(Hard Copy)
E-ISSN : 2456-1045

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RESEARCH JOURNAL

VOLUME - 48 | ISSUE - 1

ADVANCE RESEARCH JOURNAL OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY DISCOVERIES

APRIL 2020

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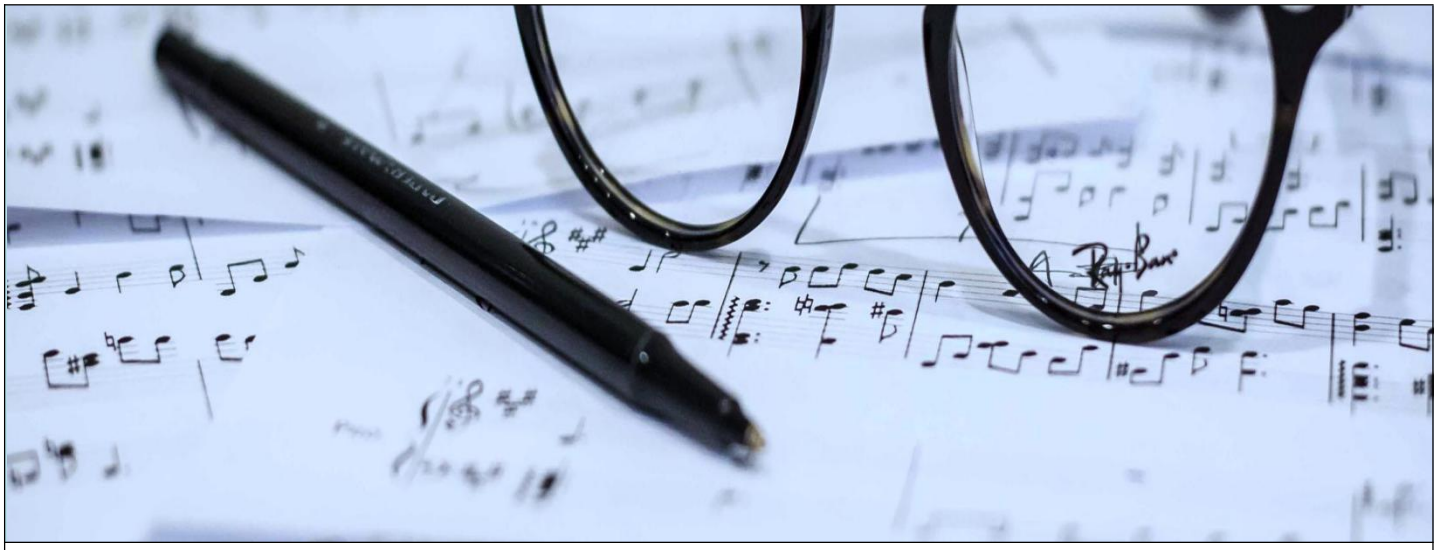

Development of musically exceptionally gifted disadvantaged youth

ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE

ISSN : 2456-1045 (Online)
ICV Impact Value: 72.30
GIF- Impact Factor: 5.188
IPI Impact Factor: 3.54
Publishing Copyright @ International Journal Foundation
Article Code: EDU-V48-I1-C3-APR-2020
Category : EDUCATION
Volume : 48.0 (APRIL-2020 EDITION)
Issue: 1(One)
Chapter : 3 (Three)
Page : 16-22
Journal URL: www.journalresearchijf.com
Paper Received: 10.03.2020
Paper Accepted: 21.02.2020
Date of Publication: 20-06-2020

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ABSTRACT

Educating gifted students has received more and more attention by psychologists, teachers, parents and researchers. Exploring the complex nature of giftedness is essential to develop gifted education programs that help young students develop their skills and talents and abilities. Factors such as these are especially important with underprivileged children. Nowadays many gifted education programs reach beyond developing special skills and students are thought individually, not only in their field of talent, but their mental health is addressed as well. Our research examined the self-esteem, life-satisfaction and general positivity in a group of very special, musically exceptional teenagers both disadvantaged and not disadvantaged. The data found supported that low socioeconomic status can be connected to many mental health factors. The study is intended to be longitudinal.

KEYWORDS: gifted student, disadvantaged, self-esteem, satisfaction with life

CITATION OF THE ARTICLE

Dalma T. (2020) Development of musically exceptionally gifted disadvantaged youth; *Advance Research Journal of Multidisciplinary Discoveries;* 48(3) pp. 16-22

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I. INTRODUCTION

Educating gifted learners, creating special opportunities and conditions is not a new concept, and currently it is receiving more and more attention from teachers, parents and researchers as well. The main goal is to recognize students who are above average in one or more aspects of their abilities and help them to develop their potential. To help them reach high achievements, factors contributing to the development of high potential and factors restricting them need to be explored and understood. Understanding the complex nature of talent is essential to scholars, educators and parents and anyone who is in touch with a gifted person.

Giftedness was considered as equal to intelligence for researchers and professional studies for a long time. Binet's intelligence test was used in Lewis Terman's (1922) study to identify gifted preschoolers. Terman believed that intelligence is the strongest predictor of a person's success in life. After the first testing, the identified gifted preschoolers were followed and their achievements were monitored by Terman and his group of scholars, making Terman's study the first, and until now the most longitudinal study of gifted.

Since Terman's study, the conception of giftedness expanded and got more complex, near intelligence creativity appeared in articles as a main component (Renzulli, 1977). Renzulli argues that inspiration, motivation and willingness to create are as important to high achievements and productivity as intelligence. It is now recognized that near intelligence, drive, motivation, diligence and persistence are essential to greatness, to manifest giftedness (Ericsson, Krampe and Tesch-Römer, 1993; Tokai, 2013). Concerning intelligence, Guilford (1968) stated that a bit above average intelligence is as sufficient for high achievement in particular fields of talent. More and more factors that are now considered to contribute to the development of giftedness such as family background and social support (Rinn, 2006), mental health factors like positivity, satisfaction with life, self-valuation or expectations for the future (Rimm and Lowe, 1988; Reichenberg and Landau, 2009). It is now generally accepted that near intellectual abilities other factors contribute to the development of gifted youth, such as social support. The first and primary place where children learn norms and roles in social connections is the family (Goertzel and Goertzel, 1962; Rimm and Lowe, 1988; Reichenberg and Landau, 2009).

Conceptions like „giftedness breaks though no matter what" or „talent doesn't have to be supported, it always finds its way" are discredited by these findings. It is more and more accepted that gifted learners need to be recognized and nurtured to reach their maximum potential. There are an expanding number of gifted programs where not only are abilities developed, but the focus is also on the gifted learners' social background, mental health and motivation. It is still quite commonly accepted that gifted individuals tend to be „lone wolfs", even antisocial, about their social skills being beyond average. Janos, Fung and Robinson (1985) tried to ascertain whether gifted children feel *different* from their peers. They conducted interviews and questionnaires with gifted young persons, and found that 40% of them feel different, and they are the ones who feel discomfort about themselves and about their talent. Factors that are able to work as resources are needed for the gifted to become high achieving adults are motivation, interest, persistence and emotional stability (Balogh, 2004).

Self-esteem

A connection was found by many researchers between self-esteem and high achievement (van den Berg and Coetzee, 2014). Self esteem is a collection of one's thoughts, feelings and actions towards themselves (Blascovich & Tomaka, 1991). One of the most common risks among gifted learners is the non adequate amount of self-esteem. Low self-esteem and unordinarily high sweelf esteem both can inhibit the development of skills.

A constant debate ihas been taking place regarding whether giving a student the gifted „label" benefits or harms the student. Hoge and Renzulli (1991) found that being called gifted may increase a student's self-esteem, but when picked out of their peers and put into a group of similarly gifted students can diminish their self-worth. Stipek and MacIver (1989) had similar results and found that self-esteem about their own intellectual abilities decreases through time, as the gifted learner gets into more prominent groups and their expectations towards themselves get increase. Retrospective interviews were taken by Hertzog (2003) with university students about gifted education programs. The students indicated that the programs were useful and they helped the gifted to get where they are in the present, but sometimes they felt like giftedness was a „burden" and a „label" for them.

Motivation – Aspirations

Motivation is a force that drives a person to do something, to learn, to set goals and move towards them. Motivations of a gifted person may help them reach their potential. Getting to know what drives a gifted student, what factors are important to him or her may allow us to help them to set realistic goals and achieve them. Well-set goals may form a person's behavior. They may be able to affect self-regulation. Hence motivation may be connected to physical and mental health (Ryan et al, 1996). According to Ryan and Deci's Self-Determination Theory our behavior is

driven by 3 basic needs: competence, relatedness and autonomy. Competence is the need to control things in our lives and to feel competent. Relatedness is the need to connect and interact to others in as many levels as possible, and above that autonomy is the need to be independent, to be in harmony with one's self. Every person has the inner need for constant growth, and these drives and optimal growth are inherent in every person, but not automatic (Deci and Vansteenkiste, 2004). The theory of aspirations is built over this self-determination theory, stating that every individual has a special pattern of aspirations – intrinsic or extrinsic goals, and his or her behavior is driven by these goals (Martos, Szabó, Rózsa, 2006).

Satisfaction with life

A connection has been drawn by many studies between mental health, general satisfaction with life and success, high achievement (Rimm and Lowe, 1988; Reichenberg and Landau, 2009). Subjective well-being may be able to function as a resource which helps getting through failure, it may help dealing with success in a productive way. Shin and Johnson's (1987) definition of life satisfaction is „a global assessment of a person's quality of life according to his chosen criteria (Shin and Johnson, 1987, p. 478)." Judgement as to how satisfied is someone with his or her life is a result of comparing his or her circumstances to an appropriate standard (Diener, Emmons, Larsen and Griffin, 1985).

Positivity

Links have been forged between one's tendency to look at experiences with a positive outlook as a personal trait and their achievement and success (Caprara et al., 2012). Positivity is a dispositional, general determinant of a person's subjective well-being, which works as a personality trait and may account for a person's individual variation and stability in happiness despite environmental change (Kozma, Stone and Stones, 2000). Optimism differs from self-esteem, which is the self-regard of a person, with cognitive, affective and behavioral aspects (Blascovich & Tomaka, 1991), and differs from life-satisfaction, which refers to one's evaluation of their actual life (Shin and Johnson, 1987). People's expectations for the future are shaped by positivity and optimistic people tend to expect many good things for the future and very few bad things (Caprara et al, 2012). A person's positivity is connected with self-esteem, life satisfaction, depression, optimism and depression (Caprara et al, 2012).

Underprivileged gifted children

Gifted children with a poor sociocultural background are in many ways similar to their peers with average or beyond average background, but many differences can be seen in important aspects. Their self-esteem tends to be lower, they see their own abilities mostly much worse than they really are (McIntosh and Greenlaw, 1990). Low socioeconomic background rarely allows people to think way into the future, the focus is on the present. Factors such as social support and chance may play a bigger role in their case than their peers's life (Card and Giuliano, 2015). Creating segregated, special educational programs especially for these students may not be helpful, it may reduce the willingness to join (Ceci and Papierno, 2005; Gagné, 2005). Even the tests themselves work in favor of the majority students, because these usually are made in a majority's mother tongue, this makes understanding the test itself harder for children in minority. Students' achievement may be affected by socio-economic status in an indirect way as well. Davis-Kean (2005) found that a child's performance in many ways in school is highly influenced by the education of the parents.

Effects of gifted education programs

The number of gifted education programs are increasing and they are very diverse and there have been many research attempts to measure the effect of these programs, mostly by interviewing the participants themselves.

Hertzog (2003) retrospectively interviewed university students about gifted education programs. The students mostly said that the programs were useful and helped them to get where they are in the present, but sometimes they felt like giftedness was a „burden", a „label" for them. Mostly they felt accepted among peers who were very similar to them, those who had the same interest, same passion. Delcourt, Cornell és Goldberg (2007) compared young people who took part in gifted education programs with ones who didn't, and as a control with ones who weren't identified as gifted. All three groups were satisfied with their social life, their friends. Students who took part in special programs performed the best, but their self-esteem were the lowest, so gifted education programs helped enhance performance, but factors such as self-worth weren't addressed. However there are special programs for gifted children which care for other factors, not only developing the skills. Ashman (2000) interviewed his sister, who took part in many gifted education programs. According to Amanda there is a huge difference between the usual school program and these special programs, in favor of the latter, because gifted education programs helped Amanda become a better person, according to her own self (Ashman, 2000 in Hertzog, 2003).

Subotnik and Arnold (2000) reviewed 16 studies which examined the effects of gifted education programs. The conclusion was made that the programs' methods are mostly imperfect, unreliable and not suitable for generalization, because they are made to examine one program (Subotnik and Arnold, 2000 in Balogh, 2004). Almost all of the gifted programs are very different, thus it is difficult to create general conclusions that address all of them.

Complex gifted education for disadvantaged young musicians in Hungary

Considering everything above, with the complex nature of giftedness kapt in mind, a gifted education program can be found in Hungary that deals with all of the factors above, and cares for the students' mental health as well as their skills. The program was created for mostly disadvantaged, mostly gipsy, musically exceptionally gifted students, from age 12 to 22. Classical music or jazz is taught to them, and the aim of the program is to help them develop their potential, and to get them to the highest level of music education. Twelve weeks of intense music courses is contained in the program in a small village in Hungary, where students, their teachers and mentors live together, work and learn together. The classes are taught by world-famous musicians, the students are presented with opportunities to play with their teachers, the program is completely free for them – their families couldn't afford this kind of music education otherwise. Besides music, they learn english, music history, music theory are taught and social skills are developed as well. Each of the students get an individual development plan, and an individual timetable, according to each of their needs and skills. After one year the program is finished, and the students can be asked back as many times the teachers think it is necessary.

The aim of this study is to explore the motivational patterns of these students, who are all exceptional musical gifted, to see their optimism, their self-esteem and satisfaction with life. We presume that these factors are affected by socioeconomic status directly and indirectly through demographic factors such as income, or parents' education.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Subjects

Subjects were actual and former participants of the Program. Sixty-three students, 52 male, 11 female. Nine from them are already successful, and got into music academy. Their average age is 17.21 years (standard deviation: 3.43, the youngest is 11, the oldest is 25 years old). The sample has a relatively wide age-range because the program accepts students from that age range, and all of them get an individual development plan, and one of the main aim of this research is to measure the possible long-term effect of this music program on the students' performance, and their mental health. They have been practicing music for more than 8 years (SD: 3,05 min.: 2, max.: 15), almost all, 52 of them studied music during the whole year, at home as well, not only at this program in 12 weeks of the year.

More than a half, 36 of them came from a family of musicians, and 46 of the 63 students claimed to be gypsies, 33 of them come from disadvantaged families (defined by the government according to the education of the parent, and the monthly income of the family).

Statistical analyses

For the statistical analyses IBM SPSS Statistics 23 was used.

To measure aspirations the *Aspirational Index* (Kasser and Ryan, 1966, hungarian version, validated by: Martos, Sabó and Rózsa, 2006) was used. The questionnaire contains 14 items, 7 scales as 7 different life goals, and the participant has to answer how important that life goal is to him or her. The answers give us a pattern about the participants life goals.

To measure life satisfaction Satisfaction With Life Scale (Diener et al, 1985, hungarian version, validated by: Martos, Sallay, Desfalvi, Szabó, 2014) was used. The one-scale measurement contains 5 statements about usual satisfaction with life. It has to be decided by the participant how much he or she agrees with it on a scale from 1 to 7. The internal consistency of the questionnaire is high (Cronbach's alpha: 0.892).

To measure Positivity, Caprara's shortened one-scale Positivity questionnaire (Caprara et al, 2012, hungarian version, validated by: Török, 2016) was used. It's a 5-item Likert-scale questionnaire about the person's expectations about the future, the answers have to be given in a 1 to 5 Likert scale. The internal consistency of the questionnaire is high (Cronbach's alpha: 0.936)

To examine Self-Esteem, Rosenberg's Self Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965, hungarian version validated by Sallay et al., 2014) was used. The scale contains 10 items, a bifactorial model was used. The scale can be analyzed as a one-factor questionnaire, with a scale called Global Self-Esteem where 5 negative items are inverted. Using a bifactorial model a negative and a positive self-esteem were counted. The internal consistency of the questionnaire was high in both ways (as one scale, Conbach's alpha: 0.786; as two scales, positive self-esteem: 0.586, negative self-esteem: 0.707).

III. RESULTS

Results of the Aspirational Index are seen on table 1. It is seen that development is their most important aspirations, and social relations is a close second. Disadvantaged and not disadvantaged children were compared, whether they differ in their goals, their aspirations, and no statistically significant difference were found between the two groups.

Table 1.	Mean	SD
Development	4,31	0,48
Money	4,06	0,51
Relationships	4,04	0,68
Contribution	3,63	0,84
Fame	3,55	0,75
Health	3,55	0,71
Looking good	3,54	0,81

Effect of socioeconomic status

We wanted to know whether mental health factors such as self-esteem, satisfaction with life or positivity are determined by socio-economic status. Many factors were found to be affected by the child's family's socioeconomic status:

- ✓ Positive self-esteem: t(63): -2,952, p=0,005
- ✓ Negative self-esteem: t(63): 2,692, p=0,006
- ✓ Global self-esteem: t(63): -2,855, p=0,006
- ✓ Positivity: t(63): -2,648, p=0,011
- ✓ Satisfaction with life: t(63): -2,647, p=0,005

We aimed to explore whether low socio-economic status and being a minority group member are linked, so these factors were further examined, checked whether they are predicted by the child is being gypsy or not (being a minority or a majority). According to our results, being a minority is not connected to these mental health factors, it does not predict them.

The study also wanted to examine whether low socioeconomic status is connected to aspirations. No difference was found in aspirations between disadvantaged and non disadvantaged students.

We also aimed to explore whether self-esteem, satisfaction with life and positivity are determined by factors such as the parents' education. The results are seen at Table 2.

Table 2. Coefficients[a]					
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	,370	1,922		,193	,848
positive_self_esteem	1,088	,524	,584	2,076	,045
negative_self_esteem	-,249	,289	-,190	-,863	,394
global_self_esteem	-1,166	,652	-,716	-1,787	,082
asp_money	,093	,181	,054	,513	,611
asp_development	-,310	,223	-,158	-1,390	,173
asp_respect	,410	,159	,353	2,577	,014
asp_relations	-,038	,153	-,031	-,250	,804
asp_looks	-,654	,136	-,661	-4,796	,000
asp_contribution	-,637	,148	-,639	-4,294	,000
asp_health	,748	,159	,621	4,707	,000
SLSW	-,179	,139	-,193	-1,293	,204
Positivity	1,334	,253	,733	5,269	,000

According to the regression analyses, the father's education is in relation with the positive self-esteem (Beta: 1.088, p<0,05), the aspiration towards others to respect to him or her (Beta: 0.410, p<0.05), and also aspirations towards looking good (B: -0.654, p=0.00), towards helping others (B: -0.637, p=0.00), and towards being healthy (B: 0.748, p=0.00). The father's education also has a strong effect on the student's positivity (B: 1,334; p=0.00).

Next, we wanted to major the effect of the mother's education, which according to most of the studies has a huge impact on a student's success, academic performance. The results are visible in table 3.

Table 3. Coefficients[a]					
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	-1,805	2,085		-,866	,392
positive_self_esteem	,499	,300	,244	1,664	,104
negative_self_esteem	-,274	,189	-,197	-1,447	,156
asp_money	,350	,198	,196	1,765	,085
asp_development	-,527	,246	-,246	-2,139	,038
asp_respect	,214	,170	,174	1,259	,215
asp_relations	,389	,177	,289	2,199	,034
asp_looks	-,353	,156	-,318	-2,268	,029
SWL	-,213	,158	-,213	-1,348	,185
Positivity	1,071	,297	,550	3,608	,001

Aspiration about developing (B: -0.527; $p<0.05$), aspirations about looking good (B: -0.353; $p<0.029$) and a huge effect on positivity (B:1.070 $p<0,05$) are affected by the mother's education.

IV. DISCUSSION

We found that a student's performance (as it is already known) can be determined by coming from a low socioeconomic background. The socio-economical status of the family may have an effect on a deeper, psychological level on a students self-esteem, satisfaction with life or optimism about the future. This effect exists even if that child is exceptionally gifted in a field and gets constant feedback on his or her talent. It is also shown by this research that low socioeconomic background can have an indirect effect on children's mental health as well, through parents' education. Our results show however that the two groups didn't differ significantly in their aspirations. They have similar goals, but the way these goals are seen by them and whether they will be able to reach them: do differ.

It is clear that children coming from low socio-economic backgrounds have lower values on these questionnaires. These factors are known to be quite stable like personality traits, they are hardly and rarely can be changed. It is important for a gifted education program to find these disadvantaged gifted students at a young age, as early as possible to have a long-term effect.

V. CONCLUSION

Our results show that social relations are crucial in the evolvement of the gifted stident's skills. The most importans relations are with the parents growing up, later in adolescence peer relations are as important as the family. The „gifted" label can be felt as a burden by the kids (Hertzog, 2003). This feeling of exclusion may be overcomed (or at least diminished) by special educational programs where gifted kids have the opportunitiy to be around one another, where they can meet with peers with similar skills, interests and aspirations.

To acertain the real effect of the program to be seen a longitudinal study is necessary, it is planned to track these students for a long time, as long as they lead active lives as musicians. It would be preferable to expand the sample, but these young people are a very special sample, being the most gifted in their country.

Data availability statement:

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon request.

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