



Research Article

Gifted children's social problem solving skills, social competence and school adjustment

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Abstract

The study was conducted to examine the relationship between social problem solving skills, social competencies and school adjustment of gifted children. The main problem of the study is the examination of the relationship between social problem solving skills, social competencies and school adjustment of gifted children. In addition, the study examined gifted children's social problem-solving skills, social competencies and school adjustment by gender and grade. The study was designed in correlational research model as it examines the relationship between social problem solving skills, social competencies and school adjustment. The study group consisted of 63 gifted primary school students studying in a science and art centre. The Social Problem Situations Inventory for Children and the Walker-McConnell Social Competence and School Adjustment Scale were used as data collection instruments. The data were collected in the autumn term of the academic year 2021-2022. The Social Problem Situations Inventory was distributed and completed by the children. The Walker-McConnell Social Competence and School Adjustment Scale was completed by the teachers for the children. The Mann-Whitney U-test and Spearman's rank correlation coefficient were used to determine the level and direction of the relationship between scale scores. As a result of the study, the social problem solving skills, social competence and school adjustment levels of the gifted children were high. Gender did not have a significant effect on social problem solving skills, social competence and school adjustment, but grade level did. Finally, there was a positive and significant relationship between gifted children's social problem solving skills, social competence and school adjustment. Gifted children have sufficient skills, social competence, and ability to adapt to school in order to overcome social problems. Interventions may be planned to increase social problem-solving skills, social competence and school adjustment of gifted children, and comparisons may be made by including typically developing children.

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Introduction

Gifted children are inherently different from their typically developing peers (Stuart & Composition, 2011). The advanced development of gifted children causes them to be experienced in emotional, motivational, behavioral and academic issues (Moon, 2016). Giftedness is a concept that needs to be examined in a wide range. Because there are

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individual differences among gifted children. Therefore, giftedness is not explained by a single definition (Peterson, 2016). However, gifted children are expected to be a combination of high IQ, extraordinary creativity, high executive function and motivation (Navas-Sánchez et al., 2016; Renzulli, 2012; 2016).

Gifted children's superior personality traits should be revealed and supported (Fernández et al., 2017; Pfeiffer, 2012). One of these features is interaction. Individuals are biologically predisposed to interact with individuals at a cognitive level close to them. Gifted children have difficulty interacting when there are no peers suitable for their developmental level (Cross, 2021). For this reason, gifted children may have problems in school adjustment. Difficulties experienced by gifted children in school adjustment complicate to reveal their social competencies (Almukhambetova & Hernandez-Torrano, 2020). High thinking abilities and mental maturity of gifted children have unique cognitive functions to solve the problems they encounter (Jauk et al., 2013; Sole-Casals, 2019). The characteristics of gifted children may affect their social problem solving skills, social competencies and school adjustment in different ways. In the literature, the concepts of social problem solving, social competence and school adjustment are explained.

Nowaday's complex and rapidly changing world causes various social problems. Therefore, individuals should acquire social problem solving skills. Social problem encompasses any problem that may affect an individual's life, including personal or interpersonal problems (such as emotional, behavioral, cognitive or health problems) and social problems (such as crime, discrimination). Therefore, the concept of "social" does not limit problem solving to any particular problem type (Chang, D'Zurilla & Sanna, 2004). Social problem solving is the cognitive and behavioral reactions of individuals in the process of understanding the problems they encounter in their daily lives and finding solutions (Dereli-İman, 2013). Since the difficulties and demands of human life may become more severe in the future, children need to acquire social problem-solving skills (Widodo & Darmawan, 2019).

There are two types of problems: structured problems and unstructured problems. Problems with a traceable, understandable, single and optimal solution are considered structured problems (Hmelo-Silver & Barrows, 2006). Problems in math or science classes are examples (Patriotic, 2018). Unstructured problems have multiple solutions and different variables are effective in solving problems. Many problems we encounter in daily life are unstructured problems. The way of solving unstructured problems may vary depending on the conditions and environment. These problems are called daily life problems or social problems (Yilmaz, Yel & Griffiths, 2021). Social problem-solving skills are considered in the literature as social problem-solving skills or interpersonal problem-solving skills (Ayvaz-Tuncel and Demirel, 2010).

Studies have emphasized the necessity of gaining social problem-solving skills at an early age. (Anlıak & Dinçer, 2009; Broadhead, 2003; Brownell, 2016; Mayeux & Cillessen, 2003; Yarılı & Ozkan, 2016). Since individuals are social beings, live with others and need others, individuals may encounter social problems. (Ma'abreh, 2021). The ability to solve social problems by producing new solutions and new ideas should be taught to children from an early age. There are studies in the literature examining the social problem-solving skills of preschool (Ahvan, & Mirzaei, 2020; Su et al., 2020; Yarılı and Ozkan, 2016; Yukcu and Demircioglu, 2017) and primary school children (Nguyen, Tran & Nguyen, 2021; Valadi et al., 2020; Ari and Yaban, 2012).

Social competence and adaptation to school should be acquired at an early age, as should social problem-solving skills. Social competence is a complex, multidimensional construct that encompasses skills and functioning that directly affect social relationships and well-being at school (Whitcomb, 2018). According to one study, a lack of social competence complicated to work successfully in school and in the long term led to school dropout, substance abuse, crime and disorder of emotion, thought and behavior (Magelinskaitė-Legkauskienė, Legkauskas & Kepalaitė, 2018). School adjustment is the fulfillment of a child's communication needs at school, including relationships with teachers and peers (Buyse et al., 2009). Agbakwuru (2012) defined school adjustment as the degree of school acculturation or adjustment required to maximize the educational fit between the child's unique characteristics, diverse nature, and the requirements of a new learning environment. A child may benefit from school and school-related activities only if he or she adapts well to all these aspects of school life. On the other hand, low school adjustment can lead a child to avoid school, bullying,

drug use, stealing, being rude to teachers and officials, dressing inappropriately, and undesirable behavior in the exam (Ngwoke, 2020). In this respect, social competence and school adjustment are directly related to each other. School adjustment requires a lot of interpersonal relationships and is affected by the child's social competence level.

Although there are many studies on social problem solving, social competence and school adjustment in the literature, researchers have not come across any studies conducted with gifted children. This situation may be due to the perception that gifted children are at a high level in social problem solving, social competence and school adjustment skills, as in almost every field. However, the perception that gifted children are highly successful in every field is a common but wrong perception. (Dullaghan, 2011; Townend, 2022). According to Wellisch (2016), there is a significant heterogeneity among gifted children. For this reason, studies should be designed to determine the social problem solving, social competence and school adjustment skills of gifted children. Gifted children are interested in social issues. (Clark, 2002; Gross, 1993). However, gifted children can isolate themselves from social life. (Webb, 1994; Wellisch, 2021). Gifted children may experience social problems in societies where differences are not accepted or respected. (Neihart, 2006). Since some features of gifted children are advanced in terms of their peers, gifted children can be argumentative or manipulative (Bainbridge, 2019). To overcome the social problem, gifted children should be identified whether gifted children have sufficient skills, social competence and school adjustment skills. Social problem solving skills are considered to be important in the acquisition of social competence and school adjustment in gifted children.

Problem of Study

The aim of this study is to examine the relationship between social problem solving skills, social competence and school adjustment of gifted students. For this purpose, responses to the following questions were sought.

- What is the level of social problem solving skills of gifted children?
- Is there a significant difference between the social problem solving skills of gifted children and gender and grade level variables?
- What are the social competence and school adjustment levels of gifted children?
- Is there a significant difference between the social competence and school adjustment levels of gifted children and gender and grade level variables?
- Is there a relationship between social problem solving skills, social competence and school adjustment of gifted children?

Method

Research Model

This study, which was conducted to examine the relationship between social problem solving skills, social competence and school adjustment of gifted children, is a correlational research model. In the correlational survey model, the presence or degree of change between two or more variables is determined (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012).

Study Group

The study was conducted with 63 gifted students at the primary school level who were studying in the field of general giftedness at a science and art centre in the province of Afyonkarahisar in the 2021-2022 academic year. Since the entire study group was reached, no sample was selected. The gender of 41.26% of the children was female and 58.74% was male. 55.55% of the children attended second grade and 44.45% attended third grade.

Data Collection Tools

The Social Problem Situations Inventory for Children and the Walker-McConnell Social Competence and School Adjustment Scale were used as data collection instruments.

Social Problem Situations Inventory For Children (SPSIC)

The Social Problem Situations Inventory for Children was developed by Yilmaz et al. (2021). The scale consists of six social situations and dimensions (impulse control, communication, cooperation, social initiation, empathy and emotion regulation). In social situations, questions were asked in accordance with four basic problem solving steps (identifying

the problem, (ii) generating the alternatives (solutions), (iii) making decisions (which are the best), and (iv) solution implementations or verification). Each solution step is scored from 0 to 4. A maximum of 16 points can be obtained from a single problem situation and 96 points from the whole inventory. Participants' responses to the solution steps were scored separately by two coders and the average score was taken as the participant's score. In cases where the researchers disagreed on the scoring, an experienced third researcher was consulted and scored according to the consensus of the three researchers. The internal consistency coefficient of the developed scale was found to be .86. In this study, the internal consistency coefficient of the scale was found to be .82.

Walker-McConnell Social Competence And School Adjustment Scale

The scale was developed by Walker and McConnel to measure social skills and interpersonal adjustment and adapted into Turkish by Aysan and Uz Bas (2004). The scale consists of three subscales (Teacher Preferred Social Behaviour, Peer Preferred Social Behaviour and School Adjustment) and 43 items. The scale is a 5-point Likert scale. The scale takes an average of 5-10 minutes to administer to each student. Teachers administering the scale should have at least 6-8 weeks of observation experience with students as a basis for assessing social skills. The internal consistency coefficient of the scale adapted to Turkish was found to be .96 for the school adjustment subscale. In this study internal consistency coefficient of the scale was found to be .94.

Data Collection

Prior to data collection, approval was obtained from a university ethics committee. Data were collected from children attending the Science and Art Centre who volunteered to participate in the study. The Social Problem Situations Inventory for Children was administered to the children individually. The inventory was distributed to the children and they were asked to complete the inventory individually. The Walker-McConnell Social Competence and School Adjustment Scale was completed by the teachers for the children.

Ethical Approval

Ethical approval was obtained by the researchers from the Afyon Kocatepe University Social and Humanities Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee (Date of Decision: 27.07.2022, Decision Number: 2022/248).

Data Analysis

Frequencies and percentages were calculated to assess the demographic characteristics. The scores obtained from the scale are presented as mean, standard deviation, minimum and maximum scores. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used to assess the normality and distribution of the data, the values of kurtosis and skewness were checked and it was determined that the data did not have a normal distribution. In this sense, when comparing the scores obtained from the scale, the Mann-Whitney U test was used in pairwise comparisons and the Spearman Rank Correlation was calculated to determine the relationship.

Results

In the study, social problem solving skills, social competence and school adjustment of gifted children were analysed. Accordingly, the social problem solving skills of the children are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Scores of gifted children's social problem solving skills

Social problem solving		N	Min	Max	\bar{X}	S
Gender	Female	26	47,5	95	82,4	11,1
	Male	37	48,5	96	78,6	12,7
Grade	2	35	47,5	96	76,8	13,5
	3	28	64	95	84,3	8,6
Total		63	47,5	96	80,1	12,1

According to Table 1, the social problem solving skills of gifted children (\bar{X} =80.18) are at a high level. The mean for females (\bar{X} =82.4) is higher than the mean for males (\bar{X} =78.6). The average of the children studying in the 3rd grade (\bar{X} =84.3) is higher than the students studying in the 2nd grade (\bar{X} =76.8).

Table 2. Mean rank of Mann-Whitney U test scores by gender and grade variables of scores obtained from the social problem situations

			n	Average rank	Mann Whitney U	
					U	p
Social Problem Situations	Gender	Female	26	921,5	391,5	0,211
		Male	37	1094,5		
	Grade	2	35	977,0	347,0	0,048
		3	28	1039,0		

p<.05

There is no significant difference between female and male scores for social problem solving (U=391.5, p>0.05). The SPSIC scores of children in grade 3 are statistically significantly higher than those of children in grade 2 (U=347, p<0.05) (Table 2).

Table 3. Gifted children's scores of social competence and school adjustment skills

Social Competence and School Adjustment		N	Min	Max	\bar{X}	S
Gender	Female	26	101	215	185,1	27,9
	Male	37	87	215	177,6	30,6
Grade	2	35	87	215	172	31,9
	3	28	140	215	191,6	22,5
Total		63	87	215	180,7	29,6

Social competence and school adjustment of gifted children (\bar{X} =180.7) are at high level. The mean for females (\bar{X} =185.1) is higher than the mean for males (\bar{X} =177.6). The mean for children in grade 3 (\bar{X} =191.6) is higher than the mean for children in grade 2 (\bar{X} =172) (Table 3).

Table 4. Mann-Whitney U-Test results for gifted children' social competence and school adjustment skills scores according to gender and grade variables

			n	Average rank	Mann Whitney U	
					U	p
Social Competence and School Adjustment	Gender	Female	26	909,0	404	0,282
		Male	37	1107,0		
	Grade	2	35	947	317	0,017
		3	28	1069		

p<.05

There is no significant difference between the social competence and school adjustment scores of females and males (U=404, p>0.05). The social competence and school adjustment scores of children in grade 3 are statistically significantly higher than those of children in grade 2 (U=317, p<0.05).

Table 5. Results of Spearman Rank Correlations for Students' Social Problem Solving Skills, Competence, School Adjustment

	SPSIC	WMSC
SPSIC	1,0	0,995**
WMSC	0,995**	1,0

**p < .01

There is a positive and significant correlation between children's social problem solving skills, competence and school adjustment (r=0.995, p<.01).

Discussion

The study was conducted to investigate the relationship between social problem solving skills, social competence and school adjustment of gifted students. As a result of the study, there was no significant difference in the social problem solving skills, social competence and school adjustment of children according to gender, however, there was a significant difference according to grade level.

In the literature, there is no study examining the relationship between gender and social problem solving, social competence and school adjustment skills in gifted children. In the current study, there was no significant difference between the social problem solving, social competence and school adjustment skills of male and female gifted children. However, there is a difference between male and female gender role identities (Kerr & Multon, 2015). Compared to males, gifted females have a higher perception that they could do anything and cope with any problem (Reis & Hébert, 2008). In addition, in studies, gifted women had higher self-perceptions, social competences and adjustment to academic processes (Bolland et al., 2018; Robinson, 2008). The reason why there was no significant difference between male and female gifted children in the current study is due to the characteristics of the culture in which the study group was located.

Social problem solving, social competence and school adjustment skills increase in all children according to their grade level. This is because children receive training in social problem solving and social competence at each level of education. Therefore, there is an increase in social problem solving, social competence and school adjustment. In the study, social problem solving, social competence and school adjustment skills of gifted children attending the third grade were significantly higher than those attending the second grade. This result is due to the increase in social experiences and education of the children as they progress through the grades. Alfodhly et al. (2021) concluded that the social skills of children at higher grades were higher. In some studies, as the grade level of gifted children increased, their social skills, adaptation to school and social environment increased (Citil & Ataman, 2019; Lee et al., 2012).

Social competence is the set of social, emotional and cognitive skills and behaviours that an individual needs to interact successfully socially with peers and others, and to develop positive friendships and relationships. Social competence also affects children's ability to solve problems in social situations with their peers (Senol, 2022). In studies, gifted children had high social competence, pro-social behaviours in the face of problems and social adjustment due to their advanced development (Keiley, 2002; McCallister, Nash, & Meckstroth, 1996; Nail & Evans, 1997; Neihart, 2002). However, there is also a perception that gifted children have low social competence and have difficulty adapting due to their advanced academic abilities (Olszewski-Kubilius et al., 2014). There may also be some problems in the social competence and school adjustment of gifted children. According to Atas and Sirem (2020), since the intelligence level of gifted children is higher than that of their peers, gifted children may experience difficulties in friendship relationships due to the diversity of their interests and desires. Studies have also revealed that gifted children prefer to make friends with older children rather than with their peers (Coleman & Cross, 2001). For these reasons, Gifted children may find it difficult to develop healthy social relationships. In order to overcome these problems in a healthy way, some social skills should be acquired. Social competence is a concept related to the use of social skills (Turker & Tunc, 2021). Children with social competence problems may experience problems in school adjustment and academic failure. (Tasci, 2013; Welsh, Parke, Widaman, & O'Neil, 2001; Wentzel, 1991). According to Kargi (2009), social competence is a supporter of academic skills and has a positive effect on increasing success in these skills. Therefore, social problem solving skills are important for the acquisition of social competence and school adjustment in gifted children. In the current study, there is a high level of relationship between social problem solving, social competence and school adjustment skills of gifted children. The result of the current study is compatible with the previous studies.

Conclusion

The study was conducted to investigate the relationship between social problem solving skills, social competence and school adjustment in gifted children. As a result of the study, there was no significant difference in children's social

problem-solving skills, social competence and school adjustment according to gender, but there was a significant difference according to grade level. Social problem-solving skills, social competence and school adjustment, which increase with grade level, may be related to direct and indirect experiences and the training received at school. In addition, there was a high correlation between social problem solving, social competence and school adjustment skills in gifted children. When gifted children encounter a social problem, they may have sufficient skills, social competence and school adjustment skills to overcome the problem.

Recommendations

The study was conducted with gifted children. Typically developing children may be included in the study together with gifted children and comparisons may be made. Interventions may be planned to improve the social problem solving skills, social competence and school adjustment in gifted children. More children may be included in the study to increase the generalisability of the results obtained. The data were obtained from the measurement tools filled out by the children and teachers. In future studies, the results of the study may be interpreted from a broader perspective by including the perceptions of the parents.

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Author Contribution

The first author made significant contributions in designing the research method and interpreting the results. The second author made significant contributions to the review of the research literature. The third author took part in data collection and literature review.

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