

Gifted Students' Purpose in Life

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Abstract The aim of the present study is to determine gifted students' purpose in life via interview in Turkey. Looking at the world population, it is seen that the proportion of gifted children is 2.5-3%. This rate does not change according to the countries of the world. Detection of gifted students is difficult and specific. Gifted students are placed in minority groups in the countries they are in. The present study conducted semi-structured interviews with 5 female and 5 male students between the ages of 13-16. The interview questions were created based on the "Youth Purpose Project Interview". The students were also given an additional, short information form that comprised of age and gender. Phenomenological design was used as a qualitative research method. The results of this study revealed that gifted students have goals of career-family and economic power listed under the title of future expectations. It also revealed that they attach importance to societal good and being beneficial to the society in terms of a long-term purpose. Additionally, it was revealed that purpose is directly linked with happiness. Implications of these results are discussed in light of the literature and suggestions are presented.

Keywords Gifted, Purpose in Life, Goal

1. Introduction

People speak often of goals and purpose in their day to day lives. Meaningful activities that tie into their purpose in life are described as the degree to which people find activities that will concretely render their lives completely meaningful and valuable [1]. One of the most important factors that keep individuals holding onto life is their purposes of life [2] Purpose in life is a significant source of long-term motivation [3]. The adolescence is viewed as a period where a sense of purpose is formed [4]. When asked, numerous adolescents mention doing something that would affect the world [5].

The adolescents who are looking for an answer to the questions "who I am" [6] especially, identifying with a

purpose is extremely important, and the question "why I am" is examined within the context of life purposes [7]. Adolescents having a purpose in life guide their lives in a positive way [4]. For some adolescents, purposes and identity development involves working on goals the reasons for which are well defined [7]. Gifted individuals generally base their life purposes on phenomena and opinions that most people deem impossible. They feel a need for a more challenging education, an introduction to different subjects, problem solving and creative thinking skills, and unique approaches to solutions for problems. Gifted students need to ruminate on their ideas, discuss them, think using possibilities, abstractions, and metaphorical strategies; to generalize and test them [8]. Gifted students who do not receive an education based around their characteristics and needs tend to achieve below their potentials, and once their sense of competence has weakened, which is to say when they are unable to realize their purpose in life, considering how a large portion of contribution to society comes from these people, it's apparent that overlooking this group can lead to a negative outcome [9].

Renzulli and Reis [10] list personality traits and factors that are effective in people acquiring the quality of being gifted thusly: personality factors, self-perception, courage, character, intuition, need for achievement, ego-resilience, energy, belief in destiny, personal magnetism. Disciplining them is more difficult than other children. Approaching them with the reasons and the logic behind a rule instead of saying "I am the father and what I say goes," will make it easier to discipline them. In this context, we find that these children have life purposes that feel very different to many others. For example, among their goals and dreams are going to space, creating a colony on Mars, getting to know different lives [11, 12]. Many theories show that gifted students are more prone to showing interest in social subjects such as social justice and moral thought [13].

Upon examination, we can see that names like A. Adler and V. Frankl have comprehensively studied life purposes. When we take a look at purposes, however, we see that from time to time the terms of goal, purpose, and meaning in life are used interchangeably. Many other scholars of

thought underline that the two concepts should be used separately for example according to Steger [14] meaning in life studies, indicates when defining meaning that it also encompasses purposes. On the other hand, Damon et al. [4] who worked on purposes in young people have asserted that purpose itself is a discrete construct. Based on this definition, purpose is defined as a general intention to achieve things that are meaningful for themselves and for the world beyond themselves. According to this definition, purpose is more unchanging, long term compared to goals, which are short term. Purposes are a part of the individual's search for personal meaning, but they are also processes that engage with things bigger than the person themselves. At this point, intention, activity, and engagement are underlined [15].

Purposes in life are an important source of motivation for success [16]. Purposelessness is associated with low levels of mental health and high levels of stress in adolescents and adults [17]. Having a purpose or sense of meaning in life is mostly associated with physical and mental health [18-22] when people are asked about their future expectations, one of the important factors appear to be life purposes [2]. Purposes in life are approached under different categories in different studies. For example, Kasser & Ryan [23] classify life goals under two categories; Intrinsic and Extrinsic Goals. On the other hand, Emmons [24] examine it under the titles of action, commitment, and engagement. Meanwhile McDonald, Wong, & Gingras [25] mention seven categories of meaning: Achievement, religion, relationship, self-transcendence, intimacy, self-acceptance, and fair treatment. In Turkey, the number of studies on purposes is very few and they appear to mostly focus on university students [26, 27]. In a study in Turkey with adolescents, most common goals appear to be career (success), relationship, and body-senses related goals [28].

Life goals that encompass many aspects of life, in the Turkish educational system, generally refer to purposes concerning the future and are usually approached via the lens of career. The fact that education aims to prepare man power for a market and is limited by economic factors gives the students a narrow point of view about their purpose in life. There are studies that assert that it is important to research life purposes in gifted young people [3] because research findings point to gifted people tending more towards being attached to their life goals than other young people. Many theories show that gifted people are more inclined towards approaching social subjects from a point of social justice and moral thought [3].

According to current study results on the moral development of gifted children, these children display differences from their peers in terms of physical, emotional, and intellectual development. An important portion of research done in this field has noted that children's level of intelligence increases in direct proportion with how much earlier and explicitly their moral interest develops

compared to their peers [29]. The present study aims to determine gifted students' purpose in life. With this purpose, answers to the following questions were sought:

1. What are the most important things/goals in life for gifted students?
2. What do gifted students care about the most? What are some of the things that you care about?
3. How do gifted students self-describe? What kind of person are you?
4. What would gifted students have to do to stand out in the world?
5. How do gifted students describe their perfect place/world?
6. What are gifted students doing to reach this vision?
7. How and when did this subject become important to the gifted students?
8. What are gifted students' short and long-term plans? "Picture yourself at say, 40 years of age. What will you be doing? Who'll be in your life? What will be important to you? What are your plans in the immediate future, say the next few years?"

2. Method

2.1. Participants

The participants for this study are comprised of students continuing their education at the Samsun Center for Science and Art (Samsun Bilim Sanat Merkezi). Looking at the world population, it is seen that the proportion of gifted children is 2.5-3%. This rate does not change according to the countries of the world. For example, what is the proportion of gifted children in Africa is the proportion of children in America. Detection of gifted students is difficult and specific. Gifted students are placed in minority groups in the countries they are in. Gifted students were selected via convenience sampling. For the purposes of the study, students' remarks were recorded and this created an opportunity for thorough research. The basic understanding for the method of criterion sampling involves the study of all conditions that correspond to a series of pre-determined criteria. The aforementioned criterion or criteria may be created by the researcher, or a previously prepared list of criteria may be utilized [30]. The conditions used as criteria for this study are listed below:

- Students being gifted and talented
- Students being between the ages of 13-16
- Students having expectations about the future.

A total of 10 students, 5 female and 5 male, participated in this study. The ages of the participants vary between 13 and 16. Among the participants were five 15-years old three 16-years old, and one 14 and 13 years old each (see Table 1).

Table 1. Age and gender of participants

Gender	Age
Male	16
Female	16
Female	15
Male	15
Female	14
Male	15
Female	15
Male	16
Female	15
Male	13

2.2. Data Collection Tool

This study utilized the Youth Purpose Project Interview [1] prepared by the Stanford Center on Adolescence. The survey includes in research questions. This survey was translated into Turkish from the original English text by researchers and an expert in the field. Turkish translations were compared, and the survey was finalized. The survey was tested with a student in order to see if it had any hard to understand sections. After this practice, an information form and questions regarding demographics (age and gender) were added to the survey. The survey includes structured, open ended questions that the students can answer on the form. Open ended questions allow for participants to answer voluntary. Long-term interaction and trust are important in qualitative research. All of the participants who participated in this study are students of one of the researchers. Long-term observation was provided by the researcher and there was no hesitation in creating confidence.

2.3. Procedure

Data analysis was done via the method of "Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). During evaluation, clustering was done based on the answers received. Themes were ascertained through comparisons and correlations between these clusters. For the reliability of the study, in order to ensure objectivity, compatibility with clustered data prepared by other experts was examined. Quotations were made from categories used in the analysis and the answers given by the participants to the interview questions, to ensure validity. The compatibility of data clustered by two different experts was examined for the reliability of the study.

3. Results

In this study conducted in order to determine the purposes in the lives of gifted students, who were asked

open ended questions and whose remarks were noted, 8 questions were directed at them. Subsequently, categories and codes were formed within these themes, and their frequency distribution was assessed.

When asked what the most important purpose in life was; family, a good future (career, success, economic needs), and health classifications emerged as the most important among their answers (see Table 2). Certain students who participated in the study made the statements below that are in line with this point:

- ".....It's important for me that my future is orderly and happy..." (S1).
- ".....My future, which is to say my career and life..." (S2).
- "The thing I care the most in my life is being an exemplary person who's had profound effect in our society, in my children and relatives, and even the world, who has high economic power ..." (S6)
- "Success and my future career" (S4).

Table 2. Description of purpose in life

Thema	Frequency (f)
Family	3
A Good Future	3
Health	2
Exemplary Person	1
Religion	1
Trust in Others	1
Social Issue	1

When asked what the most important things in their lives were, the gifted students appeared to prioritize family, and economical needs classifications above others in their answers (see Table 3). Certain students who participated in the study made the statements below that are in line with this point:

- ".....It's important for me that my future is orderly and happy..." (S1).
- ".....As an ambitious person, my future and my life are very important to me ..." (S2).
- "The thing I care the most in my life is being an exemplary person who's had profound effect in our society, in my children and relatives, and even the world who has high economic power ..." (S6).

Table 3. Things Gifted Students Care about the Most

Thema	f
Family	6
Friends	3
Economical Needs	1
Religion	2
Trust	2

When asked how they would describe themselves, helpful and ambitious emerged as the most common

qualifiers in the gifted students’ answers (see Table 4). One participating student remarked that people are not honest when they describe themselves. Certain statements done by the students who participated in this study that are in line with this point are listed below:

- “Helpful, panic, ambitious, stubborn” (S6)
- “Tasteful, stylish” (S1)
- “I am stubborn, aggressive, helpful and cares for those whom they love, decisive and someone who always finishes what they’ve started” (S9)
- “Ambitious and stubborn” (S5)
- “Helpful, hardworking, ambitious” (S3)
- “People who say this stuff generally lie so I’m not writing down anything here” (S10)
- “Endearing but a bit clumsy” (S7)

Table 4. Self-description (What kind of person are you?)

Thema	f
Helpful	3
Ambitious	3
Decisive	2
Authentic	2
Hardworking	1

When asked what they would do to stand out in the world, societal good emerged as the most frequent expression in the gifted students’ answers (see Table 5). The students’ related statements:

- “ Innovations that will help humanity” (S2)
- “I don’t want to change” (S5)
- “I would like to start a place where people running from war or need help can work and make sure they do work that is good to others” (s8)
- “Embracing differences, all people knowing my name of face, and having qualities that are exemplary” (S7)
- “ Innovations beneficial to humanity and the world” (S4).

Table 5. What would you want to do to stand out

Thema	f
Societal Good	3
Fame-Exemplary Human	2
Autonomy	1

When asked to define their perfect place/world, “where you are happy” emerged as the most prominent description in the gifted students’ answers (see Table 6). This was expressed thusly:

- “Where I’m happy” (S3)
- “A clean and happy world where everyone takes responsibility” (S2)
- “7 floors up, the white place and not the red place” (S10)
- “A peaceful place where everyone gets along” (S1)

- “The perfect world to me is somewhere where the best person of our day is an average person in that place” (S4)
- “A world where criminals, the sick, wars don’t exist and where everyone respects one another and live happily”. (S6)

Table 6. Perfect Place/World Description

Thema	f
Where you’re happy	3
Peace	2
Normalcy	1

When asked about their efforts to reach their purpose, work emerged as an important and much emphasized concept (see Table 7). Some of the students’ related statements are below:

- All I can do now is work hard.
- I’d help people meet.
- No for now.
- I’d work hard and pay close attention to those who can assist me.
- First, I’d work and then start a help center and apply to people and organizations that can help me.
- I’d focus on public trainings. The dreamland is only possible with education.
- A lot of it... But it’s hard to do all.
- By doing good

Table 7. Efforts towards for purpose

Thema	f
Work	3
Education	1

When asked about when their subject of interest became important to them, the gifted students generally replied that it happened over time and this was the most prominent answer (see Table 8). Some of the students’ related statements are below:

- “When I decided how I wanted to live my life” (S6)
- “When I was born” (S3)
- “Ever since I got my head together (S2)
- “It was always important to me.” (S6)
- “2 years ago” (S10)

Table 8. How and when did this purpose start becoming important?

Thema	f
At birth	3
Always	2
2 years ago	1
When I got my head together	1

Among gifted students’ age-40 dreams and near future plans, family values seem to come into prominence;

meanwhile some of their remarks and their thoughts on careers are seen in their answers listed below (Table 9). Some of the students' related statements:

- "at 40 I see myself at a hospital as a well loved and respected person who has made a difference for people. My family would become the most important thing by" (S1)
- "...I want to be 40 and a doctor and a professor at the university. It would be important for my career and my family ..." (S3)
- "I'd be a scientist" (S8)
- "At 40, if I have children I'd make the choices that are best for them but also think about myself and so I'd make the best choices" (S6)
- "at 40 I'd think about what the best would be for my children and what I can do for them. The most important thing for me would be my family (mom, dad, and my sibling) and my children" (S2)

Table 9. Gifted Students' dreams of 40 age

Thema	f
Family	5
Career	3
Science	1

4. Discussion

As a result of the interviews conducted with gifted students, we found that they essentially talk about a good future and that they explain the concept of a good future with success, a career, and economical power. On the other hand, it's striking that students underline the concept of family as their self-oriented life goals, and societal good as their beyond- the-self dreams. Happiness ranks among their ultimate goals as well.

As part of the results of the study, career/success/economic power was cited within the theme of future expectations. When examining sources of personal meaning McDonald et al. [25] included success and close relationships in the same meaning profile. Westerhof, Bohlmeijer, & Valenkamp [32] also mention success, relationships, and material needs. In this context, the factors of career, success, economic power which we have derived in this study are often cited among purposes in life or sources of meaning in the literature. Upon an examination of the studies in Turkey İlhan [33] has determined contribution to family, relationships, personal development, physical health, a meaningful life to be internal goals; and becoming rich/material success, societal good, fame/recognition, being attractive/image to be external goals. All the factors were mentioned in this interview as well. Therefore, it could be said that the goals of gifted students almost fully overlap with the goals of university students. Eryilmaz [34] cites career, relationship, and body-sense purposes as those which

contribute to subjective well-being. Career and relationship purposes among these often show similarities to the career/success and family purposes cited in this study.

As a result of the study, happiness was found to be one of the ultimate purposes in gifted students' lives. Eryilmaz, [34] specifically, has determined that setting career goals increases subjective well-being in adolescents. Purpose-meaning-goals are often underlined in happiness studies in the recent years. Studies done in this context demonstrate that meaning/purpose is both a protective element against risk factors [18] and an important indicator of mental health [35-37]. Meanwhile, Krok [38] has found that purpose in life in adolescents is central to their well-beings. The purpose-well-being relationship in this study also shows similarities to other results in the literature.

Gifted students are often viewed as arbiters of future and many governments/organizations provide these students with various opportunities. Therefore, societal good is expected of these students. Hence the first studies on purpose in life are focused on the gifted and the activist youth [39]. Definitions of purpose in life tend to expect them to be long-term beyond- the-self goals [40]. One of the results of the study, gifted students often cite "societal good" as a future expectation. In certain definitions of purpose, this is called "the ultimate concern" [24].

5. Implications and Recommendations

As a result, it was discovered that gifted student's future expectations involve career-family-economic power goals, whereas their long-term purposes involve career-family-economic power but on the other hand also care about doing societal good and contributing to the society, and that all purposes are related to happiness.

Any studies from here on out could be done about what path the students can follow in order to reach both their short and long-term goals. For example, it was found that identifying career and body-sense purposes positively affect lesson attendance in students [41]. In this context, it's thought that gifted students having a purpose might positively affect their school related success. On the other hand, this also appears to be important for them in terms of mental and physical health [2]. Additionally, it was determined that students do not have enough information about how to participate in activities where they can do societal good. In this context, students being involved in civil society initiatives might help render gifted students' special qualities into societal good.

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