

**Principals' view on equity in gifted
education programs**

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Principals' view on equity in gifted education programs

Abstract

An initiative of the Kazakhstani education system, teaching gifted children has been a matter of national significance over the past two decades. This drive can be seen in the establishment of specialized schools and programs for high-achieving students. The primary goal of which is to provide gifted children with high quality educational opportunities and ensure a results-oriented learning environment. While equality in terms of being able to participate in the school entry exam is guaranteed, the selective nature of the admission policies in these schools seems full of controversies and counterpoints in terms of equity for all.

To shed light on the aforementioned indeterminacy, the present study aimed to examine school principals' stances on equity in currently existing gifted education programs. Six participants, who are principals in schools for gifted children were interviewed. They expressed their viewpoints on questions regarding the fairness of admission policies and selection procedures within their schools. In addition to this, principals also broached the subject of the predicaments of accepting and teaching students from diverse backgrounds.

It is worth discussing the differences of opinions that emerged in the study findings. Study participants agreed upon the importance of equitable access and participation in gifted programs. Some school principals described well-laid systems to ensure equity once students get accepted. Yet discrepancies emerged when the conversation touched upon the selection criteria. Some principals found certain members of society deprived, disadvantaged or disabled to compete with their peers. Other participants were doubtful that equity was actually achievable when it comes to practice. Notwithstanding these

attitudes, the positive practices towards equity in some schools can be considered an exemplary model to better achieving this ideal.

Мнения директоров школ о справедливости в программах обучения для одаренных детей

Аннотация

За последние два десятилетия инициатива системы образования Республики Казахстан по обучению одаренных детей обрела общегосударственное значение. Это стремление можно проследить в открытии специализированных школ и программ для учащихся с высокими академическими показателями, основной целью которых является предоставление одаренным детям высококачественных образовательных возможностей и обеспечение обучения, ориентированного на результат. Несмотря на то, что равенство обеспечивается посредством возможности участия во вступительных экзаменах, политика отбора в эти школы до сих пор полна противоречий с точки зрения справедливости.

Чтобы пролить свет на вышеупомянутую неопределенность, настоящее исследование было направлено на изучение позиции директоров школ по вопросам справедливости в существующих в настоящее время образовательных программах по обучению одаренных детей. Было опрошено шесть участников, которые являются директорами школ для одаренных детей. Они высказали свою точку зрения на вопросы, касающиеся справедливости правил приема и процедур отбора в их школах. В дополнение к этому, директора также затронули вопрос о трудностях приема и обучения учащихся из разных слоев общества.

Важно было обсудить различные мнения, которые возникли в процессе исследования. Участники исследования согласились с актуальностью проблемы обеспечения справедливого доступа и участия в программах для одаренных детей. Некоторые директора школ описали хорошо продуманные системы обеспечения справедливости после того, как ученики были приняты в школы. И все же

расхождения возникли, когда разговор коснулся критериев отбора. Многие руководители обнаружили, что некоторые члены общества лишены возможности конкуренции со своими сверстниками. Другие участники сомневались, что справедливость действительно достижима, когда дело доходит до практики.

Несмотря на такое отношение, позитивная практика обеспечения справедливости в некоторых школах может рассматриваться как примерная модель для достижения этого идеала.

**Дарынды балаларға арналған оқу бағдарламаларындағы әділеттік бойынша
мектеп директорларының пікірі**

Аңдатпа

Қазақстандық білім беру жүйесінің дарынды балаларды оқыту бастамасы соңғы онжылдықта жалпы мемлекеттік маңызға ие болды. Бұл серпілісті дарынды балаларды жоғары сапалы біліммен қамтамасыз ету және нәтижеге бағытталған оқу ортасын қалыптастыру мақсатында мектептердің ашылуы мен арнайы бағдарламалардың іске асырылуынан байқауға болады. Алайда, аталған мектептерге оқуға түсу емтиханына қатысуда теңдікке кепілдік болғанымен, мектепке қабылданудағы іріктеу саясаты әділеттілік тұрғысынан қарама-қайшылыққа толы болып көрінеді.

Жоғарыда аталған мәселеге анығырақ түсінік қалыптастыру үшін осы зерттеу жұмысы мектеп директорларының қазіргі таңда жүзеге асырылып жатқан дарынды балаларға арналған бағдарламалардағы әділеттілік бойынша сұрақтарға пікірін білуге арналды. Осы мақсатта дарынды балаларға арналған мектептерде директор қызметіндегі алты қатысушыдан сұхбат алынды. Олар өздері жұмыс жасайтын мектептері аясында қолданатын мектепке қабылдау саясаты мен іріктеу үрдістері жайлы ойларымен бөлісті. Сонымен қатар, директорлар түрлі әлеуметтік топтардың өкілдерінен шыққан оқушыларды қабылдау және оларды оқыту барысындағы қиыншылықтарды айтты.

Зерттеу жұмысының нәтижесінде талқылауға тұрарлық түрлі пікірлер анықталды. Зерттеу қатысушылары дарынды балаларға арналған бағдарламаларға қатысу мен қабылдануға әділетті қолжетімді қамтамасыз етудің өзектілігімен келісті. Кейбір мектеп директорлары оқушылар қабылданғаннан кейінгі әділеттілікке

бағытталған оңтайлы шараларды сипаттады. Дегенмен оқушыларды қабылдау критерийлеріне байланысты сауалдар түрлі пікірлерге себеп болды. Кейбір мектеп басшылары кейбір қоғам өкілдерінен шыққан оқушыларды өздерінің қатарластарымен сайысқа түсуге қауқарсыз, мүмкіндігі шектеулі деп таныса, келесі біреулері іс жүзінде әділеттілікке қол жеткізуге болатынына күмәнмен қарады. Осындай пікірлерге қарамастан, кейбір мектептердегі әділеттілікті қамтамасыз етуге бағытталған тәжірибелері жоғарыда аталған мақсатқа жетудің үздік үлгісі ретінде қарастырыла алады.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background of the study

The current demand for high quality education across the globe has increasingly generated public interest in gifted education programs. Well-thought out plans on gifted education as a whole aim to ensure the academic provisions and conditions that meet the education needs of highly capable students to become exceptional human capital and have a creative capacity. However, the level of endorsements in gifted education is heavily dependent on the cultures and contexts in which they exist. While some countries are based on the overarching philosophy of egalitarianism and try to refrain from divisions based on learners' abilities, others are actively involved in promoting giftedness that requires special consideration in terms of curriculum and instruction (Heuser, Wang, & Shahid, 2017).

The Kazakhstani Government has made much effort on enhancing the standards of teaching and serving of gifted children. Although some schools for gifted children continued their work from the Soviet Union Period (for example, the Republican specialized physical and mathematics boarding schools named after O. Zhautykov, since 1970), the increased emphasis on gifted education started with the independence of the Republic of Kazakhstan. There have been significant structural changes in the system of gifted education programs, the outcomes of which can be seen in the works of recently founded schools. In 1992, the first Kazakh-Turkish Lyceums (in 2016, renamed as Bilim Innovation Lyceums) began their work through a competitive selection of students through individual subject as well as IQ level tests. Much emphasis is put on math and science using four languages of instruction: Kazakh, Russian, Turkish and English (Yakavets, 2014).

Four years later, the law on “the state support and development of schools for gifted children” came into force, and the conditions for improving gifted education were set by President Nazarbayev (MOES, 1996). According to this law, there should be a system of specialized schools, the main aims of which are to improve each individual’s potential and create specific nurturing environments for developing creative personalities by taking into account their individual abilities. These are the schools with more advanced educational programs and in-depth instruction in certain educational fields such as of science, culture, art, sport or military arts.

In 1998, the Ministry of Education opened a new Republican Research and Practical Centre called “Daryn”, which served to promote and implement the policy on teaching gifted children across the country. Currently, the Daryn network consists of 115 educational organisations, including 26 Bilim Innovation Lyceums. The admission policies of these schools are based on performance-based tests and interviews (Yakavets, 2014).

A new decade came with its educational advances and innovative ways of teaching that required reconsideration of the Kazakhstani gifted education system with respect to the ever-increasing world standards. Due to this, the special law of the Republic of Kazakhstan on the opening of Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools was established on January 19, 2011. As stated in President N.Nazarbayev’s address on “Kazakhstan’s way – 2050: common aims, common interests, common future” (Nazarbayev, 2014) , high quality education, which combines the best of national and international practices is considered to be one of the key catalysts for a 21st century country’s successful development. As a result of these governmental goals, 20 highly selective schools opened in each city center with a focus on natural and mathematical sciences. Unlike the existing programs of secondary education, the innovative and trilingual education policies of these schools give students an opportunity of acquiring knowledge in

various subjects at a higher level (NIS, 2011).

Overall, being enrolled in specialized education programs for gifted children has plenty of benefits compared with studying in traditional schools. First, more accelerated programs can meet their educational needs and foster learners' academic interests by setting challenging tasks. Secondly, these programs can provide a professional pathway to their future careers. It may also affect learners' post-secondary education, since they are privileged to participate in various regional and international intellectual competitions where the winners may be given special scholarships to leading international universities. Aside from this, to implement high standards in the curricula, schools for gifted children recruit the most qualified staff and equip classrooms to stay up to date with latest technological tools.

1.2 Statement of the problem

All these favorable learning conditions in a stimulating creative environment made student selection processes very competitive. According to OECD (2015), in spite of the difficulties in the data analyses of the schools for gifted children, the outright growth in the overall number of applicants as well as accepted students to specialized educational organizations has steadily increased in Kazakhstan. For instance, there were 15 schools for gifted children by the end of the 90s, and now there are 131 schools functioning in various regions of Kazakhstan. The same upward trend can be observed at Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools where the number of students competing for one place has dramatically increased since the schools' establishment. To illustrate, in 2011 this indicator accounted for 2.1 people, whereas, in 2014, it more than doubled to 5.8. This year, in 2018, the figure has shown 7.2 people applying per available seat (NIS, 2018). These figures undoubtedly demonstrate the increase in the quantity of students interested in these programs.

Although currently acting gifted education policies stress the equality norms in school

admission criteria, issues of equity and access to these programs are still considered to be an area of much uncertainty. However, as part and parcel of inclusive education, ensuring equity in all forms of education is accentuated in the documents of international importance such as “The Universal Declaration of Human Rights Act” (1948), “The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Right” (1966), and the UNESCO Sustainable Development Goals (2017). The OECD (2012) review also indicates that equity in educational contexts can resolve social and economic inequalities neglecting to give students an opportunity to take full benefit of learning regardless their origins and backgrounds.

As pointed out by Grantham (2012), educational equity is an indispensable factor in forging gifted education programs forward. The neglect of equity of access may trigger issues of underrepresentation, whilst carelessness of equitable participation and proper service delivery may cause “disparities of available educational opportunities for identified gifted students based on race/ethnicity, economic disadvantage, or geography/locale” (Kettler, Russell, & Puryear, 2015, p. 100).

The OECD Review on Kazakhstani schools (2015) also raised the question of accessibility of gifted education programs to disadvantaged students since they have less opportunity to afford appropriate sources to prepare for entrance examinations. Although underrepresentation of learners outside the dominant culture in programs for the gifted is a worldwide phenomenon (Callahan, 2005), there is a lack of investigation on the understanding of equity in gifted education programs in the Kazakhstani context. The potential problems may reside in identification procedures and resourcing, and the factors may be tightly linked with economic constraints on the difference in the quality of teaching between urban and rural schools, access to proper exam preparation materials, or on stereotypes about the “elite schools”.

1.3 Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The current study aims to delve into the concerns of equity in gifted education programs. In particular, the study attempts to reveal principals' attitudes regarding equitable access to gifted education. By employing a qualitative research design, this study aimed at investigating the following research questions:

Overarching question: What are principals' views on equity and access to gifted education programs?

Sub-questions:

Do the school enrollment policies consider equity issues?

What are some possible barriers to ensuring equitable access?

What do principals think could be done to overcome potential problems in admission?

1.4 Significance of the study

The findings of the study will be of benefit to the Kazakhstani gifted education system in several ways. For educators, critical analysis of existing school policies will help to deepen understanding of potential obstacles and challenges that students might be facing while applying to these schools. For the school principals, this study may encourage them to reconsider their policies in terms of access and opportunities. A more equal representation of diverse learners in gifted programs might be possible only after implementing certain policy changes. Thus, the policy suggestions proposed in the study may be found to be of value to policy makers in tackling the issues of inequity and access to gifted programs.

1.5 Outline of the Study

This chapter gave a brief introduction, and indicated the research purpose and questions, which will be discussed in the remaining chapters. Chapter 2 provides a review of the relevant literature on the main concepts and theories related to the research topic and

juxtaposes various interpretations of equity in regards to their contexts. An overview of the methodology and employed research design can be found in the following chapter. This chapter also details the choice of the study location and its participants. Chapter 4 includes findings from the conducted research, the analysis of which is presented and scrutinized in Chapter 5. By referring back to the research aims and summing up the obtained data, Chapter 6 draws a conclusion and proposes relevant recommendations for future investigation.

Chapter 2: Literature review

2.1 Introduction

As this study aims to delve into the concerns of equity in gifted education programs, it is essential to understand various interpretations of giftedness and theories around educational equity in gifted education programs worldwide. Due to the complexity of the issue, equity is considered from various angles and the interplay of equity with different concepts, such as equality, quality, access and opportunities are discussed. Furthermore, the main barriers causing inequity and their potential solutions are considered.

2.2 Theoretical framework

Since the primary aim of this research addresses the issues pertaining to equitable access to educational opportunities, it is tightly linked with the theory of social justice. However, there are many interpretations when exploring the nature of the concept of social justice. According to Rizvi (1998), this may be explained by “its embedment within discourses that are historically constituted and that are sites of conflicting and divergent political endeavors” (p. 47).

According to Bell (2007), the aim of social justice is “full and equal participation of all groups in an equitable society where all members are physically and psychologically safe and secure” (p. 1). In turn, the model of social justice presented by Fraser (1997), apart from redistribution/recognition issues, calls to look at tensions in equality as sameness/difference, as well as being concerned with policymaking procedures and behaviours of individuals, whereas social justice education demands consideration of equity, activism and social literacy of the involved communities (Ayers, M. Quinn, & David Stovall, 2009).

Yet the common point, which can be discerned from many of other scholarly perspectives on social justice, is found in its correspondence to fair relations between people

and societies. That is to say, predisposition of a society to this theory can be seen in implicit and explicit ways of distributing resources among its individuals. This perfectly matches the overarching questions of this study and makes this theory essential for this research.

2.3 Conceptual framework

2.3.1 Definition of giftedness

Experts in the field of gifted education do not agree on what it means to be gifted (Ambrose et al., 2010; Subotnik et al., 2011). Generally, gifted students can be characterized as “children or youth who give evidence of high achievement capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership capacity, or in specific academic fields, and who need services and activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop those capabilities”, which was initially mentioned in Jacob Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act (1988), then later used in The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2001).

However, the more recent research on gifted education conducted by Heuser, Wang & Shahid (2017) identified diverse trends and tendencies in existing interpretations of the notion of giftedness across the globe. According to their data analysis, there are four major dimensions in terms giftedness which have been highlighted globally.

The first and foremost direction by its popularity pertains to the vision that sees giftedness in possessing all-rounded outstanding abilities. In other words, a gifted person should demonstrate exceptional achievements in both academic and non-academic fields (Resch, 2014). This incorporation of the concept of talent and giftedness is used in most of developed countries, including The United Kingdom, Austria, Germany, and Switzerland.

A second perception of giftedness considers a person’s natural aptitudes as a matter of primary concern. This ideal can be observed in Beijing, Hong Kong, and Taiwan where a strong reliance on the criterion-based assessment outcomes serves as an indicator of

giftedness. This slightly aligns with the definition of National Association of Gifted Children (NAGC, 2010) that describes gifted individuals as “those who demonstrate outstanding levels of aptitude (e.g., exceptional ability to reason and learn) or competence (e.g., documented performance or achievement in top 10% or less) in one or more domains.”

By contrast, a third dimension, which is widespread in its use in countries such as Finland, Germany, and the Netherlands, considers the importance of environmental factors while developing a gifted personality rather than born prepositions. This supports the Netherland’s stance that believes in the giftedness of every child that should be appropriately nurtured (De Boer & et al., 2013).

The last and rarely used approach belongs to the Maori in New Zealand, where giftedness is understood as one of the reflections of collectivism meaning that individual expression of intellectual ability is not valued by their community (McCann, 2005).

Although the Kazakhstani law on education emphasizes the importance of improving and maintaining giftedness, the Kazakhstani understanding of giftedness has yet to be fully defined in one overarching agreed upon definition. Each school sets their goals and visions of gifted education based on their needs and directions. For instance, at NIS schools these children are considered as successful candidates who have shown significant aptitudes in a variety of subjects and are considered to be gifted and talented, high achieving and well-motivated to succeed. This emphasis on intellectual curiosity, rich imagination, an ability to solve problems and the ability to think creatively can be most closely aligned to the first model of gifted education discussed above.

2.3.2 Definition of equity and equality

Although the terms ‘equity’ and ‘equality’ are inherently linked with each other, there are substantive discrepancies in the meanings of these concepts. Discussions on

understanding the difference between these two terms were reflected on Sen's (1982) work, where he posed the question "Equality yes, but of what?" to identify where frames of "equality" end and fair "inequality" emerges.

Equality is typically defined as treating everyone the same and giving everyone access to the same opportunities. These principles are reflected in the Equal Educational Opportunities Act (1974), Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 1990) and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA, 1990). The focus is to protection individuals from any form of segregation by tackling barriers to students' equal participation. The issue of equality of educational opportunities irrespective of a person's religious beliefs, cultural background, and linguistic peculiarities is also highlighted in the Kazakhstani Law of Education and in the enrollment policy in schools for gifted students.

By contrast, the term 'equity', which basically means 'fairness' is not given the same emphasis in educational contexts. According to Nichols (1987), this notion was firstly mentioned in the works of Aristotle as a term that means rejecting the law to take actions against cases which are not indicated in 'universal rules'. Meanwhile, Benadusi (2006) indicated that 'equity' as a separate concept appeared in the late 90s and in the beginning of the 21st century only.

In a contemporary educational context, equity is basically dependent on two aspects. As reported by OECD (2008), it is comprised of fairness and inclusion. While fairness deals with affordability of educational opportunities with no personal and social barriers, inclusion advocates for provision of basic learning conditions and educational needs for all students.

In the Kazakhstani context, the notion of equity is often times implied through the concept of equality. According to the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan (1995), "citizens of the Republic regardless of their nationality, religion, membership in public

associations, national origin, social or property status, occupation, or place of residence shall have equal rights and responsibilities”. However, the neglect of equity in the state policies may limit the access to some spheres of human life, including access to gifted education programs.

2.4 Equity in Gifted Education Programs

Over the past several decades, policies promoting selective schools and using special educational programs for gifted children have remained an area of much controversy. Scholarly directives and perspectives in the literature advocate either for excellence or for equity in gifted education policies. On one hand educators recognize gifted students’ learning needs to be different from those of other children: by equating gifted with special needs children they hold the idea that without special education services, gifted students would waste their school days in learning environments that do not meet their needs (Gwiazda, 1983). In contrast, such programs are also seen by some as explicit and implicit reflections of elitism, which is exclusive and accompanied with the underrepresentation issues. As a result, this dilemma has triggered policymakers and researchers’ concern on how to best determine equity in gifted education programs.

Analyzing the literature on educational equity, Gillborn & Youdell (2000) highlighted four pervasive perspectives on equity. Equity and access are definitely are most essential topics in gifted education polices n (Dai, 2013; Esquierdo & Arreguín-Anderson, 2012; Jolly & Kettler, 2008). The need for all children to have access to quality education, regardless of background has become increasingly prominent in national and international policy agendas (OECD, 2007; UNESCO, 2017). A second vision highlighted by Gillborn and Youdell (2000) is equality of circumstances, which is becoming prevalent due to the existence of private

schools. As the authors point out, low socio-economic backgrounds and lack of student loans have created many barriers in educational opportunities. The next perspective on this issue is related to equity of participation which deals with “structures and policies that define everyday life in schools” (Valli, Cooper, & Frankes, 1997). Furthermore, it considers potential gender and racial barriers in the implementation of the formal and hidden curriculum within the schools. The final understanding of equity refers to the outcomes of educational provisions. To increase schools’ predisposition to equitable outcomes among diverse societal groups, it is necessary to resolve the disparities in academic achievements, reasons leading to school drop-out and how to further increase education enrolments in certain more exclusive programs.

A similar classification can be found in DeVillar’s (1986) description of key components of equitable education, which refers to access to specialized learning opportunities, fair participation in those learning situations, and benefit received from those learning situations. In the same vein, Sapon-Shevin (2003) revealed the constituent parts of equity in gifted education and suggested a more concise way to stipulate the essential parts of equity, which are “equality of access, equality of services, and equality of outcomes” (p. 132). Thus, this study mostly utilizes the terms mentioned in the latter literature.

How different individuals and policymakers perceive these equity categories and bring them to practice is a continuing matter of concern. There has been ambiguity between studies aimed to investigate the complex interplay of equity policies and quality of practice (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Cohen & Hill, 2001). Berne and Stiefel (1984), later Maitzegui-Onate and Santibanez-Gruber (2008), posit three ways of measuring the interrelation between equity and quality in education, which are horizontal equity, vertical equity and equal opportunities.

The core idea of horizontal equity is giving equal shares and expenditures to those who are equal. As indicated by Maitzegui-Onate and Santibanez-Gruber (2008), horizontal equity

assumes everyone to be equal and give all opportunity to start from the same point. Although it aims to reach equality in all of its terms, this concept does not take into account treatment of students with special educational needs. However, as Brown (2006) claims, horizontal equity can be viewed as the onset that may contribute to vertical equity. That is to say, ensuring horizontal equity standards is also necessary for vertical equity.

According to Berne and Stiefel (1984), vertical equity is regarded as the “appropriately unequal treatment of the unequal”. By way of explanation, it allows the system to pay more attention and needed support to some learners in order to bridge the gap between different levels. Yet it has to be noted that this approach is highly dependent on values set by current policies. That is to say, some may consider the fact of having disability as a concern for special treatment, while characteristics of race, religion, sex, gender may be neglected (Hess & Kelly2005). Therefore, it should be clearly defined whose or which problems in the distribution of the resources will be underpinned.

A third term “equal opportunity” refers to the distribution of resources in order that all learners from rural regions have are provided with the same opportunities. The process of resource allocations should not depend on the demographic factors such as race, gender, geographical location or socioeconomic status, but on the various needs of learners. As argued by Johns, Morphet, and Alexander (1983), this does not mean using the same educational program for every person nor allocating the same amount of financial resources. It just means giving the same access to acquire quality education that meets individuals’ needs.

Another way of conceptualizing equity was proposed by Brandsma (2002), which discussed the meritocratic, egalitarian, and “equal opportunities” perspectives (as cited in Ozdemir, 2015).

The first aspect belongs to meritocracy, “where ability and effort count for more than

privilege and inherited status” (Hurn 1993, p.45). Upholders of this idea see fairness in merit-based distribution of opportunities and believe that it lessens the impact of barriers caused by one’s social and economic background, since people’s success is fully dependent on their intrinsic motivation and personal characteristics (McNamee & Miller, 2004). However, Hill (2003) argues that governments’ inclination to meritocracy explains existing inequality problems as “natural” and even deteriorates the relationship between societal groups. Analyzing the responses of their small-scale qualitative research, Kennedy and Power (2014) came to conclusion that individuals holding key positions in Irish educational organizations, as well as state policies, were also the strong proponents of meritocratic ideology that implicitly empowers the continuation of privileges of those who are already privileged.

In terms of the premise of egalitarianism in educational settings, Brandsma (2002) writes of the need to allot more funding for disadvantaged children to achieve equality of outcomes. Brighthouse (2003) also admits that inequalities rooting from family circumstances should not interfere quality of education. While examining one of New York’s schools for gifted children, Mazie (2009) also found that there is still a need for directing elite schools’ programs away from meritocratic principles to a more democratic commitment to resolve issues of underrepresentation.

A recent UNESCO report (2017) established five overarching principals of measuring equity in educational policies, which can be reviewed in Table 1 below:

Table 1

Educational equity concepts and related equity norms

Univariate (based on the distribution of an educational variable)	Bivariate/multivariate (based on the joint distribution of an educational variable and one or more characteristics)
Minimum standards	Impartiality

Binary educational variable (e.g. completed primary education) is positive for everyone	Education does not depend on background characteristics
Equality of condition Educational variable is the same for everyone	Meritocracy Education is positively related to ability but not related to other characteristics
	Redistribution Education is positively related to disadvantage

Author: UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2018)

It has to be noted that implementation of pure equity standards seems challenging to be achieved in today's market-economy conditions, since it demands more financial investments (Levinson & Wood, 2011). It is also contingent on the quality of a wide spectrum of other variables like teachers' qualification, as well as differentiation in educational programs. Even in case of available financial and human resources, achieving equity goals will be strongly influenced by priorities set by national and international policymakers. On the other hand, there may be non-alignments between intention and practice, which may also negatively result in the gap between intention and outcome (Sayed & Jansen, 2001).

2.5 Exploring barriers to equity in gifted education

Gifted education policies, even the ones that received much governmental attention are confronting the obstacles of inequitable access and difficulties with student retention in gifted programs (Ford, Grantham, Whiting, 2008; Wright, Ford, and Young 2009).

According to Levin (2003), assumptions why some individuals or groups are more successful than others is heavily dependent on how much of the responsibility for success is placed on the individual learner. However, when some consider that innate differences in capacity are the key factor in participation and in outcomes, it is very challenging or even impossible to overcome them. Others might claim that discrepancies in the results are the outcomes of inadequate provision or societal barriers for certain minorities. Many

sociodemographic attributes may exacerbate disparities in access to quality education. These may be apparent in cultures and languages, religions and beliefs, mental and physical health, parents' education and family income.

It is also noteworthy to mention that these discrepancies in social and economic circumstances generally do not operate separately, and the amalgam of several dimensions can widen existing gaps even further (Morley & Lussier, 2009; UNESCO, 2008). For instance, the coexistence of poor academic achievement and low socioeconomic conditions among some ethnic minorities is considered a ubiquitous issue in the South African context. In the South Africa, the problem of increasing the number of students from diverse linguistic backgrounds is often times combined with inappropriate class sizes and scarcity of learning materials (Van der Westhuizen & Maree, 2006). Therefore, since 1994 and up to now, the South African gifted education policies have seen very little recognition and are viewed as “not encouraging”, “dismal” and “the plight of the gifted learner seldom mentioned” (Kokot, 1998). In addition to this, to avoid the educational elitism, there is an increasing tendency of shifting from specialised schools for gifted children to more inclusive school models (Oswald & Villiers, 2013).

In many highly developed countries, such as the UK, Finland, Canada and the USA, ethnicity and low socioeconomic status appear to be two of the main risk factors for underachievement in schools and underrepresentation in gifted education programs.

In the US context, the main concerns of educational equity in gifted education opportunities are primarily around the discrepancies in the ratio of white and black students. In a 1998 article, the author scrutinized the demographic features in the national gifted education program. He came to the conclusion that Black, Hispanic, and Native American students were always underrepresented in gifted education, and during particular eras their participation and

enrollment were even lower (Ford, 1998). It is worth highlighting that there was a strong legislative support and much effort has been put forth from the government. For example, in 1988, the U.S. Congress passed a law that was targeted to help students from disadvantaged backgrounds. According to this law, around half of the scholarships for gifted education were to be distributed to students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Furthermore, the National Association for Gifted Children (1997) put into educators' agenda the importance of using several placement tests in identification, assessment policies and procedures dealing with giftedness. Despite these governmental initiatives, a decade later, in 2016, the same tendency was observed in the summary report of the U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights (OCR). In the interim, Ford (1995, 1998) in his analysis of GATE (Gifted and Talented Education) programs, also calls to reconsider influential factors such as the application of standardized tests in students selection procedures and teachers' lack of ability in recognizing gifted children and their learning styles.

In a survey Pfeiffer (2016) investigated 64 gifted education experts who revealed that after the problems of misunderstanding of giftedness, student selection procedures and the validity of instruments used were the most pressing questions in the field of gifted education. Indeed, relying on these tests is inappropriate for multiple reasons such as bias in the test, poor instruction and low level of preparedness that leads to poor results. This approach also neglects the strengths of culturally and linguistically diverse students and their socio-economic backgrounds. What is more, academic achievement, if taken as a reflection of students' higher abilities, does not consider the reality that not all gifted students are motivated to learn and show success in education because of inadequate educational policies, stereotypes, and negative peer pressure (Ford, 1996).

Another set of issues in gifted education can be related to the combination of low

socio-economic conditions and poor educational quality in rural schools. Thompson (2010) emphasizes that underrepresentation of rural children in gifted education programs is problematic not due to the lack of gifted and talented pupils in remote areas but because of the unavailability of special support programs for highly able students in remote areas. According to Puryear and Kettler (2017), rural students' abilities to compete with their urban counterparts may be constrained due to the limited subject choice and the shortage of school resources in rural settings. Even withstanding the fact of generally smaller class sizes in rural areas, this cannot guarantee teachers' competence to identify and work with gifted students (OECD, 2019).

Co-occurrence of giftedness and special educational needs also can pose a barrier to the enrolment in the gifted education programs. Montgomery's (2013) scrutiny of the literature reported that it was only in 1970s when the very first attempts to address the needs of gifted children with disabilities were made. However, there is still lack of knowledge on understanding these students' learning peculiarities. According to Omdal (2015), a teacher who is working with twice exceptional students should also have a deep awareness on education for gifted and special needs students. The research of Reis (2014) also claims that the teachers' perceptions on dual-exceptional students are directly linked with their awareness of the intersection between giftedness and disabilities. Aside from difficulties in identification and teaching procedures, Montgomery (2013) also comments that there should be effort made to overcome attitudinal barriers and dispel doubts and fear associated with including students with any mental or physical disorders in gifted education programs.

2.6 Achieving educational equity

Implementation of any educational program is dependent not only on the policies they involve but also on the interplay between program developers and on contexts where they are

enacted (Chen, 1998; Greenberg et al., 2006). Each country may be at a different stage of policy enactment and depending on its development trajectory certain equity items might be more important than any others. Nonetheless, recommendations for equity in gifted education programs primarily focus on equity of access and students' identification procedures.

When analyzing current US gifted education programs and observing ubiquitous underrepresentation issues, Dai (2013) gives some recommendations on achieving a fairer way of distributing educational opportunities. Firstly, he calls not to reward "giftedness" but excellence. In this opinion if a child has high IQ score but is not motivated to study there is no need to offer extra services. Instead, another student with lower IQ but higher authentic examination results deserves gifted education services, if he motivated. In other words, when changing identification tools there should be equal consideration of one's potential excellence along with demonstrated excellence. Nevertheless, Dai (2013) highlights the importance of early childhood intervention rather than just changing identification criteria to solve the problem underrepresentation of minority and disadvantaged students.

Concerns of appropriate identification instruments is also a matter of urgency for China and other developing countries. It is essential to set research-based standards of gifted education to ensure equity in student selection procedures to uncover real gifted children (Almås & Johnsen, 2012). Secondly, the school curriculum should meet the needs of diverse students and offer proper opportunities based on their field of interest. Most importantly, educational quality in the specialized schools for gifted children, and mainstream schools should be improved simultaneously and be given equal attention (Fu, 2017).

Nevertheless, ensuring equity of access as indicated by Merry and Arum (2018) can be applied to any schools no matter their context. They highlighted three main prerequisites schools should make sure to enhance the relationship between fairness and entry exam

policies. First, schools have to identify their underlying intentions in selection procedures. Although it may not be explicitly seen, implicitly schools may support strong social justice values or focus on high academic scores or aim to maintain other pedagogical goals set by school curricula. Secondly, entry exam criteria should align with the educational opportunities that students will be later exposed to. Ideally, educational assessment should take into account several factors in order to ensure reliability and validity of the procedures. For example, it may employ subject tests, a candidate portfolio, and letters of reference. Thirdly, assessment results should be systematically analyzed and monitored. This accountability helps to reveal possible factors leading to social exclusion. Thus, policy changes are only made possible after investigating the structural and cultural setting as well as identifying and understanding priorities set among those involved (Ringeisen et al., 2003).

Achieving equity in gifted education programs is undoubtedly an expensive and a multi-dimensional goal. While structural inequities in societies may need a variety of solutions, the field of education demands specific approaches. Maintaining the balance between equal access and quality of educational opportunities demands more financial and human resources and lies on the crossroads of the economic and political conditions of a country.

Equitable resourcing should also consider the issues of low-income families. Traditional identification tools or standardised tests are not fully applicable for gifted students from rural and economically disadvantaged students (Aamidor, 2007). As it was already mentioned, these students may experience shortage of learning materials due to the scarcity of funding and distance from special educational centres (Castellano, 2011). In addition to these hurdles of access to quality education, barriers to participation can be caused by application fees in the admission process that are impossible for children from families at the lower end of

the socioeconomic range. An example of the recognition of these issues for promising students from low-income families can be seen in the work of John Hopkins Center for Talented Youth, which provides a wide range of support and special scholarships for bright but disadvantaged students.

The scope of obstacles to equitable access cannot be determined only by the aforementioned problem of the “capacity” but it is also tightly linked with the “will” of stakeholders. As reported by Levin (2003), if “capacity” refers to people’s awareness of what to do and knowing their potential to do something, “will” speaks to their inclination for promoting equity. These two are intertwined when implementing social policies, since a system aimed to support those in need will ensure efficiency of allocated funds. Moreover, Wright, Ford, and Young (2017) claimed that the potential barriers of minority students remain pervasive mostly owing to either people’s ignorance or indifference towards their situation. These all indicate how one’s personal inclination of equity issues are important.

Achieving educational equity in schools is strongly linked with the school principals’ inclination towards equity. This is assumed not because of the power and authority they possess but because of their role as a central source of leadership of change. Principals’ can influence their schools in a variety of ways: guiding the use of educational programs, monitoring assessment procedures and developing fair evaluation criteria, and striving to develop equity-friendly school environments (Ross & Berger, 2009).

2.7 Conclusion

This review of the literature was presented in order to develop a deeper understanding of main concept as well justify the theoretical framework best suited to this research. The

literature supports the importance of considering social justice and egalitarianism in educational access. Analysis of perceptions of giftedness and equity as equality demonstrate how these issues have influenced, or not, current global tendencies in the policies of gifted education programs. Identifying pervasive barriers to equitable access and participation in gifted education programs adds to the understanding of the significance of the context, funding, and leadership issues.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter was devoted to the analysis of the literature on the notion of equity and its connection with various educational categories. The review of the literature also revealed the existence of explicit as well as implicit impediments to ensure equity in gifted education policies around the world. To scrutinize the Kazakhstani vision of a more equitable model of gifted education programs, the research questions were developed and this chapter presents the methodology carried out to investigate this topic. Precisely, the following chapter presents the information on the research design employed in this study. First, the research paradigm relevant to this study was identified. After this, a research site and participant sampling as well as data collection instruments, procedures, and data analysis methods were chosen.

3.2 Research paradigm

For any researcher, it is crucially important to reveal the underlying paradigm of the intended investigation, as the identification of a comprehensive belief system and framework will help to guide the research and practice in the field (Willis, 2007). Apart from determining philosophical path of the work, it will have an impact on the decision to be done for the research purposes including the choice of methodology and methods. Since this study is aiming to explore the views of principals on existing different school policies and practices, the combination of the Critical and Interpretative theories are found relevant for this research.

The evident promises of the Critical theory can be revealed from the educational problems that are raised in this research. It is known that the Critical paradigm considers social justice issues and “seeks to address the political, social and economic issues, which lead to social oppression, conflict, struggle, and power structures at whatever levels these might

occur” (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017, p.35). In the case of this research, it will attempt to identify inequitable access of opportunities as presented in various gifted education policies, which will explain a lower representation of students with diverse backgrounds. It is also assumed that the potential barriers to equity might be caused by existing unjust policies, which are the core issues considered in a Critical paradigm.

There is also room for the application of Interpretative paradigm theories. As stated by Guba and Lincoln (1989), the central endeavor of the Interpretivist paradigm is to understand the subjective world of human experience. This study is aiming to discuss the views from different principals’ perspectives, thus, the data will be dependent on the contexts they relate to and their own subjectivities.

All in all, although the ontological assumptions and values of this research are inherently linked with Critical paradigms, the nature of the knowledge and proposed methodological implications found relevant to the humanistic interpretive theories.

3.3 Research Design and Rationale

Choosing the Interpretivist paradigm aligns with qualitative research design that is used in this study. One of the key characteristics of the qualitative research discussed by Mason (2002) was the exploration of a central phenomenon and the way it is explained, understood, experienced, produced or constituted. Its flexibility and sensitivity to various social contexts were also highlighted. In addition to this, it gives the possibility to take into account the complexity of an issue with regards to underlying circumstances. These features of the qualitative study perfectly match with the proposed research questions.

What is essential, the qualitative methods are applied when there is a need for the in-depth understanding of the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human

problem (Cresswell, 2012). It will help one to see a detailed picture about the what, why and how the study participants think about equity issues and their feelings about existing policies in gifted education programs. This way the participants are provided the opportunity to describe the ideas and perspectives around this issue in depth.

This study had the characteristics of both narrative and phenomenological theory research. Creswell (2012) claims that “narrative study reports the stories of experiences of a single individual or several individuals, whereas a phenomenological study describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon” (p. 76). By means of the narrative form of the research, study participants can share their reflections on implementing gifted education programs within their schools, while the phenomenological nature of the study allows to explore principals’ attitudes towards the phenomena of equity in gifted education policies.

3.4 Research Sites

The study employed six face-to-face interviews with the school principals. As Shuy (2003) stated, compared to telephone or e-mail interviews, conducting face-to-face interviews makes possible to obtain more “thoughtful” responses. When there is a lack of non-verbal and visual interaction this makes interviewing process unnatural, thus, it may have an impact on the quality of participants’ answers.

The selection of these schools was based on convenience sampling. For a researcher, this sampling means the accessibility of the study participants in terms of their geographical locations (Dörnyei, 2007). When considering study participants’ and the researchers’ work schedule, it was decided to conduct the study in the schools of two city centers: Karaganda is the city where the researcher lives and works in, while Nur-Sultan is the capital city, which is only two hours away so easy to travel to. It also has to be mentioned that the type of the

schools was purposefully selected, since this research considers the views of the principals working in the selective schools with no application fees. Thus, the study was conducted in the secondary schools for gifted children that accept students on a competitive basis and teach them from grades 7 to 12. The number of the students in these schools varies from 300 to 700.

3.5 Sampling procedures and study participants

The study participants were chosen based on non-probability purposeful sampling criteria. This purposive sampling is used to access “knowledgeable people”, i.e. those who have in-depth knowledge, maybe by the virtue of their professional role, power, and access to networks, expertise or experience (Ball, 2012). In other words, this sampling involved determining ahead of time which criteria were required of participants and then choosing individuals who possessed the criteria or could provide the type of information necessary for the research purposes (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). That is why, the researcher selected the school principals as the most influential in their schools’ admissions process and as the school representatives who have a deep awareness of the school policies within their systems. More specifically, the researcher tried to manage the participation of the school representatives working with different gifted education programs and selection criteria. This was aimed to see the discrepancies in gifted education delivery within one region.

As mentioned above, the researcher incorporated narrative and phenomenological inquiry elements in this research. Therefore, it was decided to keep the scale of the research relatively small, by selecting only six school principals.

The table 1 below illustrates the demographic characteristics of the study participants. Each principal is represented by a number in order to assure confidentiality. It should be noted that most of principals (Principals 1, 2, 3, 6) had initially worked as Vice-principals in other schools prior to the schools for gifted children being established. Principal 4 has become a

principal after several years of work as a Vice-principal in another school. The school of the principal 5 was relatively new, and the principal has considerable experience teaching in local universities. For the researcher, this heterogeneous diversity of backgrounds promised the diversity of views which are revealed in the study findings.

Table 2

Characteristics of participants

Name of the Principal	Years in school administration	Years of experience as a school principal
Principal 1	15	7
Principal 2	18	6
Principal 3	14	6
Principal 4	8	2
Principal 5	14	2
Principal 6	6	3

Source: created by the author

3.6 Data Collection Instruments

Qualitative interviewing was found as the most relevant research instrument to apply to this study, since “it is a flexible and powerful tool to capture the voices and the ways people make meaning of their experience” (Rabionet, 2011, p. 563). This type of interview also allows the researcher to expand interviewee’s answers by asking follow-up questions, at the same time keeping the control of the sequence of the questions related to the study.

Overall, there were ten questions developed by the researcher to get detailed answers on the principals’ perspectives on the school policies and equity issues. Before conducting the interviews, the questions were examined in a pilot interview by a school Vice-Principal whom the researcher personally knew well. According to Kvale (2007), using the pilot tests helps to reveal potential limitations and shortcomings of the developed interview questions and to make necessary changes before implementing the investigation. Hence, questions had minor

changes in terms of their sequence, and the final version was translated from English into Russian and Kazakh languages. Respondents chose which language they preferred to be interviewed in. The first two questions asked about the principals' work experience in their educational organizations, general information about the school as well as the admission criteria. The remaining questions were about their personal views on equity and the school admission policies. The conversations concluded with the principals' suggestions and recommendations on gifted education policies

3.7 Data Collection Procedures

Before starting this research, it was necessary to first get ethical approval from the Nazarbayev University Graduate School of Education Ethical Review Board. After receiving the University approval, school principals were contacted by phone to invite them to participate in this research. The researcher briefly explained introduced herself and provided information about the purpose of the study. Once their permissions were received, the time and venue of meeting was negotiated.

The interviews were conducted in the schools where principals worked. If we take into account their busy work schedule, this decision was convenient for the principals in terms of time which meant they did not have to leave their work places. Prior to the interview, the potential participants received via e-mail a project information sheet, which included the purpose and some possible benefits to the school as well as the information about the interview.

A day before the meeting, participants were reminded about the expected interview and time. One interview was rescheduled 3 times due to that principal's other urgent issues. On the interviewing day, the researcher distributed the consent form to read and sign, if the participants agreed. Prior to signing each participant was

reminded that all information would be kept confidential and they could withdraw at any stage of the research. The permission for recording the audio was asked and the researcher took additional notes when it was deemed necessary. The interviews took around 20-30 minutes. All in all, two months, precisely February and March, were devoted for data collection purposes.

3.8 Data Analysis Methods

Data analysis procedures comprised several steps. In the beginning, the collected interviews were fully transcribed which were recorded with the researcher's mobile phone. It is essential to note that all the personal information was replaced with pseudonyms and the school names were given unique identifying letters. The audio materials were kept in a password-protected computer folder.

In the next part of the study, the researcher compiled the information into certain groups, which are known as themes or codes (Creswell, 2012). To categorize the research findings, certain phrases and key words in each sentence were highlighted with different colors which helped to identify main themes in participants' responses.

Finally, the content analysis of each interview was conducted. This process involves systematic consideration and thorough evaluation of obtained data (Mayring, 2004). According to Louis Cohen and Morrison (2007), apart from coding and categorizing (use of words and certain phrases) of collected data, which are mentioned above, this procedure includes a comparison between revealed themes, then it identifies similar and contrasting points. Thus, nine subtopics emerged in the analysis of six interviews, which were grouped into three main themes: understanding of equity and school admission policies, potential barriers to ensuring equity in gifted education programs, and recommendations on achieving educational equity.

3.9 Ethical Concerns and Risks of Research

The research participants were informed about the anonymity of the provided information before the interview. The school names and the identities of the principals were given special codes and pseudonyms which were only known to the researcher. The interviewees were assured that only the researcher and her Master's thesis supervisor would have an access to the research data. The data was kept on the researcher's own personal computer in a password protected file.. All the notes, audio files and interview transcripts related to the participants, consent forms, information on the study participants will be in a locked file for two years post study and to be used for research purpose such as conference presentations and journal publications.

Considering the research purpose, this was a very low risk study for the participants. Their possible worries in terms of may have related their role as the school principals, and a worry that honest answers may put their job positions at risk. To avoid this, the confidentiality principles were rigorously explained. Another point to consider was connected with the interview questions that the participants might not be willing to talk about. Reminding participants about their right to withdrawal from the research or skipping particular questions helped to ease the participants' potential worries

3.10 Conclusion

This chapter provided detailed information on the development of research methodology and paradigms that shaped the framework of this study. Using qualitative research design was found relevant since it allows to explore participants' deeper understanding of the notion of equity and other concepts related to the research questions of this study. Semi-structured interviews, as a research instrument, ensure flexibility in asking

clarifications and additional follow-up questions depending on respondents' answers. In addition, this chapter elaborates on the purposeful selection of research sites and participants. Finally, it presents the sequence of data collection procedures and establishes methods of research findings analysis and consideration of ethical concerns. The following chapters will present the data collected with the implementation of this methodology and discuss the results.

Chapter 4: Findings

4.1 Introduction

The following chapter presents the findings of this research after conducting six qualitative interviews, the purpose of which was to reveal principals' views on equity in gifted education programs. This was accomplished by utilizing a semi-structured interview that allowed the researcher to ask follow-up questions when some clarifications or additional information were needed to enrich the discussion. The gathered data were fully transcribed, coded, and sorted into particular categories. The analysis of this grouping helped to determine the underlying themes that matched the overarching questions of this research: equity in selection process, equity in participation and service delivery, and ways of elucidating the inequity issues.

Thus, this chapter is composed of three themed sections: the first part begins by elaborating on the principals' perceptions of equity and its reflection on the school admissions criteria in the gifted education programs. The second section deals with the potential impediments of ensuring equity. The barriers are considered with regards to the stage students might be at: before admission and while studying in a school for gifted children. The third part, tying up the principals' initiatives and their plans, draws upon principals' suggestions to eliminate potential problems.

4.2 Equity and school admission policies

The first set of questions were dedicated to principals' understanding of the notion of equity in school admission policies. Since there is no exact alternative for the word of equity in either the Kazakh or Russian languages, the translation of the word fairness was regarded as a very close concept to equity by the meaning it implies. Principals also expressed their viewpoints on the attainability of equity and equality within their systems.

4.2.1 Understanding of educational equity

It has to be noted that fairness of gifted education programs was understood not as a key component of equity but as ensuring academic honesty and transparency to the test administration procedures, whereas the notion of equity was implied in principals' interpretation of the concept of equality. In other words, most respondents perceived equity as equality of participation that students are given in the schools for gifted children. For example, Principal 6 asserted: *"Equity means giving equal opportunity. Our tests are equal, of the same content for every student who wants to get admitted to our school."*

Only minority of principals demonstrated broad awareness of the connections as well as major distinctions between the notions of equity and equality. To illustrate, Principal 1 gave an example of people who are the same age but of different heights:

... At first glance, they may seem equal. In fact, they are not. If one needs a little help, the other ones may require more support. Equality implies giving equal opportunities. All children - from villages or cities, Kazakh or Russian, no matter which nationality they belong to or their socio-economic status should be provided equal education and given a chance to study in the schools of their oblast.

In turn, Principal 5 expressed another perception of equality and giftedness:

All schools should be the same, this is my opinion, it may be wrong. All children are gifted. The approach should be the same for all no matter if they are mainstream or specialized schools. Studying at specialized schools is a choice of each. Then the difference will be only in the title. In fact, the content is the same. We are working on content. There should be equality.

That is to say, Principal 5 was concerned about ensuring equity for all children and was against any forms of educational elitism. Equity, in his opinion, is achieving equality for all rather than excellence of some, as the majority principals think. This shows how principals' understanding of giftedness shapes their way of interpreting equity in gifted education.

4.2.2 School admission procedures

As heads of their educational organizations, principals provided detailed information on the student selection procedures and entry exam subjects. This revealed some similarities as well as discrepancies in the approach in which exams are held. Overall, all six schools accept students based on the test results of applicants' logical thinking and linguistic skills. However, according to Principal 2, student selection procedures are not properly organized:

Not only in our region only but in the whole Republic, there is no clear system of conducting entry exams for specialized schools. I cannot say there is the high level of organization of admission procedure, because it changes every year.

The main disparities were linked with testing applicants' English language skills. One year students have the English language exams, another year they may not have this subject in the list of exams at all. Another area of uncertainty pertained to the level of difficulty of the questions, which is also not standardized from year to year. According to four principals, these are all dependent on the regional educational department. On the one hand, these frequent systematic shifts have triggered principals' uncertainty and doubts about the validity on how the tests are being conducted. On the other hand, lack of their decision-making authority may have caused principals' indifferent attitude towards the enrolment procedures, which can be seen in the words of Principal 4:

The regional center is organized this way... There were five subjects in the first year, next year it was changed, heads wanted so... to ensure transparency... It is good for us. They decide who to accept, and we educate those admitted children. It is good for us.

Therefore, principals feel the necessity for a more scientific approach while also determining the exam type. They feel there should be a distinct understanding on the types of questions: how many there should be at the low, middle or higher levels.

In the meantime, representatives from the schools, which are granted more autonomous status in their policy decisions demonstrated more concise knowledge about their admission policies and were able to arrange conditions and rules based upon their needs. Although there

is no perfect mechanism of identifying gifted children, the ideal assessment Principal 3 sees would be evaluating higher order thinking questions. In turn, Principal 6 believes in the effectiveness of additional tasks on creative thinking or presentation skills, the neglecting of which may result in schools losing outstanding talents.

4.3 Equity in selection procedures

The majority of principals were of the opinion that programs as well as selection procedures are fair enough. To be precise, Principal 3 declares that “It is fair, it just selects gifted children”. He also gave an example of the selection criteria for figure-skating, ballet and art schools where nobody thinks it is not fair if a candidate doesn’t possess certain skills. Nevertheless, he also stated his position that any kind of filters would be certainly unfair:

... We work in a bit different field, but the principles are the same... Our school was opened not to satisfy the needs of all, even its name “specialized” says so. In this sense, life may be not fair. Different people have different abilities.

Principal 2 was fluctuating between fair and unfair in his opinion during the interview. Initially he said “*Children are fairly accepted depending on their preparation and motivation. An unprepared child will not pass it*”. He was confident that the percentage taken from the entrance exam results is an indicator of their effort. Later, when some controversial questions about vulnerable groups of our society were asked, he added that it may be unfair to rural students because they cannot attend special preparation courses or there is no opportunity in their location to prepare for them.

4.4 Exploring barriers to equity in gifted education

The second part of the interview aimed to identify principals’ views on the potential barriers that may prevent full access and participation of all members of society in gifted education programs. Apart from various positive practices, there was still an abundance of

challenges facing these schools in different areas. Especially in this part of the interview, most of the principals showed strong enthusiasm to discuss their school's problems and needs as well as their hopes for the future. Research results were organized in the following way: before enrolment and while studying in schools for gifted children.

4.4.1 Equity of access

Potential obstacles in admission procedures identified during the interviews were mostly similar with the problems of underrepresentation. After revealing the most common topical areas, I decided to group these issues into two sub-sections: rural students and students from low-socio economic status families.

Rural students

According to principals, difficulties in passing language exams, specifically in English, were barriers among applicants from rural areas. Since all the schools for gifted children are exposed to trilingual education system, knowledge of English, Russian, and Kazakh is considered to be essential in their future studies. Most principals admitted that poor English language ability is definitely one of the critical factors lowering the representation of students from remote regions and villages. Principal A showed a great interest in this and shared how he was able to make a difference and persuade other principals not to test learners' English language abilities:

... We expect applicants from rural areas. They don't know English well. If we have 100 schools, only few of them may teach English properly. Some can go to language courses. And only thanks to this, these children may successfully pass the exam. Therefore, I was against this. If the skills of their native languages are good enough, teaching any other foreign languages will be easy for us...If I am not mistaken, it was a year ago... And other principals, governing bodies also agreed, a unanimous decision has been adopted in this respect.

By contrast, Principal 3 dismissed the idea of language barriers being problematic, putting forward the fact that it can be compensated by a high level of knowledge of

mathematics in the overall score: “*And quite often we come across cases when a child has a low English score, but he/she enters our school*”. He also added that under conditions of high competition compared to other schools they can afford this enforce language filter.

Another potential barrier mentioned by Principal 6 is related to test administration procedures. A city, where the exams are usually conducted, may be located so far from villages that not every rural child will have the opportunity to travel there to take the test.

Low socio-economic-status

Almost all respondents admitted the significance of deliberate preparation for the exams, which is offered through a number of special private courses. Principal 6 sees families with low-income as disadvantaged in this situation:

What we noticed is that students who are admitted are mostly from families who are able to allocate extra money for preparation. Since our tests are standardized, there are some educational centers that prepare grade 6 students on a paid basis. Families with low income cannot afford this amount of money.

By supporting this claim, other participants also disclosed the situation that disadvantaged rural children cannot compete with their urban counterparts due to the lack of preparation resources, extra courses, books, and other needed educational materials. Principal 1 also indicated that it does not mean they are not smart, but because of the aforementioned problems, gifted and talented students from rural area and poorer backgrounds may miss opportunities and be left behind.

4.4.2 Equity of participation and service delivery

Maintaining equitable conditions for education after being enrolled in the schools for gifted children was more deliberately planned and given better attention. The schools employ various educational programs to improve learners’ academic skills and use differentiation strategies to ensure equity in the learning process. Moreover, schools regularly conduct

intellectual and sport competitions and offer a variety of extracurricular courses and activities to promote creativity and other skills, so students have the opportunity to fulfill their potential. Yet there are some hurdles that need to be considered.

First of all, principals were in doubt whether they are able to teach students with special needs because there was no situation of admitting students with disabilities. There was only single case of a student with additional educational needs being admitted to a school for the gifted. Principal 4 discussed admitting a student with a speech disorder. Some meetings were held with the teachers of this child in order to discuss ways of supporting that student. In his opinion, there should not be an emphasis on the student's problems, but on what he can do well; his strengths, motivation, and skills.

In addition to this, most study participants were concerned about school conditions, which do not meet the needs of students with special needs such as physical disabilities. There is a lack of special equipment including indoor and outdoor facilities. Wheeled mobility within the school buildings seems also challenging due to the lack of elevators and ramps. In spite of these, Principal 1 was hopeful these problems would be resolved very soon and pointed out that these struggles in the school infrastructure does not mean that he is against promoting inclusive education. Principal 5 expressed the similar opinion:

But if only technical aspects are taken into account, for example, ramps... In this regard, our school may not be ready at the moment. However, the school infrastructure will be developed over time. For instance, now we have a project, armchairs for the disabled... While watching the news, I frequently hear complaints about including children with Down syndrome in ordinary classrooms.. In my opinion, it is normal. To accept these children, you should have psychological and pedagogical knowledge.

Only two school principals were confident that the school building fully meets the needs of everyone, even for those who may have special needs such as cerebral palsy, and any additional physical or emotional challenges. In spite of this, they have no practice of

admitting and teaching twice-exceptional students. To illustrate, Principal 3 claimed :

We have not worked with such children yet. There were no such cases. But as a school, we are ready to teach such children if they come to us. Technically, we are ready. As for the rest of the children, we are trying to provide any possible support. We have a sufficiently large number of mechanisms for this. This includes psychological support, that is, there are psychological questionnaires, individual lessons, some elective courses and, clubs of interest.

4.5 Achieving equity in gifted education

The final part of the interview questions dealt with the ways of resolving potential problems. Principals reflected on some experiences they had and put forward what they thought were feasible key solutions.

4.5.1 Maintaining education equity

Discrepancies emerged when principals expressed their personal opinions on the achievability of equity in gifted education. Half of the respondents had quite optimistic attitudes towards equity, and despite challenges, they expressed their beliefs in its attainability, whilst the other two principals expressed quite skeptical views.

Principal 6 asserted that in their educational context, equality is more attainable than equity:

Admission policy of our school does not prohibit... does not cut the opportunities of students who come from rural areas. Any student from the whole country can be admitted to our school if only they pass the test requirements... In terms of equality it is fair, but in terms of equity it is not. Some amendments can be done in the process of admission.

That is to say, enrollment policies ensure students' enrollment regardless their backgrounds: wherever students come from - they all will be given the same exam questions and if accepted, are offered equal educational provisions. Principal 3, who is also working in the same network of schools, held the identical vision. However, in his opinion, equity is much more attainable once students are already accepted to the school. However, achieving

equitable access before enrollment is less likely to happen. What is more, in this principal's view, the issues of underrepresentation are not matters of this school's concern: "*I think that this is a school for gifted children, and it is not a task of the school to solve any social issues. For this, I think there should be other schools.*" He also added that their teaching capacities are limited, although the competition among candidates for available seat is usually very high.. In other words, the physical capacity of the facility means they are not able to give opportunity to all students.

Conversely, ensuring equity does not necessarily imply that it is viable only in ideal educational contexts. Principal 5 highlighted the importance of equity to all educational organizations no matter if they are either for gifted children or ordinary schools:

Even with three shifts, schools can and have to provide equitable access and participation. People may refer to lack of resources and equipment, but if they had strong desire, they could afford it. Well, we have such a mentality. People like to complain.

As mentioned by several principals, this is more dependent on the priorities that schools set to maintain. For instance, Principal M put much emphasis on the importance of fairness in gifted education programs:

What was the main purpose of opening regional specialized schools in general? The name says that it is for a region. Not only the children from cities but also children from each district and village should have the same opportunity to study here. Therefore, I believe that rural children's enrollment proportions should be higher than they are now.

By claiming so, he sees his school's mission in selecting children from the whole region and developing their intellectual skills. In the same vein, Principal D claimed that they want to discover a students' potential in spite of challenges, and their students' well-being and provision of equity are their utmost goals.

4.5.2 Policy recommendations

According to principals' claims, there is no fee for students to pay to study in schools for gifted children. Student dormitories and food are fully provided at no cost. Principal 1 mentioned the financial support they give to help students from low SES families to buy school stationaries, bags, and other school supplies. He also pointed out the role of charity clubs within their schools. He was in the process of completing a memorandum with local orphanages to teach their children within the framework of this agreement. Principal 2 supported the idea of giving special seats for children from orphanages, but this idea was still under discussion. He shared some initiatives and his dreams: he had already visited some orphanages and observed six students. Unfortunately, only one student seems ready to study at the school for gifted children, and he expressed his full support for that student. In turn, Principal 4 is already practicing such an initiative:

Every year we take two to three students from orphanages. We do not consider their entrance exam results because we know that they will not be able to pass it. They are just suggested by their administrators and we teach them. Some of them have already graduated from our school, and one student is currently studying in the US. We provide all conditions. Parents of our students periodically take them to their homes so as not feel lonely. In this environment, they acquire Kazakhs' way of upbringing their children, and they positively change a lot even in two years.

In turn, Principal 6 said that equity being placed "on a higher level of a ladder" requires even more investments in this field. On the one hand, it would solve the problems of rural children if enough trainers prepared and the exams were conducted in different regions. On the other hand, this would prolong the selection procedures. Summing up, he concluded that the schools will gradually come to equity, but it demands more financial as well as human resources. If there are no constraints in terms of money, then equity could be more easily achieved.

A well-developed school infrastructure system and up-to-date facilities would be another outcome of allocating more money to schools for gifted children. Principal 1

expressed his plans regarding this concern: *“Generally speaking, I would like to better the school conditions, from the toilets to the entrance, exits, to meet the needs of workers, and students with special needs. It is my aim. I believe that it will be implemented”*.

It was not only once put forth by principals that they were distributing special grants for certain societal groups. Primarily, students from rural schools could be considered for the extra scholarships. Principal 1 said that since this year they are going to consider these grants, while principals of other two schools claimed that this approach has already achieved positive results. For Principal 4, there is no problem with underrepresentation of rural children since parents are well aware of this aid and if interested can apply.

4.6 Conclusion

Chapter 4 presented the research findings of six semi-structured interviews that aimed to explore principals’ opinions on equity and its relation to gifted education programs. Thematic categorization of research data revealed three major areas: First, principals shared their understanding of equity and fairness in schools for gifted children. Their evaluation of their policies was quite positive. Nevertheless, principals had some doubts about the accessibility of gifted education programs for rural children. Moreover, most participants were not satisfied with school infrastructure, which does not meet current standards for inclusive schools thus prohibiting the acceptance of students with physical disabilities. Finally, principals’ suggestions on ensuring more equitable access to gifted education programs was discussed.

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This section attempts to crystallize the insights drawn from research findings with respect to scholarly literature on equity in gifted education programs. Analysis of the relationship between principals' perceptions and literature is presented in alliance with the sequence of the research questions. This chapter will focus on the principals' attitudes towards educational equity in school policies. Next, potential barriers to equity in gifted education programs will be proposed, and future implications will be reviewed.

5.2 Equity and school admission policies

The multifaceted perception of equity makes its interpretation dependent on the context where it is enacted. Widely accepted components of equity declared by OECD (2006) suggest viewing this notion as an incorporation of fairness and inclusion. Since this study examined equity in the Kazakhstani gifted education programs, which already present themselves to be not inclusive but selective and specialized in essence, principals' understanding of giftedness and fairness in school policies was a question to be scrutinized.

In the literature review, it was assumed that the Kazakhstani model of giftedness aligns with the vision that aligns both academic and non-academic achievements. But principals' interpretation of giftedness predominantly reckoned their inclination to a second model of giftedness, which basically refers to students' assessment results as an outcome of their natural aptitudes. This may stem from schools' admission and assessment criteria, which are solely based on standardized test scores. Meanwhile, one principal, although she was recently assigned as a principal of a selective school, showed a strong advocacy for the Finnish Model of education that strives for equality of all schools and children and rejects any forms of special education for gifted learners. This clearly demonstrates the discrepancy in principals'

attitudes towards giftedness and gaps between their intentions and schools' practices as discussed by Jansen (2001).

Principals' understanding of fairness drew ambiguous comments. Although the first research question was developed to reveal fairness in gifted education programs, some participants tended to perceive fairness as academic integrity only in their selection of student, and explained how they ensure honesty while conducting exams. This is evidence that fairness as a vital component of equity is given less attention in the Kazakhstani educational system.

Nevertheless, their opinion on their personal evaluation of gifted education policies could indicate two prevailing themes among principals' perspectives, which were also listed in Brandsma's (2002) classification. One part of participants sees their school admission policies as a just indicator of children's abilities: the more children prepare, the more chances to be accepted. They believe that students' dedication and learning effort usually pay off and it is less likely that families' background may somehow affect their children's exam results. This outlook is similar to the Irish study outcomes carried out by Kennedy and Power (2014) which indicates the prevalence of meritocratic views among the people of power. As stated by Hill (2003), this perspective often occurs when policymakers ignore social inequalities and try to explain any problems as a natural process, which does not suit the reality, in fact. In the Kazakhstani context, increasing gaps between rural and urban students' academic achievements are not outcomes of one admission examination but is an indicator of differences in the number and quality of learning opportunities. It would be fair to hold this view if these children are exposed to the same quality of education before coming to these admission tests.

Another half of the research respondents tended to support the idea of educational egalitarianism and admitted the existence of implicit barriers that prevent equitable allotment

of educational opportunities among all society members. They did not neglect the fact that it has become very common that children from more advantaged families have more chances to prepare in special training centers and, as a result, can successfully pass entrance exams.

Research findings can also reveal how the emphasis on equality of access in the given educational organizations outweighs equity principles. The majority of principals confirmed that only equality seems able to thrive in today's economic conditions. However, ensuring equity at the admission stage would be challenging due to financial constraints, which was also stated by Levinson and Wood (2011). Thus, supporters of this perspective may become strong defenders of 'horizontal equity', which sees everyone as equal and, consequently, treat people equally with no consideration of their disadvantaged backgrounds that may affect their current learning achievements and subsequent possibilities to enter a school for the gifted.

Notwithstanding this scarcity of resources and "capacity" barriers, a few respondents connected the occurrence of this tendency to attitudinal barriers proposed by Levin (2003). In fact, not all participants seem to actually care much about accessibility of gifted education to all members of society. This indifference or ignorance may have a link with their professional backgrounds. For instance, Principal B, who had worked only in the schools for gifted children since the Soviet Union period, was not interested in achieving equitable access at all and denied the existence of any barriers except one's intellectual abilities. In contrast, principals with the experience of being a school principal in the mainstream schools and in different regions of a country demonstrated more awareness about the quality of rural education and the problems connected with it that may explain their underrepresentation in gifted education programs.

The latter group believes believe that if it is a principal's "will" to promote equity in their schools, there will be a way to maintain educational equity even at the initial stages of

school enrollment procedures. Both these contradicting views make it possible to conclude that there is still tension between horizontal and vertical equity in access to current gifted educational programs.

In turn, equity of participation and equity of outcomes (Gillborn & Youdell (2000) were the areas of utmost importance for all respondents. Principals were confident that school policies and practices can fully guarantee equitable service delivery and ensure fair distribution of opportunities. They were convinced that differentiation strategies and techniques used by their teachers meet learners' individual needs, the results of which can be seen in students' successful enrolment in further education.

This contrast of attitudes between equity of access and participation may stem from the degree of principals' influence on decision-making procedures. Principals felt more responsibility in establishing an equitable environment and service deliveries in their own schools, while equity in enrolment procedures involves interests of other regional authorities. As mentioned by one of the respondents, principals, already being heads of their schools, have district offices, whose priorities they must take into account while conducting admission exams to their schools. This top-down approach may limit the principals' impact on ensuring equitable access to schools for gifted children. Consequently, as in the case of principal 1, principals purely follow these set guidelines and are basically in role of a "manager" who is responsible for organization and technical arrangements only. Meanwhile, another participant evaluated the approach they use as a collegial form of leadership, where everyone has a voice to express schools' needs. Yet a higher body sets the final decision, so while they can partially contribute to the development of new initiatives, they do not have total authority to make major changes. These claims can again demonstrate how principals' leadership skills influence the schools' view towards principles of equity.

5.3 Exploring barriers to equity in gifted education

A second question of this research aimed to understand principals' point of view on the possible barriers hampering equity of access and participation in gifted education programs. In the previous chapter, these obstacles were divided into two categories with relevance to the stage in which they emerge: before and after students' enrolment. Although they were presented separately, on the basis of the principals' perceptions and as outlined in the UNESCO report (2008) it is reasonable to conclude that contemporary difficulties of the Kazakhstani gifted education programs may be attributed to the co-occurrence of these identified hurdles.

The first and foremost part of the findings has an implication on the combination of underrepresentation of rural children coming from a lower economic background and language barriers as many of the schools for the gifted in Kazakhstan expect a strong level of English. A pattern similar to Puryear and Kettler's (2017) opinion was expressed by the majority of principals that juxtaposed school conditions in rural and urban settings and accentuated sharp discrepancies in the quality of education caused by lack of access to learning opportunities which continue to disadvantage rural children. In this research participants discussed that low enrolment rates from rural locations do not indicate the absence of gifted students in rural schools, but rather tell more about the lack of appropriate support for gifted children who reside in rural areas. The research by Thompson(2015) also concurred with this. In addition,, acceptance to schools for gifted children may seem unattainable if the entrance exam requires taking foreign language proficiency tests. According to principals, these problems tend to appear only when passing exams, whereas one's socio-economic status has no impact on students' further learning in their schools. Once students are accepted, they

have full access to learning materials and student dormitories. Additional financial support for children from low-income families can be also considered if required.

The only area of questioning that most participants struggled to answer was related to including children with special educational needs as such students who are considered twice exceptional by the fact while gifted in one area, they have an identified disability. It was also a common assertion that principals had no experience of testing and admitting students with identified disabilities. Yet one principal offered the opinion that it is highly likely that even if special needs students are accepted, they will ultimately drop out after some time, as keeping up to the demands of the educational program will be difficult to maintain. Moreover, he thinks that school hours from 8am to 5pm are difficult even for students without health problems. This may be an attempt to mask his attitudinal barriers as stated by Montgomery (2013). Negative attitudes come before identification issues in its importance. Although the remaining part of the respondents claim they welcome inclusive education, they stated that their building does not meet the standards for special educational needs schools. These explicit and implicit factors can be a reason for continuing resistance to ensuring equity of service delivery for twice-exceptional students.

5.4 Achieving equity

Compared to the United States or Finland education policies, which are striving to increase the excellence of all students, contemporary Kazakhstani gifted education has put a lot of effort on developing individuals' intellectual capacities yet without much focus on equity of opportunities. Nevertheless, principals' positive initiatives on ensuring equity of conditions in some aspects demonstrate they are trying to achieve this ideal at least within their school level.

According to the participants of this study, equity in admission policies is often times overlooked due to the use of standardized tests used to identify students' giftedness. As mentioned by Merry and Arum (2018), a reliance on solely one type of assessment neglects equity norms, whilst utilizing multiple authentic ways of identification instruments allows one to evaluate a wider range of children's abilities. In spite of this, some of the participants asserted that even if they want to change assessment instruments, there is a lack of research-based evidence of the validity of their ideas. More importantly, they refer to the lack of consideration in evaluating one's creativity or outstanding presentation skills. These comments were in line with Pfeiffer's (2016) research findings where gifted education experts also pointed out the challenges in evaluating validity and credibility of students selection procedures when determining acceptance into a program for gifted education.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter presented the intersection between the scholarly literature and the findings of this research. Three main themes appeared from the previous chapter were discussed in relevance to already existing perspectives. In most cases, participants' opinions and the literature conveyed similar ideas on the equity issues in contemporary existing gifted education policies. The striking differences were related to principals' perceptions of equity, which were tightly linked not with fairness but solely based on equality in gifted education policies. Respondents also admitted that current education policies mostly focus on ensuring equity of participation but not equitable access to gifted education. In spite of challenges in today's gifted education programs, the majority of principals had positive opinions about the possibility of ensuring more equitable practices in the future.

Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

By summarizing the key findings, this chapter attempts to answer the research questions of this study, which sought to identify concerns of equity in gifted education programs from the school principals' perspective. It will also consider potential limitations that should be considered when interpreting the study results. Additionally, the areas for further scholarly investigations and some recommendations regarding gifted education policies will be proposed.

6.2 Do the school enrollment policies consider equity issues?

Although principals seem to advocate for social justice principles, in practice, there is much more focus on equality than equity issues. This disparity is especially seen in school admission policies, which may derive from the lack of precise understanding of the notion of equity among school principals. Equity, for the majority of participants, is perceived the same as equality norms with no consideration of students' diverse backgrounds, whereas fairness is understood as transparency and obeying academic honesty rules only.

6.3 What are some possible barriers to ensuring equitable access?

It was admitted by all participants that rural students may be disadvantaged in the selection of gifted students since they are not able to compete with their urban counterparts due to the lack of or low quality of preparation that they are offered in their schools. Furthermore, it is also becoming more common to learn that students cannot afford additional learning courses to prepare for admission exams, which shows the impact of one's socio-economic conditions on ensuring access to gifted education. Testing applicants' English

language skills may even worsen the situation of rural students due to aforementioned problems. While some principals mentioned about scholarships and future initiatives to support rural children, others supported a meritocratic perspective and were less interested in solving the inequity of access to gifted education. However, equity becomes all principals' goal when it concerns equity of participation, where they feel more decision-making power and responsibility lying with them. Nevertheless, the problem of teaching students with special educational needs in gifted education programs remains topical due to the current policies in Kazakhstan on inclusive education. For the majority of schools for gifted children, this field is challenging due to improper school facilities and the lack of experience of teaching twice-exceptional students.

6.4 What do principals think could be done to overcome potential problems?

Principals were also asked on the ways of maintaining equity in the current Kazakhstani context. The majority claimed that inequity issues in today's economic conditions is unavoidable due to financial constraints. It was stressed that allocating more investments could solve a wide range of problems. First, reconstructed school buildings and improved school infrastructure would solve the problems of underrepresentation of students with special educational needs in gifted education programs. Secondly, expenditures made for conducting entry exams not only in city centers but also in different regions and villages could help to identify the more gifted students around the country. Thirdly, offering special scholarships for rural children would add to addressing inequity issues. However, only a minority think that the way of achieving equity is connected with the validity and reliability of the entry tests used to identify gifted children.

6.5 Recommendations on achieving equity

Taking into account the specificity of the Kazakhstani gifted education programs and

the results of this study, it is possible to give some recommendations on resolving the inequity issues. The core factor of the existence of underrepresentation issues cannot be attributed to the place where children live or born in but because of the differences in the quality of education students from diverse groups receive before applying to these programs. In the long run, there should be more focus on narrowing the achievement gap between rural and urban schools so that any student can feel confident to compete under the same conditions and be selected based on the same criteria.

Another vital factor causing inequity is linked with the approaches to how gifted students are identified. There is a mismatch between the goals of opening specialized schools for gifted children and the way potential students are selected. Although these schools aim to identify and teach children of their whole region, in reality, there is a little enrollment of students from diverse backgrounds. Using formal assessment tools such as standardized tests in student selection procedures may be convenient in terms of organization but cannot fully reflect students' real knowledge and does not take into account children's multiple intelligences and skills. Along with the subject tests, there can be other items utilized that consider several domains such as student portfolios, learning habits and recommendation letters. This allow not only to identify students with natural aptitudes but also to consider the ones who have strong enthusiasm and potential to study in more academically challenging environments.

Ultimately, to guarantee the accessibility of gifted education from vulnerable members of our society, it is advised to have special consideration for some category of students which may have disability or behavioral conditions and distribute at least 10% of scholarship provisions among them.

6.6 Study limitations and future study implication

Although the findings answered the research questions, some limitations in scope of this research must also be considered. The first limitation derives from the convenience sampling in locating the research sites. The study involved respondents from two regions and six participants only. Therefore, the findings cannot fully reflect the perspectives of all principals of schools for gifted children in Kazakhstan, and this fact lessens the degree of generalizability of this research. Hence, replicating this study in other regions of our country to hear more perspectives and compare different regions might produce other thoughts on this issue.

Furthermore, the process of interviewing might have some limitations in terms of honesty in the answers of the participants. As Cresswell (2012) mentions, interviewees might provide “indirect”, biased, or limited information. Principals might also give socially desirable answers to present themselves from a more positive perspective. This means that credibility of the research findings is directly dependent on the participants’ loyalty and genuine interest in the topic.

Another limitation is the fact that this research only scrutinized principals’ views on this topic. To view equity from other angles, it is suggested to study other stakeholders’ opinions too. For instance, the potential participants for future research may be parents, teachers as well as students who are already enrolled or hoping to study in the schools for the gifted. Therefore, it is not possible to make an assumption on equity in gifted education programs relying on principals’ perceptions only. However, this study has provided an initial discussion on this issue that should be used to help move the discussion on this topic forward.

Moreover, as the research findings revealed, there is little awareness about twice-exceptional students who are characterized as gifted children and formally diagnosed with one or more disabilities. The lack of knowledge on understanding these students’ peculiarities can

be considered one of the reasons for difficulties in accepting this category of students to gifted education programs. Therefore, examining principals' perceptions of inclusive education and special education is also advised.

Lastly, it is recommended to study equity of outcomes in gifted education programs because this study was mostly focused on investigating equity of access and participation. Although it revealed underrepresentation issues at a school level, the correlation between the accessibility of gifted education programs and students' future education choices as well as equity issues in applying for higher educational organizations are areas that are yet to be scrutinized.

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Appendices

Appendix A.

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL PROJECT TITLE: PRINCIPALS' PERSPECTIVES ON EQUITABLE ACCESS TO GIFTED EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Time of interview:

Date:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Dear Participant,

My name is Galiya Daulet. I am a master degree student at Nazarbayev University. Thank you for taking time to participate in this interview. The purpose is to get your perceptions of equitable access to gifted education programs. If it is possible the interviews will be audio recorded with your permission. No one will use your name in reports, so your privacy will be protected. The results of the study will be used for scholarly purposes only. Interview will last approximately 20 minutes. Please feel free to ask if you need any clarifications for the interview questions.

[Please read and sign the consent form] [Turn on the tape recorder]

Interview questions

1. What is your working experience as a school principal at schools for gifted children?
2. What are the main aspects of school admission policies of your school?
3. Does your school admission policy consider the equity as well as equality of opportunities?
4. How do you understand these concepts?
5. Does your school enrollment policy address the admission of students of diverse societal backgrounds (children from rural areas, orphanages, national minorities, low-income families or with physical/mental disabilities)?
6. Are there any other potential barriers to ensuring equitable access?
7. How does your school consider and address diverse needs of learners once they are admitted to your school? (teaching & learning, extra-curricular, school counselling services, etc)
8. Are there any other potential barriers to ensuring equitable participation?
9. What do you think could be done to prevent/overcome these problems?
10. In your opinion, should our Kazakhstani schools for gifted children consider only equality issues, is there room for equity? Why?

[Thank the participant for their cooperation and participation in this interview]

СҰХБАТ ХАТТАМАСЫ**ЖОБА ТАҚЫРЫБЫ: ДАРЫНДЫ БАЛАЛАРДЫ ОҚЫТУ
БАҒДАРЛАМАЛАРЫНА ӘДІЛЕТТІ ҚОЛЖЕТІМДІЛІК БОЙЫНША
МЕКТЕП ДИРЕКТОРЛАРЫНЫҢ ПІКІРЛЕРІ**

Сұхбат уақыты:

Күні:

Сауалнамаға қатысушы:

Сауалнама жүргізушісі:

Құрметті қатысушы,

Менің атым Ғалия Даулет . Мен Назарбаев Университетінің магистрантымын. Осы сұхбатқа қатысу үшін уақыт бөлгеніңізге рахмет. Менің зерттеу жұмысымның мақсаты - дарынды балаларға білім беру бағдарламаларының қолжетімділігіне байланысты мектеп директорларының пікірін білу. Егер мүмкін болса, Сіздің рұқсатыңызбен бұл сұхбат таспаға жазылады. Сіздің есіміңіз ешқандай есепте қолданылмайды, сондықтан берілген ақпараттың құпиялылығы қорғалады. Зерттеудің нәтижелері ғылыми мақсат үшін ғана пайдаланылады. Сұхбат шамамен 20 минутқа созылады. Сауалнама сұрақтарына қатысты қандай да бір түсініктемелер қажет болған жағдайда айтуыңызды өтінемін.

[Келісім формасын оқып, қол қойыңыз] [Таспаны қосыңыз]

Сауалнама сұрақтары

1. Дарынды балаларға арналған мектептерде директор ретінде жұмыс тәжірибеңізбен бөліссеңіз?
2. Сіздің мектебіңізге қабылдану талаптарында қарастырылатын негізгі аспектілер қандай?
3. Сіздің мектебіңізге қабылдану саясатында мүмкіншіліктердің теңдігімен қатар әділеттілігіне назар аударылады ма?
4. Бұл ұғымдарды қалай түсінесіз?
5. Сіздің мектебіңізге қабылдау саясаты қоғамның әртүрлі өкілдерінен шыққан оқушылардың қабылдануына бағытталған ба? (ауылдық мекеннен келген, жетім, әр түрлі ұлт өкілдері, әлеуметтік жағдайы төмен балалар, мүмкіндігі шектеулі балаларға қолдау, т.б.) Емтиханнан бұрын алдын-ала қолдау көрсетіледі ме?
6. Сіздің мектебіңізде әділетті қолжетімділік бойынша басқа қандай кедергілер болуы мүмкін?
7. Жоғарыда айтылған үміткерлер мектепке қабылданған жағдайда қандай қолдау көрсете аласыздар?
8. Қандай кедергілерге ұшырауы мүмкін?
9. аталған мәселердің қалай алдын алуға немесе шешуге болады?
10. Дарынды балаларға оқитын мектептерде білім беру мүмкіншіліктердің әділеттілігіне теңдігіне бағытталған дұрыс па?

Appendix B: Informed Consent Form

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Principals' perspectives on equitable access to gifted education programs

DESCRIPTION: You are invited to participate in a research study on investigating principal's view on equity and access to gifted education. You will be asked to participate in the interview. The interview will be also audio-taped which be heard by the researcher only. If you feel uncomfortable, you may ask that it be turned off at any time. Audio files and interview transcripts will be password protected for at least two years and will be used for study purposes only.

TIME INVOLVEMENT: Your participation will take approximately 20 minutes.

RISKS AND BENEFITS: There are minimal risks to the participants associated with this study. It is possible to skip a particular question or stop the interview at any stage of the research. The benefits which may reasonably be expected to result from this study is that as a participant you will have an opportunity to share your own vision of equity which may contribute to changes in the admission policies of the schools for gifted children. Your decision whether or not to participate in this study will not affect you negatively in our employment.

PARTICIPANT'S RIGHTS: If you have read this form and have decided to participate in this project, please understand your **participation is voluntary** and you have the **right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. The alternative is not to participate.** You have the right to refuse to answer particular questions. The results of this research study may be presented at scientific or professional meetings or published in scientific journals.

CONTACT INFORMATION:

Questions: If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about this research, its procedures, risks and benefits, contact the Master's Thesis Supervisor for this student work

Independent Contact: If you are not satisfied with how this study is being conducted, or if you have any concerns, complaints, or general questions about the research or your rights as a participant, please contact the NUGSE Research Committee to at

gse_researchcommittee@nu.edu.kz

Please sign this consent form if you agree to participate in this study.

- I have carefully read the information provided;
- I have been given full information regarding the purpose and procedures of the study;

- I understand how the data collected will be used, and that any confidential information will be seen only by the researchers and will not be revealed to anyone else;
- I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason;
- With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this study.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

The extra copy of this signed and dated consent form is for you to keep.

According to the law of the Republic of Kazakhstan an individual under the age of 18 is considered a child. Any participant falling into that category should be given the Parental Consent Form and have it signed by at least one of his/her parent(s) or guardian(s).

ФОРМА ИНФОРМАЦИОННОГО СОГЛАСИЯ

Мнения директоров школ о справедливом доступе к программам обучения одаренных детей

ОПИСАНИЕ: Вы приглашены принять участие в исследовании, посвященном изучению взглядов директоров школ на справедливость и доступ к программам обучения одаренных детей. Вам будет предложено принять участие в собеседовании. Интервью будет также записано на аудио, которое будет услышано только исследователем. При неловкости, Вы можете попросить отключить записывающее устройство в любое время. Аудиофайлы и связанные с ними транскрипты будут защищены паролем не менее двух лет и будут использоваться только для учебных целей.

ВРЕМЯ УЧАСТИЯ: Ваше участие потребует около 20 минут.

РИСКИ И ПРЕИМУЩЕСТВА:

Возможность риска, связанные с этим исследованием минимальны. Вы можете пропустить определенный вопрос или приостановить интервью на любом этапе исследования. В качестве ожидаемых преимуществ в результате исследования можно рассматривать возможность поделиться своим видением справедливости в качестве участника, что может способствовать изменениям в правилах приема в школы для одаренных детей.

Ваше решение о согласии либо отказе в участии никаким образом не повлияет на вашу работу.

ПРАВА УЧАСТНИКОВ: Если Вы прочитали данную форму и решили принять участие в данном исследовании, Вы должны понимать, что Ваше участие является добровольным и что у Вас есть право отозвать свое согласие или прекратить участие в любое время без штрафных санкций и без потери социального пакета, который Вам предоставляли. В качестве альтернативы можно не участвовать в исследовании. Также Вы имеете право не отвечать на какие-либо вопросы. Результаты данного исследования могут быть представлены или опубликованы в научных или профессиональных целях.

КОНТАКТНАЯ ИНФОРМАЦИЯ:

Вопросы: Если у Вас есть вопросы, замечания или жалобы по поводу данного исследования, процедуры его проведения, рисков и преимуществ, Вы можете связаться

с исследователем, используя следующие данные:

Независимые контакты: Если Вы не удовлетворены проведением данного исследования, если у Вас возникли какие-либо проблемы, жалобы или вопросы, Вы можете связаться с Комитетом Исследований Высшей Школы Образования Назарбаев Университета, отправив письмо на электронный адрес gse_researchcommittee@nu.edu.kz.

Пожалуйста, подпишите данную форму, если Вы согласны участвовать в исследовании.

- Я внимательно изучил представленную информацию;
- Мне предоставили полную информацию о целях и процедуре исследования;
- Я понимаю, как будут использованы собранные данные, и что доступ к любой конфиденциальной информации будет иметь только исследователь;
- Я понимаю, что вправе в любой момент отказаться от участия в данном исследовании без объяснения причин;
- С полным осознанием всего вышеизложенного я согласен принять участие в исследовании по собственной воле.

Подпись: _____

Дата: _____

ЗЕРТТЕУ ЖҰМЫСЫ КЕЛІСІМІНІҢ АҚПАРАТТЫҚ ФОРМАСЫ

Дарынды балаларды оқыту бағдарламаларына әділетті қолжетімділік бойынша мектеп директорларының пікірлері

СИПАТТАМА: Сіз мектеп басшыларының дарынды балаларды оқытудағы әділеттілік және қолжетімділік мәселелеріне бағытталған зерттеу жұмысына қатысуға шақырылып отырсыз. Осы мақсатта Сізге сұхбатқа қатысу ұсынылады. Сұхбат таспаға жазылады және оны тек тыңдауға зерттеушінің ғана мүмкіншілігі бар. Аудиофайлдар және сұхбат жазбалары кемінде екі жыл көлемінде кілттелініп сақталынады және тек зерттеу мақсаттарында ғана қолданылады.

ӨТКІЗІЛЕТІН УАҚЫТЫ: Сіздің қатысуыңыз шамамен 20 минут уақытыңызды алады.

ЗЕРТТЕУ ЖҰМЫСЫНА ҚАТЫСУДЫҢ ҚАУІПТЕРІ МЕН АРТЫҚШЫЛЫҚТАРЫ:

Зерттеу жұмысына қатысудың қауіптілігі төмен деңгейде. Зерттеудің кез-келген кезеңінде белгілі бір сұрақтарға жауап бермеуіңізге немесе әңгімелесуді тоқтатуға болады. Зерттеу жұмысына қатысуыңыз Сізге әділеттілік бойынша жеке пікіріңізді беруге мүмкіндік беріп қана қоймай, оқушыларды қабылдау саясатындағы өзгерістерге әсерін тигізуі мүмкін. Зерттеу жұмысына қатысуға келісім беруіңіз немесе бас тартуыңыз Сіздің жұмысыңызға еш әсерін тигізбейді.

ҚАТЫСУШЫ ҚҰҚЫҚТАРЫ: Егер Сіз берілген формамен танысып, зерттеу жұмысына қатысуға шешім қабылдасаңыз, Сіздің қатысуыңыз **ерікті** түрде екенін хабарлаймыз. Сонымен қатар, **қалаған уақытта айыппұл төлемей және сіздің әлеуметтік жеңілдіктеріңізге еш кесірін тигізбей зерттеу жұмысына қатысу туралы келісіміңізді кері қайтаруға немесе тоқтатуға құқығыңыз бар.** Зерттеу жұмысына мүлдем қатыспауыңызға да толық құқығыңыз бар. Сондай-ақ, қандай да бір сұрақтарға жауап бермеуіңізге де әбден болады. Бұл зерттеу жұмысының нәтижелері академиялық немесе кәсіби мақсаттарда баспаға ұсынылуы немесе шығарылуы мүмкін.

БАЙЛАНЫС АҚПАРАТЫ:

Сұрақтарыңыз: Егер жүргізіліп отырған зерттеу жұмысының процесі, қауіп мен артықшылықтары туралы сұрағыңыз немесе шағымыңыз болса, келесі байланыс құралдары арқылы зерттеушімен хабарласуыңызға болады.

ДЕРБЕС БАЙЛАНЫС АҚПАРАТТАРЫ: Егер берілген зерттеу жұмысының жүргізілуімен қанағаттанбасаңыз немесе сұрақтарыңыз бен шағымдарыңыз болса, Назарбаев Университеті Жоғары Білім беру мектебінің Зерттеу көрсетілген байланыс құралдары арқылы хабарласуыңызға болады: электрондық поштамен gse_researchcommittee@nu.edu.kz.

Зерттеу жұмысына қатысуға келісіміңізді берсеңіз, берілген формаға қол қоюыңызды сұраймыз.

- Мен берілген формамен мұқият таныстым;
- Маған зерттеу жұмысының мақсаты мен оның процедурасы жайында толық ақпарат берілді;
- Жинақталған ақпарат пен құпия мәліметтерге тек зерттеушінің өзіне қолжетімді және мәлім болатынын толық түсінемін;
- Мен кез келген уақытта ешқандай түсініктемесіз зерттеу жұмысына қатысудан бас тартуыма болатынын түсінемін;
- Мен жоғарыда аталып өткен ақпаратты саналы түрде қабылдап, осы зерттеу жұмысына қатысуға өз келісімімді беремін.

Қолы: _____

Күні: _____

Appendix C. Sample Interview Transcript

A: Interviewer

B: Interviewee

A: Thank you very much for taking part in this interview. My research is dedicated to investigating principals' views on gifted education programs. Your answers will be valuable for my study. May I record this interview with my phone?

B: Yes, of course.

A: Thank you. Can you please tell about your work experience as a school principal?

B: Well, I have been working as a Vice principals for 6 years and as a principal 3 years

A: Does your school admission policy consider the equity as well as equality of opportunities?

B: I think equality is much more in practice than equity. Because equality means giving the same opportunity for everyone. So our tests are equal, of the same content for every student who wants to get admitted to our school. However, equity may not be realized in some terms because this issue is linked with the individual style of learning of students. Some gifted students may be well-gifted in their speech and in different other skills. But our admission policy requires students take tests. Not every gifted student can be identified effectively with the test in terms of equity. In terms of equality yes, but in terms of equity we are not. Some amendments can be done in the process of admission.

A: Does your school enrollment policy address the admission of students of diverse societal backgrounds (children from rural areas, orphanages, national minorities, low-income families or with physical/mental disabilities)?

B: Yes, I think, partially. Admission policy of our school does not prohibit does not cut the opportunities for students who come from rural areas. Any student from the whole country can

be admitted to our school if only they pass the test requirements. In terms of procedure it is fair enough, equal. But if we talk about the equity I think that the process that the tests is administered only in the city, gives some disadvantages to some students who come from rural area. They may not even hear about the possibilities to come to our school. About national minorities I don't think it is a very big issue in terms of low-income families. What we noticed is that students get admitted mostly from the families who are able to allocate extra money for preparation because our tests are standardized and there are some educational centres that prepare 6 grade students for money. Families with low income cannot afford and this amount of money So I think they are in disadvantaged situation.

A: Are there any other potential barriers to ensuring equitable access?

B: The huge barriers is the administration procedure of the test. So I think in order to give equitable access we could administer the test in various places not only in city but also in rural areas. But it would cost much more financial and logistical issues, challenges. Also in order to give opportunities for students to express their oral or presentation abilities we would need to administer not tests but interviews, but there are barriers for that because it would also take much more time to administer interview. And it might give some risks and threats for corruption.

A: How does your school consider and address diverse needs of learners once they are admitted to your school? (teaching & learning, extra-curricular, school counselling services, etc)

B: In our school subjects are taught in groups with 10 students, So teachers can pay attention to students' individual needs in order to provide equity for the learning process. We call this differentiation strategies. We offer professional development for teachers. And every teacher

use these strategies according their professional development. Also appraisal system that is working in our school is highly focused on developing smart goals for teachers. And these smart goals should be related to students' individual needs. Also extracurricular activities we have in our school. Students higher abilities can participate in various competitions intellectual sport competitions. In this way they can fulfill their potential. Counselling services, we have curators also who can guide students and propose student participate in extra curricular activities.

A: What do you think could be done to prevent/overcome these problems?

B: I think in order to give more opportunities for students from rural areas it is related to financial aspect because when we administrated our school only. We have each year coming once. If we take test from multiple sides it would cost much more money. So I think the only problem is financial problems. If enough trainers prepared, and testing days are prolonged it can be also done.

A: In your opinion, should our Kazakhstani schools for gifted children consider only equality issues, is there room for equity? Why?

B: I think in our school equity and equality is provided, but in different time frames. When take their test they are treated fairly, equity is provided when they enter the school. I think equity as well as equality should be taken into consideration. And I think gradually our school will pay attention to equity issue more. I think equity is located on a higher level of a ladder. Equality can be administered if compared with equity is fairly easy. If we talk about equity it demands more human resources and financial resources. If there are no constrains in terms of financial resources then equity is the best priority.

A: That is the end of this interview. Thank you for your participation.

B: You are welcome.