

Üstün Zekâlı Öğrencilerin Bakış Açısıyla Üstün Zekâ Etiketinin Öğrencilerin Çeşitli Algıları Üzerindeki Etkileri

Effects of Gifted Label on Gifted Students' Perceptions

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Öz

Bu çalışmanın amacı, üstün zekâ etiketinin üstün zekâlı olarak tanılanan öğrencilerin kendilerine ve ebeveynlerinin ve arkadaşlarının tutumlarına ilişkin algıları üzerindeki etkilerini araştırmaktır. Üstün zekâ ile ilgili alanyazında etiketlemenin, olumlu ve olumsuz etkileri olduğu ileri sürülmektedir. Araştırmaya, üstün yetenekli öğrenciler için yürütülen bir eğitim programına başvuran 415 altıncı sınıf öğrencisi katılmıştır. Bu öğrenciler arasından 26'sı üstün zekâlı olarak tanılanmıştır. Araştırmada, Üstün Zekâ Etiket Etkileri Ölçeği kullanılmıştır. Araştırma sonuçları toplam test ve alt ölçek bazında, üstün zekâ etiketinin öğrencilerin kendilerine ve ebeveynlerinin ve arkadaşlarının tutumlarına ilişkin algılarında önemli bir değişikliğe neden olmadığı ortaya koymuştur. Madde bazında analiz sonuçlarında ise "Arkadaşlarım arasında kendimi yalnız hissediyorum", "Ailem beni başka çocuklarla çok fazla kıyaslıyor" ve "Arkadaşlarım zayıf yönlerim ile alay ediyorlar" algılarında anlamlı bir artış olduğu görülmektedir. Ayrıca üstün zekâlı olarak tanılanan öğrencilerin, arkadaşlarının tutumlarına ilişkin algılarında normal öğrencilere göre daha olumsuz algıya sahip oldukları saptanmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Algı, Üstün zekâ, Üstün zekâ etiketinin etkileri

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of labeling students as "gifted" on their perceptions of themselves and of their parents' and friends' attitudes towards them. Research shows that labeling can have both positive and negative effects. This study was conducted with 415 sixth-grade students who applied to the Education Programs for Talented Students (EPTS). Of the population 26 were identified to be gifted. The Gifted Label Effects-Scale (GLE-S) was used to collect data. Total scale and subscale comparisons of gifted students' pretest and posttest scores showed that labeling students as "gifted" did not have any significant effect on their perceptions about themselves nor did it have any effect on their perceptions about their parents' and friends' attitudes towards them. However, a comparison of gifted students' pretest-posttest scores by item showed increases in the following perceptions: "I feel lonely among my friends", "my parents often compare me to other children" and "my friends tease me for my weaknesses." In addition, results showed that gifted students had less positive perceptions about their friends' attitudes towards them compared to those who were not identified to be "gifted."

Keywords: Gifted, Gifted label effects, Perception.

Summary

Purpose and Significance: Labels function in education as means of delivering specialized services to identified students (Hickey & Toth, 1990) and the label "gifted" is widely used to

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describe advanced academic performance or cognitive development. The label gifted can affect both familial and peer relationships. It may also affect the child's sense of self-worth both directly and through the response of others to the label. The related literature shows that the label "gifted" has been hypothesized to be perceived both positively and negatively by students, their parents and friends. Nevertheless, such a hypothesis has not been investigated sufficiently to draw certain conclusions. The purpose of the current study was to investigate possible positive and negative effects of gifted label. The study was distinct in terms of its methodology through which labeling effects were investigated both before and after students were labeled as gifted and comparisons were made with a control group. The following research questions were examined:

1. Do gifted students' perceptions about themselves and their parents' and friends' attitudes towards them differ from non-gifted students' perceptions?
2. Do gifted students' perceptions about themselves before they are identified as gifted differ from their perceptions after they are identified as gifted?
3. Do gifted students' perceptions about their parents' attitudes towards them before they are identified as gifted differ from their perceptions after they are identified as gifted?
4. Do gifted students' perceptions of their friends' attitudes towards them before they are identified as gifted differ from their perceptions after they are identified as gifted?

Method: Research participants consisted of 415 sixth-grade students (47.5% female and 52.5% male) who applied to the Education Programs for Talented Students (EPTS) at Anadolu University in Eskisehir in Turkey and who filled out the Gifted Label Effects-Scale (GLE-S) during their applications. The gifted group included 28 students who were identified to be gifted among the 415 students by the identification system of the EPTS. These students were accepted to the EPTS programs. Because two of them dropped out the program before the posttest was administered, the research group included 26 gifted students. The comparative group included 387 non-labeled students who applied to the EPTS but not identified to be gifted. Of the gifted sample 23.1% was female and 76.9% were male. As a posttest the GLE-S was administered to the gifted students after they attended the EPTS programs for 4 months. We had such a time period between the pretest and posttest because we hypothesized that labeling effects did not appear soon after the identification; instead a reasonable time period was necessary for the emergence of the effects.

GLE-S is composed of 3 subscales. They measure self-perceptions, perceptions of parental attitudes and perceptions of friends' attitudes (see Appendix A). Each subscale includes 8 items, of which 4 are related to positive perceptions and the other 4 are related to negative perceptions. In total, the scale includes twenty-four items, half of which are negative perceptions and the other half are positive perceptions. A four point likert-type scale was used for scoring the items in the scale. Each item was scored from "0" to "3" ("0" = It does not suit

me, "1" = It suits me slightly, "2" = It suits me mostly, "3" = It suits me completely). The items related to negative perceptions were coded in reverse. Total score on the scale can range from 0 to 72. Scores closer to "0" mean negative perceptions whereas scores closer to "72" mean positive perceptions. Cronbach alpha coefficient for the reliability of the GLE-S for 24 items was found to be .72.

Pretest and posttest scores were compared at total score, subtest score and item level since each item in the scale was supposed to have its distinct significance. Paired-samples t-test was used to compare pretest and posttest differences at total score and subtest levels, whereas Wilcoxon sign-ranks test was used to compare pretest and posttest differences at item level. Independent-samples t-test was used to compare gifted students' scores with the scores of the students who were not identified to be gifted.

Results: A significant difference was found between the total score of non-gifted students ($X=54.93$) and the posttest score of gifted students ($X=51.80$), $t(411)=2.12$, ($p<.05$). Follow-up analysis by subtest showed that the difference came from their perceptions of their friends' attitudes, $t(411)=2.025$, ($p<.05$). That is, gifted students held less positive perceptions than non-labeled students about their friends' attitudes towards them. A comparison of gifted students' perception scores before the identification and their scores 4 months after the identification using Paired-samples t-test analysis yielded no significant difference. That is, gifted students' scores at the subscale level did not change significantly from pretest to posttest. However, Wilcoxon sign-ranks analysis item by item showed significant increases for 3 items out of 24. These perceptions were as follows: "*I feel alone among my friends.*" "*My family compares me with other children too often.*" "*My friends make fun of my weaknesses.*"

Discussion: A comparison of gifted and non-gifted students' perceptions related to labeling effects shows that gifted students hold less positive perceptions than other students about their friends' attitudes towards them. However, whether or not this difference comes from gifted labeling is unknown because gifted students' perceptions related to labeling effects did not change significantly from the pretest to the posttest at the subscale level. Although pretest-posttest scores (self-perceptions, parents attitudes and friends attitudes) at the subscale level did not change significantly, as reported before, we found significant increases in three items, related to negative perceptions, in the item level analysis. For example, gifted students' scores in the item "*My friends make fun of my weaknesses*" significantly increased after labeling. Several reasons can be speculated about the increase in negative perceptions related to labeling. Either gifted students' perceptions might have changed or their friends and parents' attitudes might have changed. For example, in the case of students' making fun of gifted students' weaknesses, their actual purpose might be to camouflage gifted students' abilities because of jealousy. These speculations bring into mind a need for directly measuring labeling effects on parents and friends rather than gifted students' perceptions.

There could be more differences than the ones found in this study between gifted and non-gifted students' perceptions related to labeling effects if different samples are used in research. We prefer to make a speculation here. The education system in Turkey could be one of the principal reasons behind the absence of significant effects of labeling on gifted students' perceptions. The education system is thoroughly test-oriented which entails competition among students to obtain the highest grades across the classroom, the school, the city and yet across the country. Higher grades are also considered to be the most important criterion of achievement among the community. Most of the participants in the current study who applied to the EPTS usually held the "top" ranks of academic success in their classes. As a consequence, they already were implicitly labeled by their social environment and exposed to effects of labeling even before they took part in the EPTS.

This study is distinct in its methodology compared to other studies about the labeling effect. First, the current study diverges from previous studies by measuring and comparing gifted students' perceptions both before and after labeling. Second, unlike previous studies in which effects of "gifted" label were directly asked to gifted and other students, we did not ask students effects of gifted label; instead we included behaviors or perceptions in our measurement that could be changed by "gifted" label. More research is needed to fully understand possible effects of gifted label. Particularly needed is the experimental study that includes gifted and non-gifted control groups.