

Teachers' Perception and Attitude towards Gifted Students Focusing on Their Giftedness Characteristics in Primary Schools in Riyadh: Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

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Abstract: Gifted students are those who stand out among their peers who are the same age or grade level in terms of their remarkable intellectual or creative ability. This study aimed at investigates teachers' perceptions and attitudes toward gifted students with a focus on giftedness characteristics in mainstream primary schools in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Based on the theories of scholars in previous studies, the methodology of descriptive analysis of data, and direct interviews with teachers, the researcher found that Teachers typically had a good understanding of these characteristics. Furthermore, the researcher found that teachers have positive attitudes towards gifted students. The study highlights the urgent need for teacher training programs in the field of gifted education in The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Keywords: Teachers' perception- gifted students- gifted characteristics- Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

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تصورات المعلمين واتجاهاتهم تجاه الطلاب الموهوبين مع التركيز على خصائصهم الموهوبة في المدارس الابتدائية بمدينة الرياض: المملكة العربية السعودية

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وزارة التعليم | المملكة العربية السعودية

المستخلص: هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى استقصاء تصورات وآراء المعلمين تجاه الطلاب الموهوبين، أولئك الذين يتفوقون بين أقرانهم من نفس العمر أو المرحلة الصفية من حيث قدرتهم الملحوظة في مجالات الذكاء أو الإبداع، مع التركيز على سمات الموهوبين في المدارس الابتدائية العامة في الرياض- المملكة العربية السعودية، بناءً على نظريات العلماء في الدراسات السابقة، ومنهجية التحليل الوصفي للبيانات، والمقابلات المباشرة مع المعلمات، وجدت الباحثة أن المعلمات عادةً ما يمتلكن فهماً جيداً لهذه السمات. علاوة على ذلك، اتضح للباحثة أن المعلمات يحملن آراءً إيجابية تجاه الطالبات الموهوبات. كما تسلطت الدراسة الضوء على الحاجة الملحة لبرامج تدريب المعلمين في مجال تعليم الموهوبين في المملكة العربية السعودية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: تصورات المعلمين – الطلاب الموهوبين – خصائص الموهوبين – المملكة العربية السعودية.

1- INTRODUCTION

Giftedness is a general concept and can be understood differently by different people: academics, psychologists, teachers, parents and children themselves (Potential Plus UK (PPUK), 2013). There are several definitions of giftedness and many countries and organisations define gifted individuals according to their own perspective on giftedness (Gifted Journey, 2007-2014). Current researchers' work shows that gifted students (GS) are individuals who have sufficiently highly developed abilities in one or more skill domains (Reis and Renzulli, 2004). strongly disagrees that giftedness is an 'elite topic'. Instead, she believes it should be addressed in basic scientific research in recognition of the high levels of human potential of gifted children (GC) both socially and personally. The GC, she adds, should be included within the scope of learning and development psychology theories.

Like all other children, GS are enrolled in the education process to increase their knowledge and develop their capabilities. Due to their high abilities, teaching GS requires some changes in the school environment such as the curriculum and teachers' understanding and behaviour towards them. The education system ought to address the needs of GS to ensure their appropriate development in all aspects of life, such as academically, socially and emotionally (Drudy, 2005). Within equal rights education systems, it is a basic right of GC to have their needs met at school and Renzulli (1998) points out two main education aims of the gifted. From an individual perspective, education should provide opportunities to develop and express their talents so that they can achieve maximum self-fulfilment. From a social perspective, education should provide societies with producers of knowledge and skill who are able to find solutions to existing problems.

GC generally exhibit one or more characteristics of giftedness. Silverman (2013) denotes some gifted characteristics such as large vocabulary capacity, high learning ability, high energy levels, curiosity, strong memory and interest in the future. GC go through the same developmental stages as their peers but they tend to develop significantly earlier than their age peers. Because of this early development and their heightened intellectual abilities, GC may have different social and emotional experiences from their peers (Webb, 1994). Furthermore, as the differences increase, the social difficulties for the GC increase (National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC), 2009). Essentially, if parents, teachers and peers have affirmative attitudes and strive to meet the needs of the GC, this should create a better, more inclusive and comfortable environment for them.

In recent years, Anderson (2009, p.22) states that educating GS has started changing. In the past it was dominated by concerns about learning needs whereas now it takes into consideration social and emotional developments and needs too. Currently, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Ministry of Education (KSA MoE) is working hard to improve the state educational system. MoE maintains the rights of GS to receive an appropriate level of education so GS are, currently, one of the main targets of educational policies in KSA.

With a population of 20.3 million and net primary school enrolment rate of 96.5%, KSA focuses strongly on education (Central Department of Statistics and Information, 2012). GS have been receiving closer attention by MoE recently. Officially, GS were addressed for the first time in 1969 when the Saudi Council of Ministers endorsed the 'Education Policy in the Kingdom' which has been in use ever since. This document is considered the beginning of formal governmental and social interest towards gifted individuals. In the following 20 years, there was some fragmented attention to legal concerns for the gifted and talented and their families. Mostly, the focus was on moral and material rewards including scholarships in KSA and abroad.

This process continued with a second stage of legislation items covering the social and emotional understanding of GS. This lasted between 1990 and 1995 where a lot of work was done on the upbringing and education of GS. The most significant accomplishment of that period was raising public awareness of the value of gifted individuals in society. Tests and measures were employed as well to identify the gifted and provide them with the help they need. The majority of Saudi researchers engaged in the third and ongoing stage of the process are focused on ways to enhance science and mathematics instruction through the development of teaching strategies and subsequent MoE implementation of the strategies. (Fetzer, 2000)

2- hypotheses

This study aims to investigate the complicated relationships between teachers and their gifted pupils, with an emphasis on how teachers' attitudes and views may change with regard to various characteristics of giftedness. To that purpose, we put forth the following hypotheses, each of which speaks to a different aspect of our research:

1. Is there an indication of teachers' perception of the characteristics of gifted students at the primary stage?
2. Is there an indication of a positive attitude among teachers towards gifted students in the primary stage?

3- Aims of study

This study aims to investigate whether teachers understand GC's characteristics in mainstream schools in Riyadh, KSA. In addition, it investigates the teachers' attitudes towards GS. The study findings will be submitted to KSA MoE and King Abdul-Aziz and His Companions Foundation for Giftedness and Creativity (Mawhiba), hoping that MoE will find these results helpful in designing teacher training programmes concerning GS's education. Mawhiba could use the findings to evaluate the ability of mainstream teachers to identify giftedness characteristics as the foundation relies on them to recognise GS and recommend them to the national project for the gifted. In order to fulfil the needs of gifted students, hereinafter referred to as GS, and to create a conducive learning environment for them in the classroom, teachers can substantially benefit from proper training programs (Morelock, 1992). Such programs need to be carefully designed, and teachers' comprehension of the characteristics of the GC must be thoroughly examined.

4- Scope and justification

The researcher had a clear idea about the research topic from the beginning of this project. The aim is to explore teachers' understanding of GC's characteristics and SEN. Although teaching grades 7-9 (13-15 year-olds), the researcher chose to explore teachers' understanding in primary schools. The researcher believes that giftedness should be discovered early so the GC can be supported as soon as possible. (AL Garni, 2012) agrees that early identification facilitates the nurture of the GC's unique needs and talents.

Location-wise, the researcher chose Riyadh city for two main reasons. First, Riyadh is the capital of KSA where MoE is located. It is common practice to administer new educational programmes nearby where MoE can evaluate them. Second, my family lives in Riyadh and any organisational problems with the participants could be resolved easily.

5- Literature review

Not one meaning of giftedness is accepted by everyone and this lack of consistency may cause confusion about what giftedness is (Denton and Postlethwait, 1985, p.20). Occasionally, educators and non-educators find it difficult to communicate about giftedness because of their different perspectives on it (Bainbridge, 2014). In the teaching career, he researcher noticed that GS are very different from each other. They utilise different thinking and information processing strategies. Educators and teachers must understand the different aspects of giftedness in order to be able to meet the unique and individual needs of gifted people (Schuler, 2012).

5-1- Giftedness definitions

To effectively define giftedness, we need to understand the purpose of the definition. From a theoretical viewpoint, in order to better comprehend human capacities in the context of specific individual circumstances, we set out to define giftedness. To be effective, however, the person who creates a definition of giftedness must be fully aware of its goals and how they relate to actual fieldwork. (Achter, Lubinski, & Benbow, 1996). Codd (2014) notes that a clear definition of giftedness and the gifted individual is instrumental to educators in determining which student could be identified as gifted. It would also aid educators in providing suitable programmes for GS and help meet their needs in schools.

According to Columbus Group (1991), Giftedness is asynchronous development in which advanced cognitive abilities and heightened intensity combine to create inner experiences and awareness that are qualitatively different from the norm. This asynchrony increases with higher intellectual capacity. The uniqueness of the gifted renders them particularly vulnerable and requires modifications in parenting, teaching and counselling in order for them to develop optimally. (Morelock, 1992) Asynchronous development in this context refers to the GC's cognitive development which happens at a faster rate than their physical or emotional development (Silverman, 1992) (Aljughaiman & MOWRER-REYNOLDS, 2005).

The KSA MoE (2012) defines GS as: [having] preparations, extraordinary abilities or outstanding performance compared to the rest of their peers in one or more of the areas appreciated by the society, especially in the areas of mental superiority, creative thinking, academic attainment and special skills or abilities. They need to be taken care of and provided with special education, which may not be available to them in an integrated way in the typical programmes of study. (General Directorate of the Ministry of Education and Gifted Education ((Berman, Schultz, & Weber, 2012))).

This definition and specifically the formulation 'appreciated by the society' show that the Saudi policy of education links giftedness to social values. It follows that the definition is influenced by the country's ideology as an Arabic Muslim state. The main foci of the education system in KSA are Islamic identity and social morals (MoE, 2010). To illustrate, members of Saudi society would label as gifted a child who memorized the Quran at an early age whereas in other Arabic or Islamic societies this may not be enough. The KSA MoE definition addresses some apparent characteristics of the gifted individual and refers to their educational rights too.

These two different definitions show that each definition of giftedness is directly related to the perspective and aim of the person or organisation that formulates it. As Delisle and Lewis (2003, p.35) confirm, there is no unified and comprehensive definition of giftedness and all definitions are dependent on the mission and philosophy of their authors. In the following section

5.2 Gifted children's characteristics

GS have characteristics that distinguish them from their peers. Many studies in the educational and psychological fields are interested in gifted individuals' characteristics for different reasons. However, many sources agree that there are no GC who possess all of these (Fetzer, 2000). The following list mentions only the characteristics that were relevant to the questionnaire. The markers COG1-COG10, SaE1-aE10, PaS1-PaS5, and I1-I5 will be used to refer to these characteristics for the rest of this research.

(Clark, 1997) lists gifted characteristics within four brain functions: cognitive, social and emotional, physical and sensory, and intuitive:

5.2.1 Cognitive:

- Extraordinary quantity of information; COG1
- Advanced comprehension; COG2
- Unusually varied interests; COG3
- Unusual curiosity; COG4
- High level of language development; COG5
- Flexible thought processes; COG6
- Ability to generate original ideas and solutions; COG7
- Early differential patterns for thought processing for example abstract thinking;
- COG8
- An evaluated approach toward self and others; COG9
- Persistent, goal-directed behaviour; COG10

5.2.2 Social and emotional:

- Unusual sensitivity to the expectations and feelings of others; SaE1
- Keen sense of humour – may be gentle or hostile; SaE2
- Heightened self-awareness accompanied by feelings of being different; SaE3
- Idealism and sense of justice which appear at an early age; SaE4
- Unusual emotional depth and intensity; SaE5
- Advanced level of moral judgement; SaE6
- Leadership ability; SaE7
- Solutions to social and environmental problems; SaE8
- Strong need for consistency between abstract values and personal actions; SaE9
- Involvement with the meta needs of society for example justice, beauty, truth; SaE10

5.2.3 Physical and sensory:

- Unusual quantity of input from the environment through a heightened sensory awareness; PaS1
- Unusual discrepancy between physical and intellectual development; PaS2

- Low tolerance for the lag between standards and athletic skills; PaS3
- ‘Cartesian spirit’ can include neglect of physical well-being and avoidance of physical activity; PaS4
In addition, the characteristic of ‘high energy’ (PaS5) was mentioned in Silverman (1997-2013) and CAG (2005).

5.2.4 Intuitive:

- Early involvement and concern for intuitive knowing and metaphysical ideas and phenomena; I1
- Open to experience in this area; will experiment with psychic and metaphysical phenomena; I2
- Creative approach in all areas of endeavour; I3
- Ability to predict; I4
- Interest in future; I5

While Clark lists these as characteristics of giftedness, she does not specify whether they may be observed in non-gifted students too. These characteristics may not be limited to GC because some of them may be displayed by non-gifted children too. (Maker, 2005) also notes that some gifted characteristics seem not to be related to giftedness only. Hence, some adults find it difficult to identify GS who have these characteristics.

- Disorganised
- Unable to complete tasks
- Answering back
- Challenging authority
- Challenging tasks that seem meaningless.
- Sense of humour which may be too keen to be readily understood
- Average achiever due to inability to prioritize effectively

Therefore, a mainstream teacher not trained in gifted education may not be able to recognise GS among other peers.

5.3 Teachers’ attitudes towards gifted students

Bohner and Wänke (2002, p.13) note that social psychology is influenced by attitudes.

People’s attitudes determine how they think, feel about, and respond to different stimuli in everyday life. The relationship between attitudes and behaviour is not straightforward because attitudes affect both individual and social behaviour. Hence, we can change a person’s behaviour by changing his/her attitude.

At the individual level, a person’s behaviour is influenced by his/her attitudes. An example from my personal experience as a teacher where attitude affected behaviour happened five years ago. A new science curriculum was introduced for mainstream schools by KSA MoE. The new curriculum reflected 21st-century scientific knowledge. At my school science teachers refused to teach the new curriculum for reasons such as unclear guidance about new teaching methods and time and effort requirements associated therewith. Some were afraid to fail in meeting the new requirements and some resisted change in their teaching methods. For me, the old science curriculum was outdated and frustrating because it was scientifically weak, simple and not challenging enough for students. My negative attitude towards the old curriculum was the main reason for accepting to teach the new curriculum. This means that my attitude towards the old curriculum changed my behaviour in the education field.

On a societal level, Bohner and Wänke (2002) state that negative group attitudes and prejudices can directly cause discriminatory behaviours. This means that teachers with negative attitudes toward giftedness, GS and their educational needs may not realize that they are being ignorant and prejudicial. Needham (2012, p.3) confirms that teachers’ beliefs strongly influence their behaviour in the classroom. From the previous experience, the researcher concurs with Bohner and Wänke. Teachers might justify their ignorance with common preconceptions and abstain from improving their understanding of GS.

At one school where the researcher taught, there was a programme for GS; teachers refused to lead the programme for three main reasons. First, they had negative attitudes toward the gifted because they thought that working with them was difficult, challenging and required a lot of effort and time. Second, they pointed out their work overload. Third, they said that they lacked

understanding of the needs of the gifted and did not know how to teach them. This created a barrier for the teachers and put the GS at an educational disadvantage.

On a personal level, the relationship between teacher and student is very important.

Highly sensitive students realize teachers' attitudes and degree of openness of communication (Wallace, 1981). David (2011) and Carly (2009) emphasise that teachers significantly influence the educational development of GS so their attitudes can have both negative and positive effects.

5.4 Teacher training

There are studies in the field of gifted education that confirm that teacher training is a main factor in improving teachers' attitudes and behaviours towards them and increasing teachers' understanding of GS's characteristics and needs (Carly, 2009; Szymanski and Shaff, (Aljughaiman & MOWRER-REYNOLDS, 2005). Such training programmes equip teachers with appropriate methods to easily and efficiently deal with the educational needs of the gifted.

However, McCoach and Siegle (2007, p.247) surprisingly report that they found no correlation between teacher training and improved attitudes toward GS. However, they mention that Bégin and Gagné (1994) identified that, in prior research, five out of eight studies showed a statistically significant positive correlation between teacher training and better attitudes towards GS.

From all of the above studies and arguments, we can conclude with a degree of certainty that teachers' attitudes toward GS are subject to change. More often than not teachers' attitudes can be improved and their professional qualifications can progress through appropriate training programmes. Based on the fact that the above studies are conducted in different countries (UK, USA and Australia) and yield consistent results, if similar studies are conducted in KSA mainstream schools, the results will be comparable or identical. Finally, within the current literature review, the situation of GC in KSA will be described.

5.6 Gifted children in KSA

Gifted individuals have recently been receiving substantially more care from KSA government and MoE and this tendency is set to continue. Education policies in KSA assert the rights of GS to have access to appropriate care programmes that develop their creative skills and high abilities. The government and Mawhiba are dedicated to providing an inclusive environment in and out of school to foster gifted individuals through The National Project to Identify Gifted Individuals.

However, KSA teachers do not take the gifted nomination for the project seriously.

From my viewpoint, the reasons are that teachers might not have good knowledge of GS characteristics and needs. Also, the mainstream curriculum does not challenge GS to display their giftedness. The high student-teacher ratio and the large number of classes per teacher are also problematic.

Notably, in KSA society there are some issues with the understanding of GC, their characteristics. Due to the single-gender schools in KSA and due to the researcher being female herself, the following study is based on female teachers and students only.

6-Research paradigm

Selecting a research paradigm depends on the topic and goals of the study (Silverman, 2000, p.1). Matthews and Ross (2010) advise that the social research paradigm should not be influenced by data collection methods but by the research question/topic. The current study aimed to understand teachers' perspectives towards giftedness and pinpoint the characteristics that teachers look for when trying to recognise giftedness in students. Personally, the researcher gained a deeper understanding of teachers' attitudes towards GS. Silverman (2000, p.1) notes that when exploring people's lives, experiences and behaviours, qualitative research is more appropriate. Therefore, this research utilised the qualitative paradigm. The paradigm consists of four components: ontology, epistemology, methodology and method (Scotland, 2012, p.9).

Ontology is related to the understanding of reality according to Willis (2007, p.9) and

Scotland (2012, p.9) agrees that it is a reflection of the researcher's reality perception. Ontologically, the researcher uphold the relativist perspective because of the reality is relative.

This means that what we see as truth may not be so for other researchers. So, different people command different consciousness and perception.

Epistemology, on the other hand, is about knowledge and the theory of knowledge (Matthews and Ross, 2010, p.18). Interpretivist researchers consider human beings and their institutions the main participants in social research. In an epistemological context, the researcher believes that people give meaning to their world and any social reality reflects their communication and interaction. Therefore, social phenomena can only be addressed appropriately from the viewpoint of the research participants. Furthermore, social phenomena cannot be free of context because social context is the medium where the phenomena occur. Studying the subject without the context, therefore, removes the meaning from the study. As a social researcher, from ontological and epistemological perspectives, The interpretive beliefs and have utilised the interpretivism approach in the current study.

6- Theoretical perspectives

The social researcher should always be familiar with the different theoretical approaches that may be relevant to their study. (Berman et al., 2012) notes that research theory provides the researcher with two important foundations. First is the rationale through which the study is carried out. Second is the framework for understanding social phenomena which aids the researcher and readers in interpreting the study findings appropriately. However, if the researcher does not know the theoretical framework well, this might result in the failure of the project (Aljughaiman & MOWRER-REYNOLDS, 2005). The current research utilised the inductive approach as illustrated by Gray (2004, p.6). He explains that within the inductive approach, the data is collected and subsequently analysed. Later the researcher finds patterns standing out from the questionnaire answers and themes emerging from the interview responses. Afterwards, using these intermediate findings, the researcher can formulate meaning, generalization, relation or theory.

7- Methodology

The current study combined qualitative and quantitative methods for data collection. Hussein (2009, p.2) indicates that triangulation is the use of more than one method, often qualitative and quantitative, in the scope of one social research study and can be used to strengthen the credibility of the study and the validity of the findings. Scotland (2012, p.10) states that qualitative and quantitative data can be used to support any paradigm. According to Matthews and Ross (2010, p.142) there is a difference between the ontological and epistemological theoretical framework for qualitative and quantitative methods. However, Hussein (2009, p.4) believes that the combination of two different methods strengthens the research and the study findings because the two methods will complement each other's strengths and neutralize each other's weaknesses. However, triangulation can be confusing during application due to the uncertainty of applying the two methods concurrently.

9-Methods

The qualitative data collection was based on the quantitative data collection and was done after. As a result, the researcher made sure the two sets of data matched and were pertinent to the study's theme. Therefore, the researcher, with full agreement with the supervisor, designed a questionnaire and direct interviews with teachers as tools for this study which would survey the teachers' attitudes towards gifted students. In the following section, the two data collection methods will be discussed

9.1 Questionnaire

Matthews and Ross (2010, pp.141-142 and p.201) mention that questionnaires are a common method of data collection in social research. Often, they are used alongside statistics programs to manipulate data samples (Matthews and Ross, 2010, p.142). Significantly, Carly (2009) used questionnaires to collect quantitative data about primary school teachers' attitudes towards GS.

For the current study, participants were randomly selected. The initial request for participation was made publicly over social media and potential participants who matched the research criteria contacted the researcher to gain access to the questionnaire. Anonymity and consent issues will be discussed later. The researcher sent initial questionnaires to the teachers with only two questions, asking them for feedback on the format. 11 out of 13 people preferred close-ended questions with the quintuple Likert agreement scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree and Strongly Disagree). 2 out of 13 teachers chose close-ended Yes/No questions.

The supervisor advised to include an 'I don't know' option. The questions were grouped in the broad categories of cognitive, social/emotional, physical/sensory, and intuitive characteristics.

The aim of the questionnaires was to gather quantitative data related to two aspects: teachers' understanding of the characteristics. The questionnaire asked teachers to agree or disagree that a certain characteristic or need is associated with giftedness. The reasons behind their choices for the SEN were further explored in the interviews. In the findings section, all results will be interpreted in accordance with the research topic.

Participants received the link to the survey via personal emails from the researcher. One teacher who lacked a computer was forced to utilize her colleague's laptop. Instead of writing their names for question one, participants utilized the number given to them in order to maintain participant confidentiality. Because of the consent form's anonymity provisions, when a teacher wished to divulge all the answers, she could only see the given numbers and not the names of other participants.

9.2 Semi-structured Interviews

The researcher conducted ten phone interviews that lasted between 50 minutes and two hours each. This method saved time but cost money because we had to contact people overseas. Another disadvantage of conducting interviews over the phone is the loss of eye contact and the inability to read body language. To truly convey how the respondents felt during the interview, certain verbatim expressions are quoted in the finding's presentation. The interviewer should utilize acknowledgements like "yes" and "aha" to promote communication during telephone interviews, according to Dicker and Gilbert (1998, p. 71). So, during the interviews, it was used a lot of verbal language. Last but not least, head teachers may act as arbitrators when selecting interviewees, according to Wilson and Edwards (2001, p. 3).

10- Data analysis

Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) is the variety of procedures by which researchers progress from collected qualitative data towards some explanation, understanding or interpretation of the participants and conditions being investigated (Lewins et al, 2005). Qualitative data, when analysed appropriately, offers an in-depth description and explanation of the researched case (Gray, 2004, p.319). Qualitative text and narrative data which involves words and not numbers come from diverse sources such as interviews notes (Taylor-Powell and Renner, 2003). However, QDA has been criticized for being prone to researcher subjectivity, for absence of rigid methodology and for being based on a small sample size (Gray, 2004, p.314).

Matthews and Ross (2010, p.373) stress that qualitative data is less structured and has different format to quantitative data. The researcher needs to use an analytical approach that ensures the clarity and credibility of the analysis for the interested users. Appropriate data analysis (ADA) methods have to be systematic, comprehensive, grounded, dynamic and accessible (Matthews and Ross, Ibid). Therefore, the researcher used thematic analysis (TA) method to analyse the data. Matthews and Ross (2010, p.373) accentuate that TA is a process whereby the researcher manipulates raw data to identify main ideas or themes. Guest et al (2012, p.11) state that TA is useful in extracting ambiguous meanings and complex ideas from written data. Braun and Clarke (2006, p.4) note that TA should be a primary method for analysing qualitative data. For more information on ADA and TA please see Appendix 9: Appropriate Data Analysis and Thematic Analysis.

Conversely, Neill (2010) notes some disadvantages of TA which depend more on the quality of the analysis and the appropriateness of the research topic than on the method itself. Some of these are that TA is too flexible whereas the analysis process needs to be focused, clear and in-depth. Also, he states that TA is conducted across cases and not within them. Furthermore, TA is labour intensive and may suffer from the bias of the researcher. Despite these limitations, TA is suitable for the current study.

11- DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

11.1 Gifted students' characteristics, teachers' agreement and disagreement

31 teachers answered the online survey that investigated agreements and disagreement on GS's characteristics. Responses strongly agree and agree were combined and treated as agree. And responses strongly disagree and disagree were combined and treated as disagree. Refer to Chart 1 for an overview of the teachers' agreement responses and to Chart 2 for the disagreement

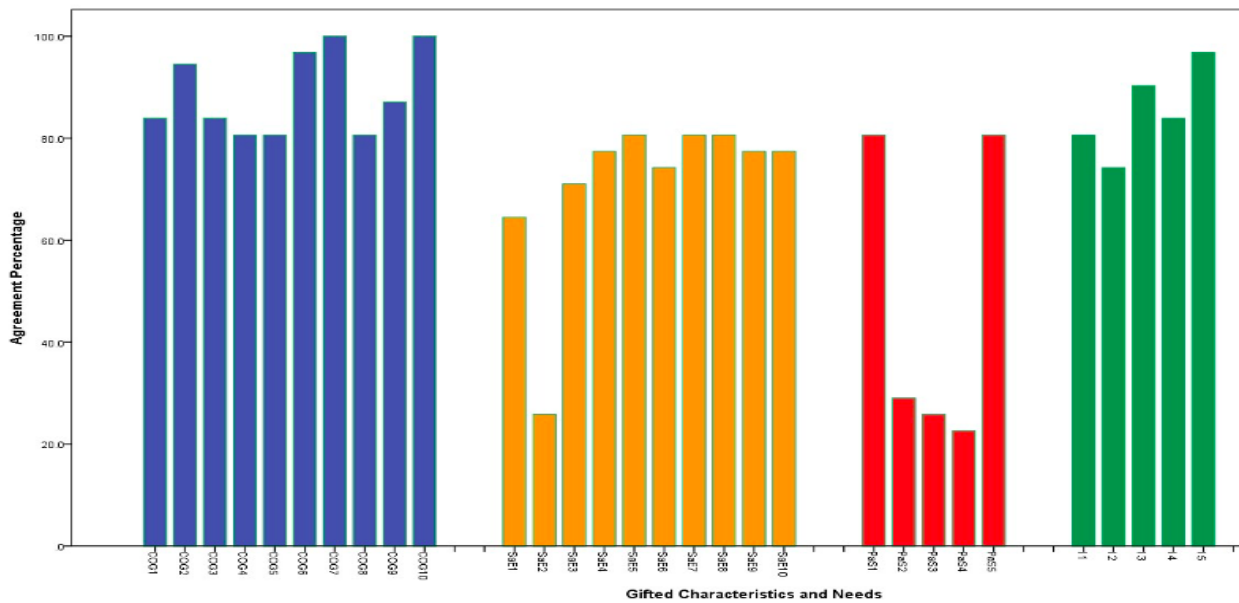


Chart (1) Percentages of teachers’ agreement on gifted students’ characteristics and their social and emotional needs

Starting with teachers’ agreement responses, the lowest responses in the cognitive area were observed in COG4 (unusual curiosity) and COG5 (high level of language development) (80%), whereas the highest responses were observed in characteristics COG7 (ability to generate original ideas and solutions) and COG10 (persistent goaldirected behaviour) (100%). For the social and emotional category, the responses ranged between 26% for SaE2 (keen sense of humour, may be gentle or hostile) and 81% for SaE7 (leadership). In the physical and sensory category, the lowest response was in PaS4 (neglecting of physical wellbeing and avoidance of physical activities) (22%), and the highest were in PaS1 (unusual quantity of input from the environment through a heightened sensory awareness) and PaS5 (high energy) (81%). In the intuitive area, responses ranged between the lowest (74%) for I2 (open to experience in this area, will experiment with psychic and metaphysical phenomena), and the highest (97%) for I5 (interest in the future).

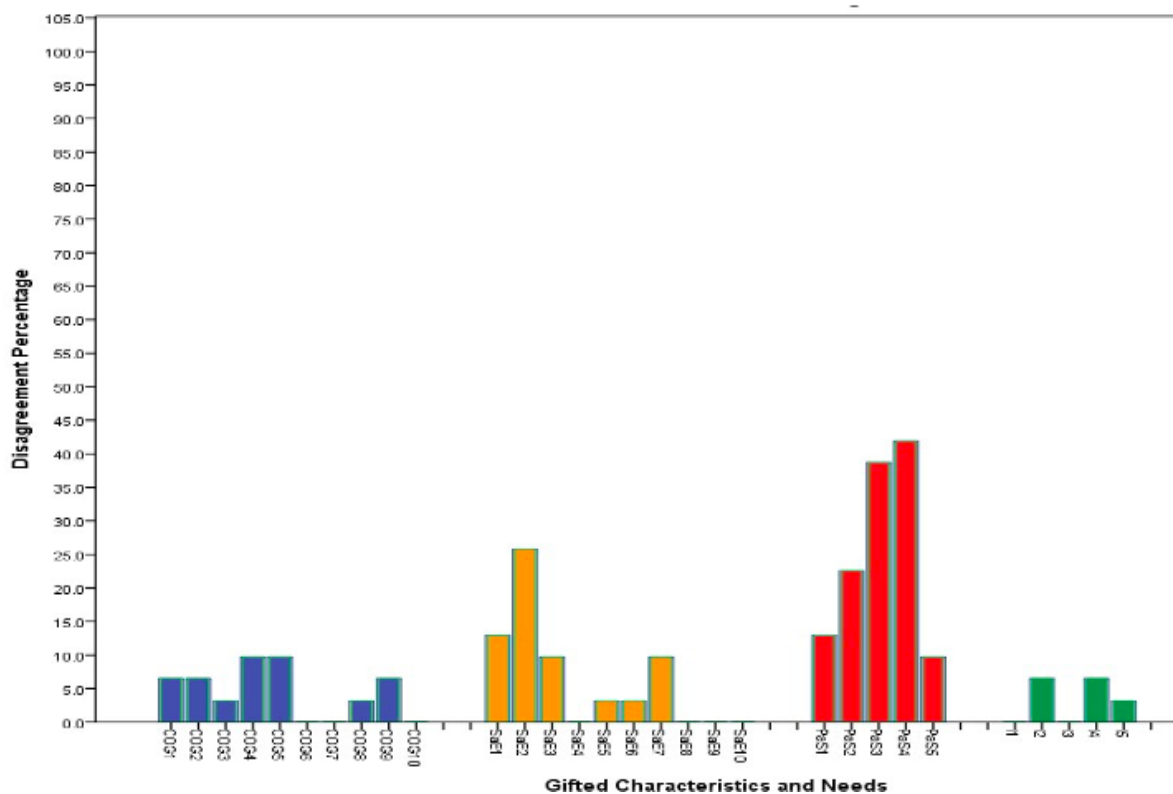


Chart (2) Percentages of teachers’ disagreement on gifted students’ characteristics and their social and emotional needs

Regarding teachers' disagreement responses, the lowest responses in the cognitive area was 0% for COG6 (flexible thought process), COG7 (ability to generate original ideas and solutions) and COG10 (persistent goal-directed behaviour), whereas the highest response was 10% for COG4 (unusual curiosity) and COG5 (high level of language development). In the social and emotional area, responses ranged from 0% for SaE4 (idealism and sense of justice which appear at an early age), SaE8 (solution to social and environmental problems), SaE9 (strong need for consistency between abstract values and personal actions), and SaE10 (involvement with the meta needs of society), to 26% for SaE2 (keen sense of humour, may be gentle or hostile). In the physical and sensory category, the lowest percentage was observed in PaS5 (high energy) (10%), and the highest was in PaS4 (neglecting physical well-being and avoidance of physical abilities) (41%). In the intuitive category, responses ranged from 0% in I1 (early involvement and concern for intuitive knowing and metaphysical ideas and phenomena) and I3 (creative approach in all areas of endeavour), and 6% in I2 (open to experience in this area, will experiment with physical and metaphysical phenomena) and I4 (ability to predict).

Teachers who chose the options 'Neutral' or 'I do not know' were unable to identify these characteristics and needs in GS. Their responses reflected either lack of understanding of these characteristics and needs because of lack of training or that they may not have encountered any GS in their career. Additionally, as non-gifted students may display some of the above characteristics, non-qualified teachers may find it difficult to identify GS appropriately. MoE and Mawhiba should take this percentage of teachers into consideration when evaluating the importance of training programmes in giftedness and the ability of average untrained mainstream teachers to identify GS and meet their needs.

11.2 Interviews

During the ten interviews the researcher found that teachers generally had positive attitude towards GS. They seem enthusiastic during the discussions and had empathy with giftedness in KSA in general and GS in mainstream schools in particular. The interviewed teachers answered two groups of questions according to their self-defined level of knowledge about giftedness. Evidently, the giftedness definitions provided by teachers result from their experience where they had not had any training programmes and this reflects their subjectivity and possible personal bias. The overlap between their definitions and the official state definition shows that KSA MoE's definition is suited to Saudi society. Also, this supports the point that each entity defines GS from their perspective which results in multiple definitions of giftedness.

Teachers interviewed for this study had a variety of perceptions of giftedness. There are obvious similarities between these results and those mentioned in the literature. However, answering this question took longer and required deeper consideration on behalf of the teachers than other questions. This could be because the number of GS that the teacher had taught was sometimes limited to a maximum of 2 or 3 per year. Hence, the teacher took time to remember different characteristics that their GS display.

Six out of seven teachers mentioned creativity in areas such as writing stories, doing homework and conducting projects, as a characteristic of GS. This complies with the results of the questionnaire where 90% of the teachers agreed that creativity is associated with giftedness. Five teachers mentioned excellence in a subject as associated with giftedness. Three out of seven teachers mentioned leadership. The questionnaire results show that only 10% of the teachers disagree that leadership is associated with giftedness. Two teachers mentioned unusual sensitivity. The result of the questionnaire showed that 64% of the teachers agreed that unusual sensitivity towards the expectations of others is associated with giftedness.

Other characteristics mentioned included feeling different from peers, being popular or isolated, strong personality and self-confidence, persistent and goal focused behaviour, heightened self-awareness, curiosity, craving learning, task commitment, strong memory, interest in the future, and challenge to authority.

Some gifted characteristics, such as keen sense of humour, may confuse adults and act as a barrier to identifying the GC (CAG, 2005). The result of the questionnaire complies with the CAG perspective. Significantly, the percentage of teachers who agreed and disagreed that GS have keen sense of humour was the same – 26% agreed and 26% disagreed. However, literature points to the fact that keen sense of humour is a characteristic of giftedness. Therefore, teachers' responses reflect possible subjectivity due to lack of appropriate training because they interpret humour from their personal perspectives rather than as a characteristic of giftedness. Also, some teachers might be very strict which would not allow GS to display their sense of humour in class and their giftedness may go unnoticed. However, outside class they would freely display such sense of humour and a qualified teacher would be able to recognise this giftedness characteristic.

12- Discussion of Findings

Teachers' responses to the questionnaire and the interview demonstrated their understanding that GS have different characteristics and needs from their peers. They were able to appropriately define gifted individuals. In addition, it was evident from the high percentage of agreement to the relevant parts of the questionnaire that teachers have a developed understanding of giftedness characteristics of GS. However, these results do not ensure that the teachers are able to identify and meet GS's needs in classes with large number of students or that they are able to educate multiple GS simultaneously. Teachers understand that giftedness is not exclusively based on academic achievement. Teachers recognize that giftedness can be categorised in two types, schoolhouse and creative-productive. Each teacher expressed her acceptance to attend training programmes one or more times during the interview and some teachers mentioned having the appropriate training in gifted education as a condition to accepting such teaching position. They expressed keen interest in meeting some domestic gifted individuals and learning about successful experiences in gifted education from other countries. Teachers also wanted to get information on programmes, summer schools and opportunities provided by the public and private sectors to help GC to foster their gift.

13- Limitations

Despite the large scope of the findings, this study is limited in several aspects including sample size and scope, time and data collection methods.

Clearly this study has involved a small sample. Although the participants were sourced randomly, the small sample size cannot result in a justifiable generalisation about all

KSA teachers' understanding and attitudes towards GS. However, due to the homogenous nature of the Saudi female school's teacher population, some generalisations can be achieved. Additionally, due to this single-gender educational system, the researcher had no access to male schools so this study cannot generalise the results to the male teachers in KSA.

Time was a major limitation for three reasons. This study was carried out at the end of the KSA academic year when teachers are busy with end-of-year examinations so the number of respondents was lower. Secondly, in order to limit the number of characteristics to thirty and focus on the three most prominent needs in my experience, and due to time constraints, the decision was made to select only one city and one educational level. To ensure that the pilot study accurately represented the study population, the pilot study teachers were chosen exclusively from Riyadh city, resulting in a reduction in the total number of participants.

Conducting overseas research has some limitations. The online questionnaire was very useful, flexible, and cheap data collection method, however, requiring an email for communication was not desirable for some potential participants and may have lowered respondents' number. Also, the researcher cannot guarantee that it was primary teachers who filled in the questionnaire. Although the phone interviews allowed to listen to the participants personally and allowed them to express their opinions freely, the lack of eye contact and body language prevented the researching from collecting more information such as facial expressions or demeanour associated with their answers.

14- Conclusion

In an attempt to survey the Teachers' Perceptions and attitudes towards Gifted Students in Primary Schools in Riyadh, Using several instruments, the researcher carried out a qualitative and quantitative investigation. The researcher selected a sample of primary school teachers, created questionnaires, and conducted direct interviews with them in order to accomplish the objectives.

The researcher has covered a wide range of gifted characteristics. The two various definitions of giftedness show how many individuals and organizations have various viewpoints on giftedness. According to Gagné's viewpoint, the researcher outlined the differences between skill and giftedness. In addition to Gardner's MIT and the three trait clusters that, in Renzulli's view, influence giftedness. The researcher outlined various traits related to giftedness from the cognitive, social and emotional, physical and sensory, and intuitive perspectives. As described by CAG, a few features that could be confusing when attempting to diagnose GC was included (Morelock, 1992).

15- Recommendations

The information collected in this research is not comprehensive but still provides a suitable platform for designing training programmes. There is an indication that teachers are interested in comprehensive training programmes. They expressed their keen willingness to qualify as GS's teachers. KSA MoE and Mawhiba should take advantage of this encouraging result and the topics of interest mentioned by teachers in designing the training programmes.

Furthermore, teachers highlighted some important points that should be taken into consideration when providing the teachers with training programmes. Time and place, where the training programmes are held are paramount factors from the teachers' viewpoint and may affect their decision to attend or not. Teachers prefer the training programmes to be held at the beginning of the academic year at the beginning of the teaching process where the teachers have high energy levels. In the middle of the academic year, they are busy with the completion of the curriculum. At the end of the year, they are stressed because of examinations and student evaluation

Another point is the period of the training programme. Teachers were keen to have appropriate training programmes which qualified them to teach GS. Hence, teachers mentioned that they prefer comprehensive programmes that cover as much as possible of the GS's characteristics and needs and such a programme cannot be conducted in one or two days only.

Teachers also expressed their opinion that these programmes should be held in appropriate places where they can come and go easily. Long distances and heavy traffic jams in cities such as Riyadh may discourage teachers from attending such programmes. One of the teachers suggested that it is better to hold these training programmes in schools. Another teacher mentioned that she would prefer if the programmes' tutors and presenters were from Mawhiba or had personal and practical training with GC. In addition, teachers would like the training programmes to include practical aspects and some real-life stories presented by GS themselves. In my opinion, it is also important that any identification methods and strategies presented at such programmes should be chosen for their suitability for the social implications of the KSA education system.

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