulut (2014) mention that contemporary science teaching focuses on fostering scientific thinking skills rather than providing information.

In short, gifted students need a teacher, a mentor who can understand them, lead them through their personal and academic development. Alkan (2015) stated that unless the positive characteristics of gifted students are not supported, they can show some negative behaviors, such as school failure, mischief, reluctance to school, inappropriate jokes, and speeches. Such negative behaviors create discipline problems. Therefore, in order to create a positive classroom environment, teachers should make appropriate programs for these students and activities. In this context, working with gifted students lead teachers in the learning process as a leader rather than a person who conveys information. In this context, teachers need in service training programs to develop their vocational skills. Some research exists in the literature that reveals the positive outcomes of such programs (Eker & Sarı 2020; Kaya & Ataman, 2017; Konaş & Yağcı, 2009). Therefore, effective teacher training programs is beneficial in order to help teachers of gifted to use appropriate classroom management strategies.

### **Conclusion**

Gifted students have special education needs because of their unique developmental traits. Gifted students' achievement growth results from complex, advanced, and meaningful content provided through appropriate curriculum and instructions (Little, 2012; Tomlinson, 2001; VanTassel-Baska, 2012). It is important for the teachers to be aware of needs of gifted students. The teachers of gifted students should use appropriate classroom management strategies and create a positive learning atmosphere in order to foster their capacities. Furthermore, openness to innovation is necessary for the teachers. Thus the main purpose of

education for gifted students should focus on maximizing their intellectual and creative potentials.

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