

The Opinions of the Classroom Teachers about the Enrichment Educational Programs for Gifted Students Who Continue to the Inclusive Classes

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Abstract

The enrichment model is a model that aims to be used in the education of gifted children and is based on the development of some additional programs for children. Enrichment educational programs (EEP) consist of high-level content products and processes which are designed to develop problem solving skills, to support creativity and independent learning and which are based on the individualized programs and teaching. The aim of this study is to determine the views of the classroom teachers about the EEPs designed for gifted students who continue their education through inclusion in primary schools. Therefore, the case study model, one of the qualitative research methods, was used in the research. The participants of the study are ten primary school teachers who taught gifted students. The data were collected using the “Semi-structured interview form” which was developed by the authors. The findings of the research show that the teachers do not have knowledge about the EEP practices in general. Therefore, there is a need for the support of the field experts in the planning and implementation of the EEPs.

Keyword: Gifted Children, Enrichment Educational Programs, Inclusive Education

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INTRODUCTION

Various education models and distinct strategies within these models are used in different countries for gifted children. Some of these models and strategies are also used for normally developing children. These models are generally education models for acceleration, grouping and enrichment (Dağlıoğlu, 2004; Dümenci, Gürsoy and Aral 2006). The enrichment model within these models is a model that aims to be used in the education of gifted children and is based on the development of some additional programs for children (Roberts, 2005). The enrichment model attempts to train gifted children with their normally developing peers and to enrich and deliver the educational programs considering the needs of gifted children (Ataman, 2003). Sak (2012) argues that enrichment is an attempt to make gifted students able to have much more comprehensive and much more detailed information about a certain topic in contrast to their peers. It is the changes made in the content and implementation of the program during the education in which gifted students are trained in the general education classes with their peers (Davis and Rimm, 1989; Enç, 1979). Renzulli and Reis (1997), on the other hand, consider the combination of gifted students and students with normal development as enrichment for all students and states that enrichment can be applied horizontally and vertically. The addition of new lessons to the existing program in this process is defined as horizontal enrichment, and delivering much more in-depth lessons are defined as vertical enrichment without further additions of lessons and activities (Clark, 1992; Cutts and Moseley, 2001; VanTassel-Baska, 2000). According to Cutt and Moseley (2004), enrichment is an application that is used as an option for gifted students who may get bored when they come across the knowledge and topics that they have already learned.

Enrichment educational programs (EEP) consist of high-level content products and processes which are designed to develop problem solving skills, to support creativity and independent learning and which are based on the individualized programs and teaching (Cutts and Moseley, 2004; Enç, 2004; Özdemir, 2017). These programs generally aim to improve the talent and expertise of gifted students, to encourage the development of interest in a subject and to increase their academic success (Robert, 2005). Şahin (2016) argues that the aim of the enriched education program is to provide new knowledge and skills that the whole class cannot acquire with the existing curriculum without discriminating the students and to improve the existing skills of students.

The enrichment programs contain those activities that stimulate children's discovery senses and those materials which improve their higher-level thinking processes and skills as well as projects which are selected by the children (Fiddymont, 2014; Renzulli and Reis, 1997). Sak (2012) argues that through these programs the scope of the educational programs is expanded and the educational programs may include advanced level of topics. The enrichment activities can be field visits, independent work, extracurricular programs, and learning centers or may be the transfer of the content, problems based on real life situations and school-wide enrichment strategies (Davis & Rimm, 2004; Sak, 2012; Schiever & Maker, 2003). Enrichment should take place both in and out of school (Akar, 2015). Generally, the EEPs are additional programs that are diversified with activities such as projects, experiments, materials, games, designs, discussions, school teams, seminars, trips and competitions. It should be known that planning this diversity means that the issues that are of interest to the students are based on and that the aim should be to go beyond the current education programs.

Ensuring that gifted children receive education with their peers in line with their abilities is seen as one of the most used educational approaches in the world (Ataman, 2003). This situation is also included in the legislation of the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) in our country. In addition, in the regulation of special education services published by the MoNE (2018) it is stated "special education institutions or special education classes can also be opened for those individuals with special educational needs, where it is essential for individuals of all educational types and levels to continue their education through integration or inclusion." In the regulation of the educational practices through integration / inclusion (2017) it is reported that for the gifted students at schools support education rooms will be opened in order to offer special education support by providing special materials and educational materials. It is stated in the same regulation that enriched individual

education programs will be delivered for specially talented students who continue their education through inclusion / integration.

There are some studies on the EEPs. Such studies mostly deal with the effects of the EEPs in terms of students' achievement, their attitudes towards the course content, and their motivation and conclude that in-depth knowledge and skills are extremely significant to improve their higher-level of cognitive processes and creativity (Lee, Olszewski-Kubilius and Peternel, 2010; Markowitz, 2004; Reis and Boeve, 2009; Stake and Mares 2001; Walsh, Kemp, Hodge & Bowes, 2012). Studies carried out in Turkey (Çoruhlu, 2013; Durukan, 2018; İdin and Aydoğdu, 2016; İkikat, 2019; Kahraman, 2012; Koyuncu, 2009; Marangoz, 2018; Özdemir, 2017; Özmen, 2017; Şahin, 2016; Tekfidan, 2018; Uluç, 2019) mostly deal with the enrichment of the existing educational program through various activities and educational practices. Uluç (2019) analysed the effects of the EEPs on fourth grade primary school students' achievement in geometry course, their visual perceptions and on their attitudes towards the mathematics course. It is found that the EEPs have significant effects on their achievement in geometry course and their visual perceptions. However, any significant effects of the EEPs was not found in relation to their attitudes towards the mathematics course. In another study which dealt with the effects of the EEPs on the fourth grade primary school students' critical thinking skills, problem-solving skills and their math anxiety (Şahin, 2016) it is found that the EEPs reduced their math anxiety. However, any significant effects of the EEPs were found in relation to the students' critical thinking skills and problem-solving skills. İdin and Aydoğdu (2016) analysed the effects of the EEPs on the seventh grade students' academic achievement in science courses and learning. It is found that the test scores of the experiment students who were taught the units the body systems, force and movement and electricity in daily life through the EEPs were much higher than those of the control students. The authors suggested that the other units of the science courses can be delivered using the EEPs. Darga (2010) analysed the effects of the EEPs on pre-school and the first grade gifted students. It is found that the EEPs are significantly efficient. Tekbaş (2004) examined the effects of the EEPs on the gifted students in inclusion classes. It is reported that the EEPs have positive effects on all students in the classrooms and on the teaching activities improving the quality of teaching process.

Our country is very rich in terms of special talented individuals, but only some of these students are provided with appropriate education (Levent, 2011). Preparing appropriate educational environments and programs for special talented individuals is very important in terms of their right to education. Specially talented children can develop themselves in specially designed classes and programs (Enç, Çağlar & Özsoy, 1987). For this reason, the activities and programs designed for specially talented individuals should support the needs of these individuals. It is considered to be important to analyse the implementation of the EEPs in schools especially for students with special skills who continue their education through inclusion. In the literature review conducted on the EEPs in our country, it is seen that there are many studies focused on enriched education programs. However, it is observed that there is no study regarding the implementation process of the EEPs designed for specially talented students who continue their education through inclusion in general education schools. It is important to get the views of the teachers who have duties and responsibilities especially in the development and implementation stages of the EEPs in primary schools, to identify the problems encountered during the delivery of these programs and to reveal the expectations regarding the solution of these problems. Because primary school period is an important part of basic education, and it is also a period when educational interventions designed to gifted children diagnosed early will have a significant effect. In this respect, it is considered to be significant that determining the status of EEPs in practice in supporting the development of the children with special abilities in the early years and maintaining their existing potentials.

Therefore, in this study, it is aimed to determine the views of the classroom teachers regarding the EEPs designed for gifted students who continue their education through inclusion in primary schools. In line with this aim the study attempts to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the views of the classroom teachers about EEPs designed for gifted students who continue their education through inclusion?

2. What are the views of the classroom teachers about the development process of the EEPs designed for gifted students who continue their education through inclusion?

3. What are the views of the classroom teachers about the problems in implementing the EEPs designed for gifted students who continue their education through inclusion?

4. What are the views of the classroom teachers about the solutions of the the problems in implementing the EEPs designed for gifted students who continue their education through inclusion?

METHOD

Design of the study

In this study, it is aimed to uncover the views of the classroom teachers about the EEPs designed for gifted students who continue their education through inclusion in primary schools. In this regard, the views of the primary school teachers who teach the gifted students through the EEPs within inclusion classes are investigated in relation to how these programs are planned, the problems they faced and their views about solutions. Therefore, the case study model, one of the qualitative research methods, was used in the research. Case study is a research method based on the experiences in its natural environment, where the lines between the existing phenomenon and the content are not definitively clear and there is no more than one evidence or data source available (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2008).

Participants

Criterion sampling was used to identify the participants. It requires the use of a variety of pre-established criteria in selecting the participants. The participants of the study are ten primary school teachers who taught gifted students. One of the participants is a graduate of two-year teacher training program. Eight participants are the graduates of four-year teacher training programs. The remaining one participant has a graduate degree in education. Two participants have a professional experience of 10-14 years. There is one participant with 15-19 years of professional experience. Two participants have 20-24 years of professional experience and four have 25-29 years of professional experience. The remaining one participant has 30 years of professional experience. Of ten participants two are female and eight are male.

Data collection tool

The data were collected using the “Semi-structured interview form” which was developed by the authors. The form consists of two sections. The first section contains the items about the demographical characteristics of the participants. In the second section there are four items: (1) What are your views about the EEPs designed for gifted students who continue their education through inclusion? (2) What are your views about the development process of the EEPs designed for gifted students who continue their education through inclusion? (3) What are your views about the problems in implementing the EEPs designed for gifted students who continue their education through inclusion? and (4) What are your views about the solutions of the the problems in implementing the EEPs designed for gifted students who continue their education through inclusion? These items were first used in the pilot study with two classroom teachers who teach gifted students. Based on the feedback from the pilot participants the form was finalized and used in the study.

Data analysis

The data were examined using the content analysis. The process in content analysis is to bring together certain similar concepts and themes and to organize and interpret them in a way that the

readers can understand (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2008). In order to ensure the validity of the data analyzed during the reporting phase, specific examples from the teachers' views are included. Within the scope of the reliability analysis of the data, all of the data were examined by two experts who completed their doctorate in the field of special education. The reliability is found to be 100%. The data were organized by the authors which were separated into themes and recorded for each item separately. Themes created by the authors were reviewed by another specialist who has a doctorate in special education. The themes that are common in the review of the themes were left the same, and the themes that had no consensus were further discussed. Then the themes were finalized. The male teachers were coded “M”, and “K” coding were used for female teachers in giving the responses of the participants.

FINDINGS

The findings of the study are tabulated based on the frequency of the views of the participants according to the sub-dimensions, and the views are explained by giving the participants' statements.

Table 1. Participants' views regarding the education programs designed for specially talented students continuing their education through inclusion

	Teaching experience (10-14)	Teaching experience (15-19)	Teaching experience (20-24)	Teaching experience (25-29)	Teaching experience of 30 years or more	Total
I do not employ the EEPs.	2			1	1	4
I do not have any information about the EEPs.	2	1		1		4
The EEPs should be developed based on the level of children.	2				1	3
There is no such a program	1					1

Table 1 illustrates that there are some teachers who reported either that they do not use the EEPs or that they are not informed about the EPPs. There are two participants who reported that such programs should be designed in consistent with the developmental levels of the students. There are one participants stating that there is no such program. Therefore, it is possible to state that the participants in general do not have necessary information about the EPPs and that they do not employ these programs. The following quotations exemplify the views of the participants about these programs:

“I do not know about education programs.” [M1]

“Such programs should be developed in accordance with the levels of students.” [M3]

“There is no education program specifically developed for gifted students.” [M4]

“Our school does not have an enriched individualized education program for gifted students.” [M5]

Table 2. Teachers' views on the planning of the enriched individual education programs for specially talented students who continue their education through inclusive education

	Teaching experience (10-14)	Teaching experience (15-19)	Teaching experience (20-24)	Teaching experience (25-29)	Teaching experience of 30 years or more	Total
It is planned by the guidance system at schools.					1	1
No planning about the EPPs.	2	1		1		4
No information	2	1		1		4
It is realized by the individual effort of the teacher	1				1	2

Table 2 shows that one of the teachers reported that the educational programs for the gifted students are developed by the guidance service of the school. “The number of the participants who reported that they had no idea about the development process of the EPPs is four. There are two participants who stated that such programs are developed by the teachers. Therefore, it is possible to state that the participants in general do not involve in the development process for the EPPs and that they do not have any information about this process. The following quotations exemplify the views of the participants about these programs:

“School guidance service develops the educational program of special talented children.” [M7]

“There is no plan for the education programs for specially talented students in our school. So I have no idea how it is developed.” [F1]

Table 3a. Teachers' views on the potential problems which may occur during the development process of an enriched individual education program for specially talented students who continue their education through inclusion

	Teaching experience (10-14)	Teaching experience (15-19)	Teaching experience (20-24)	Teaching experience (25-29)	Teaching experience of 30 years or more	Total
Inefficiency of teachers	2			1		3
Not giving trainings on this process to teachers by specialists	1			1		2
Lack of necessary information about the process	2	1	1		1	5
Insufficient identification of student performance by teachers	1					1
The authorities are also inadequate in this regard		1				1
Lack of parental support			1			1

Table 3a illustrates that three participants cite the insufficient knowledge of teachers about the EPPs as a problem. There are two participants who cite the lack of educational activities offered to teachers about the EPP as a problem. There are five participants who consider the insufficient information about the development of the EPPs as a problem. The remaining three participants cited the followings as a problem: teachers' inability to identify the level of student performance, administrators' lack of information on the topic and the lack of parental support. Therefore, these statements indicate the fact that teachers do not have enough information in relation the development of the EPPs and that they feel themselves insufficient in this regard. In addition, the participants stated that they did not receive any education in this field, that the ministry staff who deal with the development of the education programs of specially talented children are inadequate in this regard, and that the parents do not involve in this process. The following quotations exemplify the views of the participants about the potential problems in relation to these programs.

“We asked for a training and for help form the authorities to prepare the program, but they told us that they did not know about it.” [F2]

“The lack of standards developed by the Ministry of National Education causes confusion in the development of the EPPs.” [M8]

Table 3b. Teachers' views on the solutions to the potential problems which may occur during the development process of an enriched individual education program for specially talented students who continue their education through inclusion

	Teaching experience (10-14)	Teaching experience (15-19)	Teaching experience (20-24)	Teaching experience (25-29)	Teaching experience of 30 years or more	Total
The EPPs should be developed and implemented by the field experts	2			1		3
Education should be given to those teachers who teach special talent students in their class.	1				1	2
A clear guideline on what to do about this practice should be developed.	1			2		3
Authorities and parents should support the process	1	1	1			3

Table 3b indicates that the participants offered several suggestions to solve the problems in relation to the EPPs. For instance, three participants argued that the EEPs should be developed and implemented by the field experts. Another three participants considered the significance of the support by the parents and administrators in the process. There are three participants who claimed that a clear guideline on what to do about this practice should be developed. The remaining two participants argued that education should be given to those teachers who teach special talent students in their class. In short the participants suggested that the EEPs should be developed by experts, that they should be supported in the process and that the implementation of the EEPs for the specially talented students should be clearly explained in the regulations. The following quotations indicate their views in this regard.

“The content of the program should be clearly explained by the Ministry of National Education through regulations or directives.” [M5]

“Parents should be effectively included in the content of the programs developed.” [M6]

Table 4. Teachers' suggestions in regard to enriched individual education programs for specially talented students who continue their education through inclusion

	Teaching experience (10-14)	Teaching experience (15-19)	Teaching experience (20-24)	Teaching experience (25-29)	Teaching experience of 30 years or more	Total
Specially talented students should be educated by field experts			1	1		2
Specially talented students should receive education in different educational environments	1				1	2
These students should study at separate schools		1			1	2
Bilsem and general education school should work in coordination					2	2
Following the formal education at schools children do not want to go to BİLSEM for education due to the fact that they get tired	1			1		2

Table 4 indicates that there are several suggestions by the participants to improve the quality of the EPPs. For instance, they suggested that such students should be educated by the field experts and that gifted students should be educated either at a different school or at an educational setting. Two of them argued that in order to improve the education of the gifted students Bilsem and schools should work in coordination and that following the formal education at schools children do not want to go to BİLSEM for education due to the fact that they get tired.

The related quotations are given as follows:

“There should be a separate school within the Ministry of National Education for special talented students where they should continue their education.” [E2]

“The education program which is developed and implemented by the field experts at Bilsem should be compatible with the EEP that the teacher develops and employs at school.” [E3]

DICUSSION AND CONCLUSION

When the findings of this study aiming to determine the opinions of the class teachers about the EEPs prepared for gifted students who continue their education in primary schools are examined, it is seen that the teachers do not have knowledge about the EEP practices in general. Therefore, there is a need for the support of the field experts in the planning and implementation of the EEPs.

Most of the participants stated that they did not employ the EEPs and did not know anything about these programs. This finding of the study shows that the EEPs are not properly implemented in schools, so that the educational needs of gifted children who continue their education at inclusive classrooms are not met. It prevents gifted children from enjoying the most of their educational rights. On the other hand, developmental characteristics of these students should be taken into consideration. Research suggests that through the EPPs several advantages are offered to the gifted students. For instance, their problem-solving skills, creativity and their skills to learn independently are improved (Cutts ve Moseley, 2004; Enç, 2004; Özdemir, 2017; Robert, 2005). Another point that should be emphasized is the legal procedures. The regulation on inclusive education by the ministry of national education (2017) states that the EPPs should be employed for the gifted students. Therefore these programs are in fact legal requirement. However, it is seen that teachers are not aware of these programs and do not have necessary information about them. In addition, the existing EPP practices at schools are not well-established. The reason for this situation may be that teachers are not sufficiently informed about the legal regulations regarding education practices through special education and inclusion.

It is also found that some of the teachers do not have any plans for the EEPs and some of them do not have knowledge about such a planning process. Some of the participants reported that the existing EEPs are planned by the school guidance services, while others stated that the plans are made with the individual efforts of the teachers. Therefore, it is understood that there are different tendencies in the planning of the EEPs in schools. On the other hand, in some schools there is no planning about the EEPs. It may have totally negative effects on the inclusive students. Because the EEPs are programs that contain many concentrated activity programs and are based on individualized teaching experiences. Therefore, such programs should be carefully planned. Research indicates that gifted students may improve their potential through the special programs and learning environments (Enç, Çağlar & Özsoy, 1987). It is also added that such students may become bored due to the repetition of the course topics and when they are offered some topics which are not appropriate for their developmental levels (Cutt & Moseley, 2004). Thus, well-planned EEPs are necessary to provide them quality educational activities.

The participants also stated that they had problems in developing the EEPs. The major problem is found to be the inability of teachers to develop the EEPs. They also reported that the administrators are not capable of developing these programs and that the parents do not want to take part in the related process. All these points are negative for the gifted students who are in inclusive classrooms. Because teachers are practitioners of educational programs and play an active role in students' learning. Odom (2000) emphasizes that teachers play a key role in successful and qualified inclusion practices. The fact that the teacher is an effective practitioner, renewing and enriching his teaching experiences according to the expectations of the students increases the quality of education (Saracho, 1998). Professional development of teachers is important in terms of realizing education at high standards. Darling-Hammond, Hyler and Gardner (2017) defined professional development as structured professional learning, which has led to changes in teachers' knowledge and practices and

improvements in students' learning outcomes. Therefore, teachers' competence in developing the EEPs should be improved and their deficiency should be eliminated.

The participants also consider the inefficiency of the administrators and the lack of parental involvement as problems. It is thought that it would be appropriate to evaluate this situation in terms of the management skills of ministerial administrators, provincial, district national education administrators, and school and institution administrators who play a role in determining and managing special education and inclusion policies. As a matter of fact, the role and responsibilities of educational administrators change with the social, political and technological transformations experienced today (Lashway, 2003). Especially school principals play a critical role in the successful implementation of education policies. According to Garies and Tschannen-Moran (2005), school principals play decisive roles in guiding school staff with their knowledge, skills and experience, and in initiating and maintaining change efforts at school. Therefore, school administrators should be knowledgeable about special education and inclusive education and be able to transfer this information to the school staff. For this reason, it is necessary to take into account this finding of the research and to inform the school administrators about the education and rights of gifted children studying in the inclusive classes.

The participants reported some suggestions to solve the problems experienced in relation to the education of the gifted students. They mostly suggested that these students should be educated at separate schools and that they should be educated by field experts. These findings remind the recent attempts in this regard such as the opening of the universities and schools by the Ministry of National Education or by different associations. Teachers' suggestion that gifted children should be educated at separate schools is not considered by some researchers (Marsh, 2005; Marsh & Craven, 2006; Marsh & Hau, 2003, 2004) as an appropriate and positive solution. Çitil and Ataman (2018) argue that separate schools have some advantages but also disadvantages. Çitil (2016) further states that classroom management in separate educational environments can be considered as an important challenge. In addition, separate education schools reduce the academic self-esteem of gifted children, but minimize the problems related to social acceptance and adaptation. The current practice in Turkey requires that gifted students continue their education with their peers with normal development. In practice, the gifted children generally benefit from support services at schools where they study, or in support education centers (BİLSEM) at certain times. Although some of the participants reported that gifted children should be educated at separate schools, classroom management and behavioral control are stated to be difficult in the classes created for gifted children (Markusic, 2012; Özbay, 2013) and in addition, such classrooms are abandoned for different projects and activities (Dill, 2012). Therefore, it is thought that it would be beneficial to consider the characteristics of gifted children and to make educational adaptations according to these features.

One of the suggestions of the participants is the coordination between the schools where gifted students are educated and BİLSEMs. It suggests that BİLSEMs are given importance in regard to the education of the gifted students which is a unique model in Turkey (Ataman, 2007), but it also indicates that there is currently no strong coordination between schools and BİLSEMs. BİLSEM models that offer differentiated education without separating children from their own schools and peers, and are based on principles such as project-based learning, responding to the needs of children with leadership spirit and creativity (Dönmez, 2004). Although some participants argued that going BİLSEMs following the formal education at schools is a tiring activity for students, coordination between schools and BİLSEMs can be a way to provide high-quality education to the gifted students and to meet their needs.

As a result, in Turkey the EEPs should be made standard and teachers and administrators have necessary knowledge on this issue. In addition, the education of the gifted students should be supported and the capability of classroom teachers who teach gifted children should be improved. For this purpose, in-service trainings should be organized on the education of gifted children and the development of the EEPs to improve teachers' competencies. Although this study is limited to the EEPs developed for gifted students who continue their education through inclusion in primary schools,

it is recommended to investigate this subject with samples of secondary and high school teachers and school administrators.

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