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Research Article

A Case Study on the Experiences of Underachieving Gifted Students

Beklenmedik Başarısızlık Gösteren Özel Yetenekli Öğrencilerin Deneyimlerine İlişkin Bir Durum Çalışması

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Abstract

Purpose: *The purpose of this study is to examine the experiences of gifted students who exhibit underachievement through a case study approach from the perspectives of students, teachers, and parents. By integrating multiple stakeholder views, the study aims to provide a multidimensional understanding of how underachievement develops and is sustained in gifted learners.* ***Method:*** *The study group consisted of two gifted high school students identified as underachievers, their mothers, and their subject teachers at Science and Art Centers (BILSEM), selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected using semi-structured interview forms developed in line with the components of the Achievement Orientation Model (self-efficacy, task value, environmental perceptions, and self-regulation), as well as questionnaires administered to teachers. The data were analyzed using content analysis.* ***Findings:*** *The findings revealed that the development of underachievement differed markedly between the two students. While underachievement in one case was largely situational and related to contextual factors, it evolved into a more chronic and persistent pattern in the other case. Differences in task value, teacher–student relationships, and self-regulation skills emerged as critical factors. The distance education period also had differentiated effects on students.* ***Conclusion:*** *The results indicate that gifted underachievement is a multidimensional and context-sensitive phenomenon. The study underscores the importance of school-based interventions that extend beyond academic support and incorporate motivational and psychosocial dimensions to effectively prevent and address underachievement among gifted students.*

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Öz

Amaç: *Bu çalışmanın amacı beklenmedik başarısızlık gösteren özel yetenekli öğrencilerin deneyimlerini öğrenci, öğretmen ve ebeveyn bakış açılarıyla inceleyerek bu olgunun nasıl geliştiğini ve sürdürüldüğünü çok boyutlu biçimde ortaya koymaktır. Çalışma beklenmedik başarısızlığın bağlamsal ve bireysel dinamiklerini bütüncül bir yaklaşımla ele almayı amaçlamaktadır.* ***Yöntem:*** *Araştırma durum çalışması deseniyle yürütülmüştür. Çalışma grubunu amaçlı örnekleme yoluyla seçilen iki beklenmedik başarısızlık gösteren lise düzeyindeki özel yetenekli öğrenci, anneleri ve BİLSEM'de alan derslerine giren öğretmenleri oluşturmaktadır. Veriler Başarı Yönelimi Modeli'nin bileşenleri (öz-yeterlik, hedef değeri, çevresel algılar ve öz-düzenleme) temel alınarak geliştirilen yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme formları ve öğretmenler için hazırlanan anketler aracılığıyla toplanmıştır. Veriler içerik analizi yöntemiyle analiz edilmiştir.* ***Bulgular:*** *Bulgular beklenmedik başarısızlığın iki öğrencide farklı örüntüler sergilediğini göstermiştir. Bir öğrencide durum daha çok durumsal ve bağlamsal faktörlerle ilişkiliyken diğer öğrencide daha kronik ve süreklilik gösteren bir yapı ortaya çıkmıştır. Hedef değeri, öğretmen-öğrenci ilişkileri ve öz-düzenleme becerilerindeki farklılıklar belirleyici unsurlar olarak öne çıkmıştır. Ayrıca uzaktan eğitim sürecinin öğrenciler üzerinde farklılaştırıcı etkiler yarattığı belirlenmiştir.* ***Sonuç:*** *Sonuçlar beklenmedik başarısızlığın çok boyutlu ve bağlama duyarlı bir olgu olduğunu göstermektedir. Çalışma, beklenmedik başarısızlık durumunda okul temelli müdahalelerin yalnızca akademik destekle sınırlı kalmayıp motivasyonel ve psikososyal boyutları da kapsayacak şekilde bütüncül olarak ele alınması gerektiğini ortaya koymaktadır.*

Introduction

Underachievement is the discrepancy between a student's potential or expected performance and their actual performance (Reis & McCoach, 2000). Underachievement is one of the most surprising and challenging phenomena observed among gifted students (Collins et al., 2023). Although underachievement is most often perceived as an academic issue, it is not limited to educational settings nor confined to the period of formal schooling (Feinstein & Peck, 2008). The transformation of potential into performance, in other words, the effective use of one's abilities, is a lifelong process that contributes to self-actualization from birth to death. When individuals fail to engage in this process, they are likely to experience negative emotions (Subotnik et al., 2011). Such emotions may manifest across multiple life domains and hinder individuals' efforts toward self-actualization (Yılmaz, 2015). From this perspective, addressing underachievement is essential as it represents a phenomenon that can affect individuals not only in the academic domain but also across broader areas of life (Željeznov Seničar & Kukanja Gabrijelčič, 2025).

Achievement is influenced by multiple factors, including individual characteristics, family, school, and peers (Üredi & Üredi, 2005). Underachievement among gifted students is

likewise a complex phenomenon shaped by both intrapersonal and interpersonal factors (Desmet et al., 2020). Underachievement can be viewed as a learned behavior that may be reinforced by families, schools, or broader cultural contexts (Siegle et al., 2021). Identifying the factors that contribute to and sustain underachievement is essential for understanding its dynamics and for preventing and reversing the problem (Davis et al., 2014). In addition to being a multidimensional phenomenon, underachievement can evolve into a self-reinforcing cycle over time in which repeated experiences of low performance lead to weakened self-efficacy beliefs, reduced motivation, and diminished intrinsic interest in learning (Snyder & Linnenbrink-Garcia, 2013). This process negatively affects learning-related behaviors, such as goal setting, effort investment, and the use of effective learning strategies, thereby contributing to the persistence of underachievement as a core cognitive-affective mechanism (Raoof et al., 2024). Synthesizing these definitions, the present study conceptualizes underachievement as a persistent and context-sensitive discrepancy between a gifted student's demonstrated high cognitive potential and academic performance that falls below both personal capacity and classroom expectations. Within the scope of this research, underachievement is operationally defined as a relative mismatch between identified intellectual ability and school performance, as perceived by the student, teachers, and parents and supported by academic indicators.

Gifted Students

Giftedness refers to a natural capacity shaped by the interaction of genetic and environmental factors, characterized by an individual's exceptionally high learning speed, problem-solving ability, and potential compared to peers in specific domains (Sternberg & Davidson, 2005). This capacity may manifest across multiple dimensions, including cognitive, creative, artistic, leadership, and academic domains, and may emerge at varying rates and levels throughout an individual's developmental trajectory (Subotnik et al., 2011). The literature emphasizes that high potential is not limited to overt performance and may remain latent when appropriate environmental and educational conditions are not provided, thus failing to be reflected in actual achievement (Pfeiffer, 2013). Accordingly, giftedness is conceptualized as a holistic combination of innate strengths and the internal and external factors that shape the development of these strengths across the lifespan (Renzulli & Reis, 2014).

Gifted students are individuals who possess markedly superior natural abilities compared to their peers in cognitive, creative, social, or domain-specific areas (Gagné, 2004). These natural abilities directly influence learning speed, problem-solving capacity, and abstraction skills (Davis et al., 2014). When such abilities are supported through appropriate environmental conditions and systematic educational opportunities, high potential can be transformed into outstanding performance (Subotnik et al., 2011). The process through which potential is converted into performance is shaped by the continuous interaction of internal factors, such as motivation and self-perception, and external factors, including family, educational settings, and cultural context (Gagné,

2004). This developmental perspective offers a theoretical framework for understanding the multidimensional nature of giftedness, distinguishing between natural abilities and systematically developed talents (Sternberg & Davidson, 2005).

The developmental trajectories of gifted students are typically heterogeneous, and rapid progress in cognitive domains does not always proceed in parallel with social and emotional development (Neihart et al., 2002). When this pattern of development is combined with characteristics such as heightened sensitivity, intense emotional experiences, and perfectionism, students may encounter various challenges in their social adjustment and academic experiences (Subotnik et al., 2011). When classroom needs are not adequately addressed through standard curricula, students' learning motivation may decline, and the risk of a mismatch between potential and actual performance may increase (Rogers, 2007). Therefore, it is critically important not only to identify gifted students but also to provide continuous, evidence-based supports that are responsive to their individual characteristics (Pfeiffer, 2013).

Underachievement in Gifted Students

Underachievement is fundamentally defined as a discrepancy between a student's expected potential and actual performance (Dowdall & Colangelo, 1982). Similarly, it is described as an inconsistency between a child's school performance and indicators of actual ability derived from intelligence, achievement, or creativity tests, as well as observational data (Davis et al., 2014). In this context, the mismatch between ability and performance represents one of the primary criteria most frequently used by educators when defining underachievement (Hoover-Schultz, 2005). Gifted students who experience underachievement demonstrate high ability on measures of intelligence yet fail to perform at a level commensurate with their potential in school settings (Baum et al., 1995). However, underachievement and low achievement are distinct concepts. While some underachieving students may perform below average, others may achieve at an average or even above-average level despite functioning below their potential (Sak, 2020).

Different approaches have been proposed regarding the types of underachievement. This phenomenon is commonly classified into two categories: situational and chronic underachievement (Siegle, 2013). Situational underachievement refers to a pattern that emerges only under specific conditions and does not persist over time. In such cases, students may demonstrate unexpectedly low performance in limited contexts, such as when faced with a particularly challenging assignment or a demanding teacher (Baslanti & McCoach, 2006; Siegle, 2013). In contrast, chronic underachievement is characterized by a more consistent and recurring pattern and is often resistant to intervention (Baslanti & McCoach, 2006). It is also emphasized that underachievement should not be attributed to a learning disability and should represent a long-term pattern of performance (Reis & McCoach, 2000). When a gifted student fails to reach at least the average achievement level of peers in the same classroom, the possibility of underachievement should be

carefully considered (Collins et al., 2023). Research further indicates that patterns of underachievement among gifted students change with age (Renzulli & Reis, 2014). As educational level increases, grades become more salient, making underachievement more visible (Siegle, 2013). If appropriate measures are not taken during adolescence, students may develop increasingly negative attitudes toward school, which can potentially lead to serious long-term outcomes, such as school dropout (Collins et al., 2023). Therefore, the early identification of underachievement indicators during adolescence and the timely provision of appropriate interventions are of critical importance (Željeznov Seničar & Kukanja Gabrijelčič, 2025).

Factors Associated with Underachievement and the Achievement Orientation Model

Various theoretical models have been proposed to explain the causes of underachievement among gifted students. These models are generally examined within frameworks that emphasize individual, familial, and school-related factors (Baker et al., 1998). Individual causal models primarily associate underachievement with students' motivational, cognitive, and behavioral characteristics (Davis et al., 2014). Factors such as negative self-concept, low self-efficacy beliefs, psychological difficulties, academic skill deficits, lack of effective study habits, low academic motivation, and insufficient school readiness are frequently highlighted as individual factors related to underachievement (McCoach & Siegle, 2003). In this context, individual factors are regarded as core components that directly influence the process through which students' potential is transformed into academic performance (Reis & McCoach, 2000).

In addition to individual factors, family and school contexts also play a decisive role in the emergence and persistence of underachievement (Davis et al., 2014). The family is one of the primary environmental systems that shape a child's academic development, and family interaction patterns and parenting styles may contribute to underachievement (Chere & Hlalele, 2014). Family-related factors are commonly classified as relatively modifiable factors, such as overprotective or authoritarian parenting, overly permissive attitudes, and parental inconsistency, and factors that are difficult to change, such as parental death, divorce, chronic family conflict, and low family resilience (Matthews et al., 2014). Following the family, the school environment represents another central context influencing students' development (Baker et al., 1998). A mismatch between students' individual needs and the academic, social, and pedagogical structure of the school, along with unengaging instructional practices, highly competitive climates, peer pressure, and curricula that are not aligned with students' ability levels, may all contribute to underachievement (Rimm, 2002). Underachievement is therefore not attributed to a single context, but is emphasized as a multidimensional phenomenon that develops through the interaction of individual, familial, and school-based factors (Željeznov Seničar & Kukanja Gabrijelčič, 2025). Accordingly, addressing underachievement from a holistic perspective is essential for a deeper understanding of the phenomenon and for the development of effective interventions (Raoof et al., 2024).

The process of increasing students' school engagement and academic achievement involves a complex interaction of numerous individual and environmental variables (Reis & McCoach, 2000). This complexity becomes particularly pronounced in the case of gifted students, as high cognitive potential does not necessarily imply that motivational processes will be inherently strong (McCoach & Siegle, 2003). Among the theoretical approaches proposed to explain the factors that support or hinder gifted students' academic motivation, Siegle and McCoach's Achievement Orientation Model offers an essential conceptual framework. This model emphasizes the decisive role of students' beliefs and perceptions in initiating, sustaining, and completing academic tasks (Siegle et al., 2017). It also provides a functional lens for understanding the motivational patterns of gifted students who experience underachievement (Barbier et al., 2019).

The Achievement Orientation Model focuses on three core self-perception domains that shape students' academic behaviors. According to the model, a student's belief that they can successfully perform a task before initiating it, namely self-efficacy, is a prerequisite for academic engagement (Siegle et al., 2017). In addition, the extent to which students perceive a given task or academic success as meaningful and valuable constitutes the task value dimension (McCoach & Siegle, 2003). When tasks do not align with students' interests, goals, and expectations, motivation is likely to decline. Within the environmental perceptions dimension, students' views of their teachers, family, and school climate as supportive, fair, and safe strengthen their willingness to invest effort (Siegle et al., 2017). The interaction of these three dimensions activates students' self-regulation skills, enabling them to engage in academic tasks and achieve success (Barbier et al., 2019).

Present Study

Although the multidimensional nature of underachievement among gifted students has been examined extensively in the literature, studies that investigate this phenomenon through students' subjective experiences while simultaneously considering the perspectives of multiple stakeholders remain limited. Underachievement is not confined to a decline in academic performance; rather, it represents a complex pattern of experience encompassing students' motivational processes, self-efficacy beliefs, identity development, and school experiences. In this context, while approaches that address individual, familial, and school-related factors separately have made significant contributions, there is a clear need for qualitative and holistic studies that reveal how these factors interact within students' everyday experiences. For gifted students in adolescence, underachievement becomes even more complex due to increasing academic expectations, intensified social comparisons, and accelerated identity development. Case studies that focus directly on students' lived experiences during this period make it possible to understand not only the causes of underachievement but also how it is experienced. Moreover, how parents and teachers perceive students' experiences of underachievement, how these perceptions converge or diverge, and how they shape students' academic trajectories constitute an important area of inquiry. Potential

mismatches between parental expectations, teacher interpretations, and students' subjective experiences may play a decisive role in either maintaining or reversing underachievement. Therefore, studies that integrate the perspectives of multiple stakeholders contribute to the development of more realistic and functional school-based interventions and psychoeducational support programs.

Within this framework, it is evident that multiple factors interact in both the emergence and the reversal of underachievement. Therefore, addressing underachievement from both a contextual and an individual perspective may enable a more holistic understanding of the phenomenon. Accordingly, the main purpose of this study is to examine the experiences of gifted students who exhibit underachievement through a case study approach from the perspectives of students, parents, and teachers. In line with this primary aim, the following research questions were addressed:

1. How do gifted students experience underachievement?
2. What are parents' perspectives on underachievement?
3. What are teachers' perspectives on underachievement?
4. In what ways do the personal perceptions of students, parents, and teachers regarding underachievement converge and diverge?

Methodology

Research Design

As this study aims to examine in depth the experiences of gifted students who exhibit underachievement, it was conducted using a case study design, a qualitative research method. Case study research is a design that enables a detailed understanding of complex and multidimensional phenomena within their real-life contexts and is frequently preferred in applied fields such as education (Merriam, 2013; Yin, 2004). Within this approach, the researcher examines a contemporary phenomenon in its natural setting, describes the case through multiple data sources, and identifies emerging thematic patterns (Creswell, 2016).

In this study, an embedded multiple case study design, a type of case study design, was employed. In this design, the phenomenon under investigation is examined through various units of analysis to achieve a holistic understanding of its different dimensions (Yin, 2004). Accordingly, the groups that play an active role in and are affected by the experiences of gifted students who exhibit underachievement, namely the students themselves, their parents, and their teachers were treated as separate units of analysis. The research process consisted of formulating the research questions, collecting data from the relevant units of analysis, relating the data to the research questions, and analyzing and interpreting the findings. This structure enabled the phenomenon of underachievement to be examined in depth and within its contextual framework by incorporating multiple perspectives.

Participants

The study group consisted of two gifted students who exhibiting underachievement, were enrolled in the Science and Art Center (BILSEM), and were attending the 9th grade, as well as the mothers and subject teachers of these students. The study group was determined using purposive sampling. Several criteria were employed to identify the study group. The criteria referred to here may be developed by the researcher or based on a previously established set of criteria (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). Within the scope of the study, the criteria used to determine the participants were as follows:

• The student has been officially identified as a gifted individual in the domain of general intellectual ability.

• In addition to being identified as gifted, the student does not have a diagnosis such as a specific learning disability or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.

• The student was placed, based on the High School Entrance Examination (LGS), in a school outside the top 2% group of schools admitting students through the central examination.

• The student identifies themselves as underachieving (i.e., perceives their performance as below their potential) and/or demonstrates academic achievement below the classroom norm.

• According to the views of subject teachers and the school counselor/psychological counselor, the student is also considered to exhibit underachievement.

Based on these criteria, it was determined that the students selected for participation in the study did not exhibit absolute underachievement but rather demonstrated relative underachievement. The profiles of the identified students are presented in Table 1.

In addition to the students, interviews were also conducted with their mothers and their subject teachers at the Science and Art Center (BILSEM). The mother of the student named Ela is 41 years old, works in the field of accounting, and has one child. The mother of the student, Emir, is 36 years old and a homemaker. She has two children, with Emir being her first child. Ela receives instruction in mathematics and information technologies at BILSEM. Therefore, an interview was conducted with her mathematics teacher, who reported having known Ela for five years. Emir receives instruction in information technologies and philosophy; accordingly, an interview was conducted with his information technologies teacher, who reported having known Emir for six years.

Table 1. *Profiles of the Participants*

	Ela[1]	Emir[1]
Age	14	15
Gender	Female	Male
Grade	9th grade	9th grade
Age at which giftedness was identified	4th grade	3rd grade
Area of identification	General intellectual ability	General intellectual ability
IQ score	145	151
LGS score and percentile rank	397 points - 11 %	382 points - 24 %
First semester grade point average	93	85
Presence of an additional diagnosis	None	None[2]

[1] *The real names of the participants were not used.*

[2] *The student's mother reported that the student named Emir applied to a child and adolescent psychiatrist twice, once during primary school and once during the final year of high school, due to a suspicion of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder; however, no diagnosis was made.*

Data Collection

To examine students' experiences of underachievement in depth, two separate semi-structured interview forms were developed for students and parents based on the Achievement Orientation Model. Interviews are considered one of the most effective ways of gaining insight into individuals' knowledge, feelings, and thoughts on various topics (Creswell, 2016; Merriam, 2013). The questions in the interview forms were designed to address the core components of the Achievement Orientation Model, including self-efficacy, task value, environmental perceptions, self-regulation, and questions encompassing more than one of these components. In addition to the theoretical framework, previous studies conducted in this field were consulted during the development of the questions (Barbier et al., 2019). Due to teachers' heavy workloads, interviews could not be conducted with teachers. Instead, teachers' views were collected using a questionnaire developed by the researchers. The teacher questionnaire consisted of items in a yes-or-no format, as well as several open-ended questions. Furthermore, expert opinions were obtained from two field specialists, one in gifted education and one in qualitative research methodology, to ensure the content and construct validity of the data collection instruments. The experts reviewed the clarity, relevance, and comprehensiveness of the interview questions in relation to the theoretical framework of the Achievement Orientation Model. Based on their feedback, several items were revised for linguistic clarity, redundant questions were removed, and probing questions were added to deepen the exploration of self-efficacy, goal valuation, environmental perceptions, and self-regulation dimensions. After revisions were made in line with expert feedback, the student and parent interview forms were finalized and administered to the participants. Specifically, several questions were reworded to enhance clarity and alignment with the Achievement Orientation Model. For example, the original student question, "Do you think you are successful at school?" was revised to "How do you evaluate your academic performance in relation to your abilities?" in order to elicit responses related to self-efficacy and perceived competence. Additionally, probing questions were added to explore dimensions such as goal valuation (e.g., "How important

is academic success to you and why?") and environmental perceptions (e.g., "How do your teachers' expectations influence your effort?"). In the parent form, general questions about academic performance were refined to focus more explicitly on observed motivational patterns and self-regulation behaviors.

In the data collection process, BILSEM were first contacted to identify students who met the criteria specified within the scope of the study. Subsequently, consent for participation was obtained from the students' parents. Data were collected through interviews conducted with the students and their mothers via an online meeting platform on predetermined dates and times. Teachers were asked to complete the questionnaire developed for the study, which was sent to them electronically. Parent interviews lasted between 35 and 45 minutes, whereas student interviews ranged from 40 to 70 minutes. Interviews were conducted first with the students' mothers and then with the students. Before the interviews, participants were informed about the purpose of the study and issues related to confidentiality.

Data Analysis

Content analysis is an analytical approach that enables the systematic examination of individuals' experiences, perceptions, and meaning-making processes and aims to derive concepts and themes from the data inductively. It is emphasized that content analysis is an effective method for analyzing dense and multi-layered datasets, particularly within the scope of case studies (Patton, 2014). Before initiating the data analysis process, the data were organized and prepared for analysis as recommended in case study research (Merriam, 2013). In this context, audio recordings obtained from the interviews were transcribed verbatim, the entire data set was reviewed holistically, and meaningful units of data were identified. During the analysis process, the data were first examined through open coding, and conceptually similar statements were grouped to form codes. By considering the relationships among these codes, higher-order themes were developed, and the themes were structured in line with the research questions.

The aim of the content analysis process is not to provide a superficial description of the data but to reveal the conceptual structures that can explain participants' experiences and the relationships among these structures (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). Accordingly, the themes derived from the data were defined and interpreted within the context of the research. The analysis process was carried out through the stages of coding the data, generating themes, organizing the data according to the codes and themes, and interpreting the findings. In this way, the data were presented in a systematic and coherent structure that the reader can readily understand. The coding process was conducted iteratively, and codes were revisited multiple times to ensure internal consistency. Throughout the analysis, analytic memos were kept to document emerging interpretations and decision-making processes. In addition, peer debriefing was conducted through regular discussions between the authors, during which developing codes and themes were critically reviewed and refined. An audit trail was maintained to

provide transparency regarding how raw data were transformed into codes and themes. Furthermore, data triangulation across student interviews, parent interviews, and teacher questionnaires strengthened the credibility and dependability of the findings.

Role of the Researcher

In qualitative research, the researcher plays an active role in the construction, interpretation, and representation of data. In the present study, the first author conducted the interviews and carried out the primary stages of data analysis. Given her professional background in psychological counseling and experience working with gifted students, she was familiar with the educational context of BILSEM. While this familiarity facilitated rapport-building and in-depth data collection, efforts were made to minimize potential bias by adhering closely to the semi-structured interview protocol and by maintaining reflexive awareness throughout the research process.

During the analysis phase, codes and themes were reviewed collaboratively by the authors. Emerging interpretations were discussed, and discrepancies were resolved through consensus. To enhance credibility, direct quotations were included to support thematic interpretations, and analytic decisions were documented systematically. Throughout the study, the researchers adopted a reflective stance, critically examining how their professional experiences and assumptions might influence data interpretation.

Findings

In this section, the experiences of underachievement among the students named Ela and Emir will be examined separately from their perspectives. Subsequently, the prominent themes emerging from the participants' profiles will be discussed.

Ela

Perceptions of Achievement

Ela defines a successful person as someone who *"has a goal, does not procrastinate, has motivation, and does not lose that motivation."* She describes an unsuccessful person as someone who *"has no goals," "loses motivation quickly,"* and *"gives up by saying either 'I can already do this' or 'I can never do this anyway.'"* From her mother's perspective, a successful person is described using terms such as *"organized," "disciplined," "planned," "psychologically strong,"* and *"able to cope well with problems."* In this respect, although Ela and her mother emphasize somewhat different characteristics in their definitions of a successful person, their views overlap particularly in terms of *"resilience."* Moreover, the mother's definition of a successful person appears to be similar to the words she uses to describe Ela herself. According to her mother, Ela is described as *"talented," "determined," "disciplined," "principled,"* and *"someone who experiences psychological ups and downs."* It is also noteworthy that one of the descriptors used by Ela's teacher when talking about her is *"determined."*

Perceptions of Ela's level of success differ across her own, her mother's, and her teacher's perspectives. While Ela is viewed by her teacher as an unsuccessful student, performing below her potential, she is described by her mother as a successful student. Ela herself evaluates her level of success as moderate. To illustrate these perceptions more concretely, when Ela, her mother, and her teacher were asked to rate Ela's level of success on a scale from 1 to 10, Ela rated herself a 6, her mother rated her a 9, and her teacher rated her a 4. According to her mother, Ela cannot be considered fully successful due to her fluctuations, whereas Ela attributed her own rating to the absence of a clear goal. It was also stated that before the pandemic, this rating might have been an 8 or 9, although not a full 10.

In addition, the negative effects of distance education and the pandemic period on changes in achievement were identified as common points expressed by both Ela and her mother. Ela's statement is as follows:

"In terms of motivation, nothing really changed, but when I started high school, before getting to know anyone, the courses were divided into tracks, and we started with distance education; that affected me a bit. There was a slight decline in my grades, but my motivation was not affected."

Her mother explained this situation as follows:

"From primary school until the pandemic period, we had no problems with Ela. I am not saying this just because she is my daughter; she has never caused us any concern, and that remains the case in every respect. However, the pandemic period affected us very seriously. When the pandemic began, we were unable to experience a normal transition from middle school to high school. From March 8th onward, they attempted to attend classes from home. While everyone, from the vice principal to the classroom teacher, was supporting us and expecting her to be admitted to the best high school here, we were unable to achieve the score we wanted due to the pandemic. No matter how you look at it, it had an impact. The pandemic affected us in every aspect."

Manifestation of the Components of the Achievement Orientation Model in Ela's Behaviors

Based on the interviews conducted with the student, the behaviors related to the components of the Achievement Orientation Model, as manifested in the student named Ela, are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. *Ela's Behaviors According to the Components of the Achievement Orientation Model*

Themes	Codes
Self-efficacy	• Preferring challenging tasks • Inability to set goals • Believing that one possesses the necessary qualities to succeed in classes • Making an effort to achieve goals

	• Believing in one's ability to succeed • Experiencing a low level of fear of failure
Task value	• Not perceiving high grades as important • Social benefits (teacher and peer relationships) • Enjoying the process • Knowing that there will be a positive reward as an outcome • Sense of obligation
Environmental perceptions	• Perceiving the family as mostly supportive • Perceiving no influence from peers • Positive attitudes toward and relationships with teachers • Not perceiving courses with low achievement as challenging • Disliking courses in which low achievement is demonstrated
Self-regulation	• Not procrastinating • Using strategies that are effective for oneself • Taking responsibility for tasks • Influence of changing conditions on effort • Recognizing sources of motivation

First, Ela's experiences related to self-efficacy can be summarized as preferring challenging tasks, being unable to set goals, believing that she possesses the necessary qualities to succeed in her classes, making an effort to achieve goals, believing that she can succeed, and experiencing a low level of fear of failure. During the interview with Ela's mother, it was also stated that Ela prefers challenging tasks, possesses the necessary qualities to succeed, puts forth sufficient effort, and experiences a fear of failure during certain periods. In this respect, the self-efficacy perceptions of the student and her mother appear to be consistent. From the teacher's perspective, the questionnaire results indicated shared self-efficacy perceptions with Ela and her mother in terms of possessing the necessary qualities to succeed in classes, preferring challenging tasks, and experiencing fear of failure in timed examinations. However, according to the teacher, Ela does not believe that she can be academically successful. Finally, despite not having specific goals, Ela is generally perceived as being determined to achieve her goals. This situation was expressed by Ela as follows:

"In terms of goals, I don't really have a specific goal, but I don't give up by saying 'I can't do this anyway.' If I need to sit down and study for a course, I can find the motivation within myself; I push myself, or when someone tells me that I can't do something, I become even more determined and push myself harder… (when I fail to reach a goal) I set a new goal and convince myself even more that I can achieve it. If I couldn't obtain something I wanted before, I put in more effort and showed higher performance afterward."

From the perspective of task value, Ela's behaviors can be summarized as not perceiving high grades as important, valuing social benefits (such as teacher and peer relationships), enjoying the process, and knowing that a positive reward will follow as an outcome. Ela expressed this situation as follows:

"…I really enjoy doing research, and if I have a friend I'm studying with, going through this process together becomes very enjoyable. Even if I continue on my own, I move forward by keeping in mind that I will gain something good at the end of the process."

While her mother shared similar perceptions regarding the lack of importance placed on high grades, she also emphasized the necessity of the task:

"For Ela, if she is given a task, she does not do it for a grade or anything else; she does it because the task has been assigned and she feels she needs to complete it. It's not about whether she will get points or not."

The teacher also stated that high grades are not crucial for Ela in terms of task value, but noted that intrinsic factors such as *"being interested," "enjoying," "producing,"* and *"being helpful,"* as well as extrinsic factors such as *"receiving a certificate"* and *"receiving a monetary reward,"* are influential in the student's engagement with tasks. From a task value perspective, it is evident that Ela's and the teacher's perceptions largely overlap.

About environmental perceptions, Ela's behaviors can be summarized as perceiving her family as mostly supportive, perceiving no influence from peers, having positive attitudes toward and relationships with teachers, not perceiving courses in which she demonstrates low achievement as challenging, and disliking courses in which she shows low achievement. In addition, both her mother and teacher stated that Ela's environmental perceptions regarding family and teachers are generally positive. Finally, Ela expressed that excessive family involvement can sometimes have a disruptive effect:

"My mother talks to me a lot; I share things with her, and she constantly tells me to study. But I have this trait: if I'm already in the mood to study, I'll study a lot if necessary. However, if I'm about to study and someone tells me to study, I get irritated and decide not to study."

In terms of self-regulation, Ela's behaviors can be summarized as avoiding procrastination, utilizing effective strategies for herself, taking responsibility for tasks, adjusting her level of effort in response to changing conditions, and recognizing her sources of motivation. Although she reported exhibiting self-regulated behaviors in many respects, she also noted that changing conditions sometimes led to a decrease in the effort she displayed. She expressed this situation as follows:

"I think I put in a good amount of effort, not during the pandemic period, but I put in much more effort in previous years. Some things happened to my friends that also happened to me. My study habits changed as well; I couldn't replicate the school routine at home. At school, you review the lesson when you get home in the evening, but that didn't happen at home."

It was observed that her mother's perceptions regarding self-regulation were similar to Ela's and that they emphasized the same points. In addition, although it was stated that Ela does not procrastinate on her tasks, it was noted that when faced with multiple tasks, she tends to leave the subject she likes least until the end.

"If she has responsibilities, she completes them first and then plays games or uses her phone. However, while studying, she usually prioritizes the subjects she enjoys. For example, if she has math and history homework, history is the subject she likes least. She leaves the history homework for last and does the math first."

Similar to the views expressed by Ela and her mother, the teacher reported that Ela does not procrastinate on her tasks, uses certain strategies, fulfils her responsibilities, and demonstrates sufficient effort in her coursework; however, it was also noted that she does not study regularly. In this respect, the perceptions of the student, her mother, and her teacher can be mainly considered consistent. Additionally, a higher level of consistency was observed in the emphasis placed by both the student and her mother on the negative impact of the pandemic period.

In conclusion, various components of the Achievement Orientation Model contribute to Ela's low academic performance. While Ela holds positive self-perceptions regarding her ability to perform better (self-efficacy) and perceives her teachers and family environment as largely supportive, and views school lessons more negatively (environmental perceptions), low levels of self-regulatory behaviors (self-regulation) and a lack of intrinsic motivation toward school tasks (task value) have been influential in the emergence and maintenance of underachievement. Moreover, it was observed that a substantial portion of Ela's negative personal perceptions related to these components were directed toward school lessons, whereas she held more positive perceptions regarding BILSEM.

Factors Facilitating and Hindering Achievement

Ela stated that her interest in the subject matter and the influence of her teachers played a role in the courses in which she demonstrated high achievement:

"I'm better at foreign languages and mathematics. I was delighted with my mathematics teachers; they always made me like mathematics, and maybe if that hadn't been the case, I wouldn't have liked it. As for English, it's not the same. I've been very interested in English since I was young; I have an aptitude for it. Teachers matter too, but I also have my own interests, and I enjoy it."

Both her mother and her teacher also believed that Ela's enjoyment of the subjects contributed to her higher achievement in those courses. On the other hand, Ela stated that the courses in which she demonstrated lower achievement were boring:

"I'm not good at verbal courses like history and literature. For example, in history classes, there are too many dates and wars. Repeating those kinds of things really bores me."

This situation was expressed by her mother as follows:

"I think it's because she doesn't like history. She studies because it's a requirement; are her grades low? No, but she studies out of obligation. In general, she doesn't like verbal courses."

The reasons for her low achievement were expressed by her teacher as follows:

"She experiences some difficulties with planning and managing her study process; she cannot find her areas of interest or the environment she wants in her current school, and she also has motivational problems, which occur periodically."

While the views of Ela and her mother regarding the reasons for her low achievement were largely consistent, it was observed that her teacher also referred to additional factors such as motivation, self-regulation, and the influence of the school environment.

Finally, the student's views regarding what would enable her to demonstrate better performance are as follows:

"Having a regular study routine, like my previous one, could lead to better performance. Attending the lesson at school, then reviewing it at home in the evening, and solving practice questions could help me perform better."

It was observed that the mother focused primarily on the teacher factor:

"The teacher is an important factor. She wants to be understood psychologically and to feel understood. Ela expects this as well. If she does not receive this closeness and support, her motivation decreases because the teacher influences her, and she becomes disengaged."

From the teacher's perspective, self-regulation skills, the provision of paternal support, and guidance services were emphasized:

"She needs to develop her self-regulation skills, and in terms of motivation, interventions targeting the expectancy and value components of expectancy-value theory seem to work well for Ela. The father should also be included in the process, as it is usually the mother who is active. One-to-one guidance sessions conducted in a safe environment may also be effective."

Emir

Perceptions of Achievement

Emir emphasized characteristics such as working hard, being willing, and subjective experience in his definitions of a successful person. He defined success and a successful person as follows:

"I think being successful first requires working hard, but working is actually a deep concept. To work, you need to be willing. As for what is needed to be willing, I honestly don't fully know, but I think you need to feel close to it. You need to build human relationships; that's

what working ultimately leads to. For example, this could be someone we care about deeply, or someone we admire who holds the same position or title we aspire to, and maybe we are striving for that. I believe that human relationships lie at the heart of effective work. That's how it is for working. But when it comes to success, working alone is not always enough. Sometimes I'm not even sure about this, but perhaps biological factors also have an effect. To put it somewhat bluntly, I think that no matter how much you train a monkey, it can never reach Einstein's level; genetics do matter. However, between one person and another, I don't think biological factors are the real barrier to success. There isn't that much difference in those biological factors. For instance, a person may not reach Einstein's level, but if they work as hard and reach a certain point, I think both have achieved the same level of success. To me, success is not a societal judgment, but rather a feeling that a person experiences internally."

The student defined an unsuccessful person as one who does not make an effort, gives up easily, and lacks analytical thinking.

"An unsuccessful person, so to speak, can be described as someone who complains a lot. They fail to put in any effort themselves and say things like 'you're lucky, I'm unlucky, that's why I'm unsuccessful.' I think unsuccessful people give up after failing once. In that sense, being unsuccessful is like not reflecting on oneself. I believe that not thinking analytically is the most important characteristic of unsuccessful people."

From Emir's mother's perspective, a successful person is defined using concepts such as *"working in a disciplined manner," "having dreams about the future,"* and *"making progress toward goals."* In this respect, although Emir and his mother emphasize somewhat different characteristics in their definitions of a successful person, it can be said that their views overlap particularly in terms of working hard and being willing to do so. Moreover, the mother's definition of a successful person also resembles the words she uses to describe Emir himself. According to his mother, Emir is described as *"determined"* and *"hardworking."* It is also noteworthy that one of the descriptors used by Emir's teacher when talking about him is *"productive."*

Perceptions of Emir's level of success differ across his own, his mother's, and his teacher's perspectives. While Emir does not consider himself highly successful, his teacher evaluates him as an unsuccessful student who is performing below his potential, and his mother describes him as academically low-achieving but highly successful in other areas. To illustrate these perceptions more concretely, when Emir, his mother, and his teacher were asked to rate Emir's level of success on a scale from 1 to 10, Emir rated himself a 7, his mother also rated him a 7, and his teacher rated him a 5. According to his mother, Emir demonstrates lower academic achievement due to a lack of self-discipline in his studies. In contrast, Emir explained his self-rating in relation to his goals and the steps he is taking toward becoming the person he wants to be.

In addition, regarding changes in achievement and motivation, Emir's mother stated that there had been no change in his performance and that school had always seemed boring to him. Emir, however, reported fluctuations in his motivation and mentioned that, with the transition from middle school to high school, there had been some positive changes in the courses in which he previously demonstrated lower achievement.

"There has actually been a difference in my school performance in terms of motivation. At the same time, though, I've also grown more distant from school. As time goes on, I get to know people at school, and a kind of cycle emerges: whenever I move up a level, going from primary school to middle school or from middle school to high school I initially look at people and think they seem like very good individuals, both students and teachers, knowledgeable and impressive. Then, as I get to know them better, I gradually feel disappointed and start to dislike school again. Schools are already the places where social relationships are most intense at my age. Due to my perception of insincerity in school environments, I don't particularly enjoy school. In terms of motivation, there is a notable difference: when I attend school classes now, I don't feel as bored as I used to. That's because the courses have become more challenging, which I enjoy more. Sometimes the content also includes things I already know, such as logic or mathematics. Subjects I like have started to appear more often, and that has increased my motivation at school."

Manifestation of the Components of the Achievement Orientation Model in Emir's Behaviors

Based on the interviews conducted with the student, the behaviors related to the components of the Achievement Orientation Model, as manifested in the student named Emir, are summarized in Table 3.

First, Emir's experiences related to self-efficacy can be summarized as preferring or not preferring challenging tasks depending on his areas of interest, believing that he does not possess the qualities he considers necessary for academic success (such as determination and willingness), showing determination in achieving goals related to his interests, exerting low effort in studying for courses, and not experiencing fear of failure. In the interview conducted with Emir's mother, it was also stated that Emir prefers more challenging tasks, possesses the qualities necessary to succeed in classes, but lacks the willingness to expend high effort to achieve goals in his areas of interest, and exhibits a periodic fear of failure in subjects such as mathematics and chemistry. In this respect, Emir's and his mother's perceptions of self-efficacy appear to be consistent. From the teacher's perspective, the questionnaire responses indicated that perceptions of self-efficacy, particularly regarding possessing the necessary qualities to succeed in classes, preferring challenging tasks, and experiencing fear of failure in mathematics and some verbal courses, overlapped mainly with those of Emir's mother. However, according to the teacher, Emir does not believe that he can be academically successful.

Table 3. *Emir's Behaviors According to the Components of the Achievement Orientation Model*

Themes	Codes
Self-efficacy	• Preferring or not preferring challenging tasks depending on areas of interest • Believing that one does not possess the necessary qualities for academic success (such as determination and willingness) • Demonstrating determination in achieving goals related to areas of interest • Exerting low effort in studying for courses • Not experiencing fear of failure
Task value	• Not perceiving high grades as important • Not repeating a grade • Perceiving the outcome or gain as necessary
Environmental perceptions	• Perceiving the family as supportive • Perceiving no influence from peers • Mostly negative attitudes toward and relationships with teachers at school • Disliking the courses in which low achievement is demonstrated • Perceiving the courses in which low achievement is demonstrated as unnecessary
Self-regulation	• Mostly procrastinating on school-related tasks • Using strategies that are effective for oneself • Partially taking responsibility for tasks • Not demonstrating regular engagement • Exerting low effort in studying for courses

Finally, it is observed that Emir's self-efficacy perceptions differ considerably both across the institutions he attends and across subject areas. For example, he expressed his preference for challenging tasks as follows:

"It actually depends on the field of the task. When I'm working on an assignment in information technologies or philosophy, I honestly prefer to be challenged, because if I'm challenged, I develop more in that area. However, for a school project, such as one in biology, physics, or literature, I would prefer to take on a project at a level I can manage. In other words, I prefer to be challenged in things I like, and not to be challenged in things I don't like."

Similarly, he expressed his views regarding possessing the necessary qualities for success in courses as follows:

"I think the qualities required to be successful in classes include determination, but I don't believe school itself has that much impact. For example, I think Koç University opens a quota for students regardless of exam scores. As far as I know, this is done through interviews. I'm not fully informed about the details, and I don't know whether things like favoritism exist, but I don't think everything is about school. When I look at school, I don't see it as something that deserves that much importance, so I don't really want to work very hard for it. The most important thing for being successful in classes is willingness, and since I don't have that, I

don't think I can be successful in school courses right now-or rather, I'm not successful anyway. But I know as much as I need to."

From the perspective of task value, Emir's behaviors can be summarized as not perceiving high grades as important, not repeating a grade, and perceiving the outcome or gain as necessary. Emir expressed this situation as follows:

"…For me, being successful means being able to understand the topics at school and not falling behind in the curriculum, but exam grades honestly have no importance to me. What I want is simply to be able to learn most of what is taught at school. However, when I consider how effective the school curriculum actually is, I place more importance on learning the things I personally think are valuable. My grades at school are not that important to me… What makes me do homework is not repeating a grade and not wasting time; that is what motivates me to complete an assignment. But if a homework task seems unimportant to me, I don't do it. For example, if my teacher says that I should solve 400 questions on a topic I already understand, I don't do it because I don't think it's necessary. For me, the motivation to study comes from whether something is necessary and whether what I will gain as a result is necessary."

From his mother's perspective, perceptions of task value are summarized as obligation, not receiving low grades, or liking the subject.

"He does school assignments out of obligation, to avoid getting low grades. But if it is a subject he is interested in, he does it for enjoyment."

The teacher also stated that high grades are essential for Emir in terms of task value, while emphasizing that factors such as *"the excitement of producing," "helping others," "recognition,"* and *"competition awards"* are influential in the student's engagement with tasks. From a task value perspective, it was observed that Emir's and his mother's perceptions showed greater consistency with each other than with those of the teacher.

Regarding environmental perceptions, Emir's behaviors can be summarized as follows: he perceives his family as supportive, believes he does not influence peers, holds mostly negative attitudes toward and relationships with teachers at school, dislikes courses in which he demonstrates low achievement, and perceives those courses as unnecessary. It is observed that Emir's attitudes toward and relationships with his teachers differ across the school and BILSEM contexts. Emir expressed this situation as follows:

"I get along well with my teachers at BILSEM; I like them a lot. I don't know whether they like me, but they probably do. Do my teachers at school like me? Some do, some probably don't. But I think I don't like more than 90 percent of them; I don't get along with them very well. I think they have authority without having sufficient competence. Because of that, I have some antipathy toward them, not hatred, but a kind of negative feeling because I see them as insincere. I don't really like most of them, although there are one or two that I like at school. I like my geography teacher. Even when I don't do my homework, instead of asking

for excuses, he asks why I didn't do it, what I was actually interested in, and how that contributes to me. That's why I like my geography teacher. Besides that, I actually like my mathematics teacher; he seems intelligent and knowledgeable. I'm not sure whether he likes me, though. Since I don't always attend his classes, he might not like me very much, but that's not a problem for me."

Nevertheless, Emir's environmental perceptions are consistent with those of his mother and teachers in terms of perceiving the family as supportive. In contrast, from the perspectives of both his mother and his teacher, relationships with teachers (particularly in the BILSEM context) are evaluated more positively. Emir's relationships with his teachers were described by his mother as follows:

"His relationships with teachers are good. It's not very clear yet in high school because they haven't had much interaction. His relationships with his teachers at BILSEM are also good; his teachers like him, and Emir likes them as well. He doesn't have any problems with his teachers. His relationships with his teachers at BILSEM are definitely better, because they understand each other and share more common ground."

In terms of self-regulation, Emir's behaviors can be summarized as mostly procrastinating on school-related tasks, using effective strategies for himself, partially taking responsibility for tasks, demonstrating irregular engagement, and exerting low effort in studying for courses. However, it was noted that he exhibits different behaviors regarding procrastination in the school and BILSEM contexts:

"If it's an assignment given by school and I think it's unnecessary, which is often the case then I usually prioritize the things I enjoy. I think doing the things I enjoy at that moment and being able to work on different things is important for me, because it helps me find motivation to do other things later on. That's why school assignments come after my hobbies. However, for example, a task assigned by BILSEM or a workplace comes after my leisure activities only if there isn't a tight deadline. If it needs to be done immediately, then it takes precedence over them. So school assignments generally come after my leisure activities, whereas tasks given by BILSEM usually come before my leisure activities."

It was observed that his mother's perceptions regarding self-regulation (procrastination, using effective strategies, taking responsibility for tasks, and exerting low effort in studying) were consistent with Emir's own perceptions. However, the views of his BILSEM teacher regarding Emir's self-regulation process indicated that he does not procrastinate, uses strategies, fulfills his responsibilities, does not study regularly, and does not exert sufficient effort to be successful. When Emir's own statements regarding procrastination and fulfilling responsibilities in relation to BILSEM tasks are examined, they are also found to be consistent with his teacher's views.

In conclusion, various components of the Achievement Orientation Model contribute to Emir's low academic performance. While Emir holds positive self-perceptions regarding

his ability to perform better (self-efficacy), perceiving the school environment as unsupportive (environmental perceptions), exhibiting low levels of self-regulatory behaviors (self-regulation), and lacking intrinsic motivation toward school-related tasks (task value) have been influential in the emergence and maintenance of underachievement. Moreover, it was observed that a substantial portion of Emir's negative personal perceptions related to these components were directed toward school lessons, whereas he held more positive perceptions regarding BILSEM.

Factors Facilitating and Hindering Achievement

Emir stated that interest played a role in the courses in which he demonstrated high achievement.

"I think I am actually successful in information technologies because I know what I need to do, the content includes things I already know, and they are areas I am interested in. Other than that, I'm not really successful in many courses. In all of them, I know only as much as I need to just enough to pass the class. I don't know more than that. But even if I did know more, it wouldn't be a bad thing; it's not something negative."

Both his mother and his teacher also believe that Emir's enjoyment of the subjects plays a role in the courses in which he demonstrates high achievement. On the other hand, Emir stated that his lack of foundational knowledge in the courses in which he shows low achievement, as well as his prejudices toward those subjects, are influential factors in this situation.

"There may be things I missed in the past. In the past, for example, primary and middle school formed the foundation. However, as I mentioned, in primary and middle school, I wasn't aware of much; if someone told me something, I listened, but if not, I just stared blankly around. When I think about my past self, I see someone who was staring aimlessly. That's why I couldn't build a foundation back then. Now I'm trying to add things on top of a foundation that doesn't exist, and it doesn't work. However, in areas where I do have a foundation, such as programming, I'm successful. In the subjects I'm unsuccessful in, it's because I don't have a foundation, because of a phobia from the past, because of a fear, or a prejudice. I don't really have that prejudice now; I broke it, but now the problem is the lack of foundation. Because I had preconceived notions before, I couldn't establish a solid foundation, and it continued that way. I'm trying to fix it."

His mother also identified the lack of a foundational background as a reason for his low achievement. The teacher, on the other hand, cited *"negative experiences with primary school teachers," "fear of failing in courses," "insufficient studying,"* and *"devoting excessive time to areas of interest"* as reasons for his low achievement. While Emir's views and those of his mother regarding the reasons for his low achievement were largely consistent, the teacher pointed to additional factors.

Finally, the student's views regarding what would enable him to demonstrate better performance focused on addressing gaps in his knowledge.

"Knowing what I didn't know in the past and solving more practice questions could help me improve in mathematics. I'm a bit slow when it comes to math. For example, while other people solve a problem in about three minutes, I spend seven or eight minutes on it. Even with a simple multiplication, I pause before answering. For instance, 7 × 81, I might think about it for 15-20 seconds, whereas others usually calculate it in five or six seconds, maybe even faster. So becoming faster could actually help me be more successful. Being quicker and not having gaps in my knowledge."

The mother's views regarding what would enable him to demonstrate better performance are as follows:

"I honestly don't really have an answer to that. He has to want it himself. When he wants to, he sits down and studies quite well; he needs to be willing. But if he doesn't want to, he goes to the exam without studying."

From the teacher's perspective, recommendations focused on planning activities that took Emir's interests into account, as well as on task value and considerations related to teachers and the family context.

"Courses can be aligned with his areas of interest, the relationship between his future goals and academic subjects can be explained in line with his interests, teacher attitudes can be improved, and the family can receive training to provide effective support."

Teacher Questionnaire Findings

In order to make the teacher perspective more visible, the findings obtained from the teacher questionnaire were examined comparatively across the two cases. In Ela's case, the teacher reported that she possessed the cognitive ability necessary for high achievement and did not generally procrastinate on her tasks; however, she did not study regularly and experienced motivational fluctuations, particularly during the pandemic period. High grades were not identified as her primary source of motivation; instead, intrinsic factors such as enjoyment of the task and opportunities for production were emphasized. In Emir's case, the teacher acknowledged his high intellectual potential but noted that he did not consistently translate this potential into academic performance. The teacher highlighted negative attitudes toward school subjects, low perceived task value, irregular study habits, and insufficient effort as key contributors to his underachievement. Furthermore, while Emir was described as productive and capable in areas aligned with his interests, his engagement with school-based tasks was characterized as inconsistent. These findings, derived from the teacher questionnaire, both corroborate and extend the patterns identified in the student and parent interviews, thereby strengthening the triangulation of data sources.

Prominent Themes in the Participants' Profiles

An examination of the participants' profiles indicates that the development of underachievement differs between the two students. While the development of underachievement in the student named Ela appears to have been caused by situational conditions, a more chronic pattern of underachievement can be observed in the student named Emir. Second, Ela demonstrates more positive perceptions across the components of the Achievement Orientation Model. In contrast, Emir exhibits less positive perceptions regarding these components in the context of school-related courses. Nevertheless, some of the themes presented below had similar effects on the students' achievement in certain cases, while in other cases they produced different effects. These themes are examined below.

Distance Education

The impact of the distance education system implemented during the pandemic period varied among students. As previously mentioned, Ela described the pandemic period as one of the most influential factors contributing to a decline in her academic achievement and motivation, a view also shared by her mother. In contrast, Emir stated that the conditions created during the pandemic period played a significant role in improving his academic performance.

"For example, during the distance education period, I was able to allocate more time to mathematics and information technologies. Before distance education, things were like this: I would go to school, but because I had gaps from earlier years, I couldn't fully understand the lessons. When I got home, I wanted to focus on programming, but in reality, I needed to catch up on what I hadn't learned in previous courses and review the material taught that day. This was very restrictive for me and left me with little time. School hours were also very long, 7 to 8 hours, and with transportation, the total time was 8 to 8.5 hours. I spent a significant part of my day at school without really gaining anything. Distance education was very good for me because I was able to improve my mathematics to some extent, advance myself in programming, and find time for philosophy and psychology. That's why I think it would be better if distance education always existed. I also have a bit of a need for control; when things are under my control, I feel happier and more comfortable, and I'm not stressed. The rush, pressure, and struggle largely disappear."

Teacher-Student Relationships

The influence of developing positive relationships with teachers on academic achievement emerged in both student profiles. Both Ela and her mother identified positive relationships with teachers as contributing factors to Ela's success. In contrast, Emir's differentiated relationships with his teachers across the school and BILSEM contexts played a significant role in shaping his attitudes toward teachers, school, and

BILSEM. Emir expressed his attitudes toward school and toward his teachers at school and at BILSEM as follows:

"Honestly, I don't enjoy going to school at all; it feels like a waste of time to me. The time we spend on transportation and during breaks has actually made me grow distant from collective education, from being educated together with many people. I have some questions and doubts about education in this sense. For example, can one person truly educate another, and what kind of outcomes would emerge if people were not educated together? Due to these thoughts, I currently feel more drawn to individualized education or self-directed learning. I think people should be taught how to educate themselves and then be enabled to do so. I also have certain feelings toward teachers, not toward those at BILSEM, but generally toward teachers whom I perceive as lacking sufficient competence. I feel as if they are being insincere. When I was younger, I often idealized my teachers. I thought that since these people have educated others for many years, they must be highly competent and knowledgeable. Realizing otherwise has made me grow distant from many of my teachers. However, I don't have such feelings toward my teachers at BILSEM, because they are truly competent individuals."

Interest

It was observed that both students demonstrated high achievement in courses related to areas they enjoy. In contrast, courses in which lower achievement was demonstrated were perceived as boring and unnecessary.

Self-Regulation

For both students, one of the reasons for their low academic achievement was a lack of self-regulation skills. Ela described this situation as difficulty in adapting her study habits to changing conditions during the distance education process. From Emir's perspective, within the context of school courses, motivation and self-regulation skills emerged as some of the weaker areas in terms of the components of the Achievement Orientation Model.

Challenge

In Emir's case, a negative attitude toward school emerges as a dominant theme. However, he displays a more positive attitude toward BILSEM, where he finds opportunities to work in line with his interests and at an appropriate level. That Emir may develop a more positive attitude toward school when a level of challenge closer to his own abilities is provided can be inferred from the following statement:

"…Actually, when I attend school classes now, I don't feel as bored as I used to. Because the lessons have become more challenging, I enjoy them more. Additionally, sometimes topics arise that I already know, such as logic or mathematics. Subjects I like have started to appear more often, and because of that, my motivation at school has increased."

Prerequisite Skills

It was stated that one of the most important reasons for Emir's low achievement in mathematics, one of the subjects in which he demonstrated low performance, was his lack of the necessary foundational skills for the course.

Comparative Synthesis of Student, Mother and Teacher Perspectives

When the perspectives of students, mothers, and teachers are examined together, both converging and diverging patterns emerge across the components of the Achievement Orientation Model. In Ela's case, there is a relatively high level of alignment among the three perspectives. All parties acknowledge her high cognitive potential and generally positive environmental perceptions. Differences arise primarily in the evaluation of her academic consistency, with the teacher emphasizing irregular study habits more strongly than the student and her mother. In contrast, Emir's case reveals more pronounced discrepancies. While both Emir and his mother acknowledge his intellectual ability, they differ from the teacher in their interpretation of the reasons underlying his low academic performance. Emir attributes his underachievement largely to task value and perceived irrelevance of school subjects, whereas the teacher highlights insufficient effort and negative school attitudes. Across both cases, task value and self-regulation emerge as central mechanisms shaping the persistence of underachievement; however, the contextual triggers and subjective interpretations differ substantially. This comparative synthesis demonstrates that underachievement cannot be fully understood from a single perspective and reinforces the importance of integrating multiple stakeholder views.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study examined the experiences of two gifted high school students who exhibited underachievement through a case study approach based on the perspectives of the students themselves, their parents, and their teachers. The findings suggest that underachievement is a complex and context-sensitive phenomenon that cannot be attributed to a single cause, and that it manifests in different patterns as a result of the reciprocal interaction of individual, familial, and school-based factors. In this respect, the study supports the multidimensional approach to underachievement emphasized in the literature with qualitative data (Davis et al., 2014; Reis & McCoach, 2000). The results of the study are also consistent with the findings of the qualitative research conducted by Barbier et al. (2019), which identified factors influencing achievement among gifted students experiencing underachievement based on the components of the Achievement Orientation Model. In addition, the present study extends this framework by examining the elements of the Achievement Orientation Model across students' broader contexts through the inclusion of perceptions related to teachers and families.

The research findings revealed that the developmental patterns of underachievement differed markedly between the two students. While underachievement in Ela appeared to follow a pattern more closely associated with situational and environmental conditions,

Emir's underachievement emerged as a more chronic and long-term phenomenon. This distinction is consistent with studies in the literature that emphasize the differentiation between situational and chronic underachievement (Assouline et al., 2006; Baslanti & McCoach, 2006). Ela was found to maintain positive self-perceptions regarding her academic potential essentially. However, she experienced temporary fluctuations in performance due to motivational declines related to the pandemic period and the school context. In contrast, Emir's negative attitudes toward the school environment, combined with low task value and weak self-regulation skills, appear to have contributed to a more persistent pattern of underachievement.

The findings show that the components of Siegle and McCoach's Achievement Orientation Model emerged distinctively in the experiences of both students. In terms of the self-efficacy dimension, both students were found to have higher perceptions of competence in tasks related to their areas of interest, whereas this perception weakened in the context of school subjects, particularly for Emir. This finding indicates that self-efficacy may vary contextually and that a mismatch between the areas in which students feel competent and the school curriculum may increase the risk of underachievement. The literature likewise emphasizes that gifted students, despite their high potential, tend to avoid exerting effort in tasks they do not find meaningful or in which they do not perceive themselves as competent (Ridgley et al., 2021; Siegle & McCoach, 2005). When the task value dimension was examined, it was noteworthy that neither student viewed high grades as a primary source of motivation. For Ela, the process of the task, social interactions, and intrinsic satisfaction were prominent, whereas for Emir, the necessity of the task and its alignment with personal goals were decisive. This finding suggests that academic achievement in gifted students experiencing underachievement is more closely related to subjective meaning-making processes than to quantitative indicators of success. When tasks are not linked to students' interests and future goals, low engagement and effort may occur despite high potential (Landis & Reschly, 2013; Rubenstein et al., 2012). In the context of environmental perceptions, the findings demonstrate that the school environment, particularly teacher–student relationships, plays a significant role in underachievement. While Ela established largely positive relationships with her teachers both at school and at BILSEM, Emir developed strong distrust and negative perceptions toward teachers in the school context. Emir's perception of BILSEM teachers as competent and supportive, in contrast to his critical attitudes toward school teachers, clearly reveals the context-sensitive nature of environmental perceptions. This finding is consistent with previous studies, which indicate that teacher attitudes and the quality of learning environments directly affect the academic engagement of gifted students (Rayneri et al., 2006; Sambuis & Bourdin, 2024).

In terms of self-regulation skills, it is evident that both students experienced certain difficulties; however, the underlying reasons for these difficulties differed. For Ela, the structural changes brought about by the pandemic negatively impacted her study habits, whereas for Emir, a low perception of task value toward school assignments led to

procrastination and low effort. This finding indicates that self-regulation skills are closely related not only to individual competencies but also to how students perceive their environmental conditions (Oppong et al., 2019; Stoeger & Zeidner, 2019). Another noteworthy theme emerging from the study is the differentiated impact of the distance education process on students. While the pandemic period was perceived as a negative experience in terms of academic motivation and performance for Ela, Emir evaluated it positively, as it provided greater control, more time for areas of interest, and opportunities for individualized learning. This finding demonstrates the sensitivity of underachievement to contextual conditions, suggesting that standardized educational practices do not produce the same effects for every gifted student. It can be argued that educational environments structured without considering students' individual learning preferences and needs for control may hinder the transformation of potential into performance (Subotnik et al., 2011; Rayneri et al., 2006; VanTassel-Baska & Stambaugh, 2005).

In conclusion, this study reveals that underachievement in gifted students is not a unidimensional academic problem but rather a multilayered process shaped by the interaction of self-efficacy, task value, environmental perceptions, and self-regulation skills. Considering student, parent, and teacher perspectives together made similarities and differences among these perceptions visible, thereby contributing to a more holistic understanding of the causes of underachievement. The findings suggest that school-based interventions should not be limited solely to academic support, but rather incorporate multidimensional approaches that address students' motivational needs, teacher-student relationships, and self-regulation skills. In this respect, the study offers important implications for educational practices aimed at preventing underachievement among gifted students.

The findings of this study have direct implications for intervention practices within BILSEMs. Given that task value and self-regulation emerged as central mechanisms sustaining underachievement, intervention efforts should extend beyond academic acceleration and incorporate structured mentoring and motivational support systems. For students exhibiting situational underachievement, short-term mentoring programs focusing on goal-setting, expectancy-value awareness, and self-regulation training may help prevent the consolidation of chronic patterns. For students demonstrating more persistent underachievement, individualized mentoring relationships with teachers trained in gifted education may foster stronger academic identity development and task engagement. In addition, structured family training programs can be implemented to increase parental awareness of how autonomy-supportive communication, realistic expectations, and balanced monitoring influence students' motivational processes. Psychoeducational workshops addressing the differentiation between high potential and consistent performance may help families adopt more adaptive support strategies. At the institutional level, BILSEM practices may benefit from integrating periodic motivational assessments based on the components of the Achievement Orientation Model. Early

screening of declines in task value, environmental perceptions, or self-regulation may allow timely preventive interventions. Furthermore, professional development programs for teachers focusing on competence-supportive classroom practices, constructive feedback, and differentiated challenge levels may reduce the risk of underachievement.

Recommendations

The findings of this study suggest that underachievement in gifted students cannot be attributed solely to academic performance, but rather represents a complex process shaped by the interaction of motivational, affective, and contextual factors. Accordingly, the recommendations are presented across three dimensions: practice, policy, and research. It is recommended that guidance and psychological counseling services implemented in schools and BILSEM be structured to support the self-efficacy beliefs, task value, and self-regulation skills of gifted students experiencing underachievement. Establishing meaningful links between students' interests and academic tasks may increase engagement in the learning process. Enhancing teachers' awareness of underachievement and avoiding interpretations of low performance as mere lack of effort are particularly important. Informational activities for families should address the effects of parental attitudes toward academic achievement on students' motivation. Educational practices for gifted students should move beyond identification and academic acceleration to include motivational and psychosocial needs. In particular, the development of transition programs that support students' academic and emotional adjustment during critical periods such as the transition from middle school to high school may reduce the risk of underachievement. Strengthening alignment between school and BILSEM programs and incorporating this topic into teacher education processes are also essential. Future research is recommended to replicate and extend these findings through studies conducted with larger samples and in diverse contexts. Longitudinal and mixed-method designs may provide deeper insight into the developmental course of underachievement over time. In addition, studies that incorporate the perspectives of school administrators, school counselors, students, parents, and teachers may contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon.

Limitations

This study should be evaluated within certain limitations. First, the study was conducted as a qualitative case study with a limited number of participants. This restricts the generalizability of the findings and requires the results to be interpreted cautiously by researchers working in similar contexts. However, since the primary aim of case study research is to achieve an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon rather than to generalize findings, this limitation is inherent to the nature of the method. The data were collected based on self-reports from students, parents, and teachers. The subjective nature of participants' accounts of their experiences and perceptions may involve limitations such as social desirability bias or recall bias. In addition, data were collected

within a specific time frame, which does not allow for the examination of changes in underachievement over time. Finally, the study was conducted within a specific sociocultural context and in a limited number of schools and BILSEM. This may limit the transferability of the findings to different educational settings and contexts. Future research incorporating longitudinal designs and encompassing a wider range of contexts may help to address these limitations.

Ethical Approval: All ethical procedures were followed in this study. Ethical approval for the research was obtained from the Bartın University Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee. The ethics committee approval number is 2025-SBB-1078.

Author Contributions

Seda Yonar Uğurlu: Conceptualisation, Theoretical Background, Methodology, Data Analysis, Data Visualisation, Writing, Review and Editing.

Marilena Z. Leana Taşcılar: Conceptualisation, Data Analysis.

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