

IDENTIFICATION OF INTELLECTUALLY GIFTED SCHOOL CHILDREN IN NIGERIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNSELLING AND SPECIAL EDUCATION PRACTICES

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the challenges and strategies involved in identifying and supporting gifted and talented individuals, emphasising the critical role of special education and counselling in meeting their unique needs. Giftedness, traditionally defined by high IQ scores, is now understood as a multifaceted concept encompassing a broad range of intellectual, physical, and psychomotor abilities. The identification of gifted children, particularly in Nigeria, is complex and requires both informal (subjective) and formal (objective) approaches that complement each other. Without proper identification and support, gifted children may become disengaged or underperform. The paper highlights the necessity for specialised educational programmes, trained educators and counsellors, and adequate resources to address the diverse cognitive, social, and emotional needs of these children. The paper concludes on the importance of a multidimensional understanding of gifted children in guiding effective counselling and educational practices. Finally, the paper recommends a clear, expert-defined concept of giftedness and a continuous, needs-based identification process to maximise the potential of gifted individuals in Nigeria.

Keywords: *Gifted children, identification, special education, counselling, tailored programmes*

INTRODUCTION

Exceptional individuals comprise sizeable portions of all societies of the world. These persons are highly creative and innovative individuals who do the extraordinary in any environment. Special education services are expected to recognise and meet the needs of these individuals within and outside of educational institutions. The individuals' exceptionalities suggest that they are unable to profit from the conventional classroom in order to realise their full potential since they need specialised and tailored services (National Association for Gifted Children, 2019). These gifted children may struggle with learning or paying attention, have behavioural issues, physical and health-related impairments, dysfunctional communication, hearing loss, or even vision loss (Tasca, Michele, Patrizia, Giovanni & Vincenza 2024).

Gifted children are individuals who demonstrate exceptional abilities in one or more specific areas, such as mathematics, science, arts, or leadership, often surpassing the expectations of their chronological age and developmental stage. The concept of giftedness has

been defined and redefined over the years, with one of the most influential models being Renzulli's Three-Ring Conception, which posits that giftedness arises from the interaction of above-average ability, high levels of task commitment, and high levels of creativity. Gifted children not only excel in cognitive tasks but also display heightened intellectual functioning, advanced problem-solving skills, and creativity. Despite the association of giftedness with high intellectual potential, often measured by IQ tests, the identification of giftedness is complex and multifaceted, requiring a nuanced understanding of how these children's abilities manifest across different disciplines and how they interact with socio-emotional and behavioural factors (Tasca, Michele, Patrizia, Giovanni & Vincenza 2024).

According to Eren, Ömerelli Çete, Avcil & Baykara (2018), gifted children often exhibit asynchronous development, where their cognitive abilities outpace their physical development. This discrepancy can lead to unique social and emotional needs, making them different from their peers. The authors indicated that gifted children may experience social isolation, sensitivity challenges, and difficulty adapting to their environment. Furthermore, the pressure of high expectations from parents and teachers, coupled with peer relationship difficulties, can lead to behavioural and emotional issues in gifted children. These challenges may manifest as learning difficulties, heightened anxiety, somatisation, low self-confidence, depressive symptoms, and even attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Given these complexities, assessing gifted children across multiple dimensions, including academic performance, self-perception, social skills, and emotional and mental health is essential. Additionally, families with gifted children often experience higher levels of anxiety and may struggle with feelings of inadequacy, leading to more authoritarian parenting styles. Eren et al. (2018) concluded that this dynamic can further complicate the child's experience, affecting their school performance, peer relationships, and family interactions.

For gifted children and their families, just like every other family in any given society, counselling and psychotherapeutic interventions are needed. Essentially, counselling and psychotherapeutic services are needed by all and sundry to create awareness of certain traits and behaviour essential for quality of life, foster positive behaviours, reduce or manage negative behaviours among people. Counselling psychologists are trained to work in collaboration with other experts and professional in other fields of human endeavour. For the field of special education, counselling services are indeed required to assist persons with special needs and their families. There are myriads of counselling and psychotherapeutic services render in this regard to attain personal and social adjustment for persons with special needs. For individuals who are gifted and talented, there is need for counselling psychologists' professional services in the areas of self-identity, including self-awareness, self-recognition, self-acceptance, self-regulation, self-esteem, self-concept, self-appraisal, self-efficacy and other self-perception constructs. In the areas of educational needs, cognitive and learning styles, developmental life span and age-appropriate behaviours, mental health issues, including maladaptive perfectionism, positive health behaviours, health risky behaviours, vocational choice including entrepreneurial intentions, business acumen training, relational competence, emotional intelligence, leadership, communication skills, among others.

According to Akintude and Fagbemi (2014), many people do not see the need to educate gifted children. While some claim that everyone is gifted, others contend that there are no such

thing as gifted children and that all children may succeed if they are given an enabling atmosphere. The authors added that another argument against the practice of educating gifted children is that since these people were already gifted, there was no need to waste time and scarce resources on providing them with specialised education. Instead, these funds that would have been used to educate gifted children should be used to support people who are disabled or impaired. Furthermore, according to Akintunde et al. (2014) for more than a century, scientists, educators, and researchers in special education, educational psychology, and general education have concentrated their studies on gifted and talented individuals. However, the authors concluded that there is no unity of purpose regarding how to address the educational needs of gifted children.

This paper, therefore, examines the need for the identification of gifted children and its implication for counselling and special education.

The Concept of Giftedness

When individuals are either extremely exceptional intellectually or physically or have a psychomotor endowment, such children are being gifted. Efforts to explain the derivation of giftedness began in 1921 with Lewis Terman's Genetic Studies of Genius (Terman, 1925). Top marks on standardised IQ tests served as an early and still-used criterion of giftedness. The first IQ test was developed by Alfred Binet in 1905 to predict academic success rather than to assess innate intelligence or "raw" genetic potential (Gardner, 1992). Gagné (1985) advocates a distinct separation between giftedness and talent in his Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent. According to the author, a child is talented if they demonstrate exceptionality in just one field of human endeavour but gifted if they demonstrate exceptionality in more than one. Howard Gardner (1983) while opposed to the limitations of the IQ test scores in assessing giftedness posited that humans possess multifaceted intelligence, a range of skills derived from various disciplines. He suggested that the educational system should be adapted to cater to these different intelligences, particularly in gifted and talented education. Gardner proposed eight intelligences: linguistic-verbal, logical-mathematical, visual-spatial, musical, naturalistic, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal. These intelligences are crucial for effective teaching, assessment, and gifted education.

Giftedness is an elusive term to define considering there has been much debate around the concept for many years. When talking about an exceptional phenomenon, 'gifted' is sometimes used as a synonym for 'prodigy'. Others use it more generally, finding gifted individuals in substantial numbers throughout the population. Defining the concept was initially difficult due to its wide range of application (Cigman, 2006).

According to Marland's (1972) report to the United States Office of Education (USOE), gifted children are those who have been identified by professionals who are capable of high performance due to their exceptional ability. These are children who, in order to achieve their contribution to self and society, require unique educational programmes and/or services beyond those often offered by the standard programmes. Children who are capable of high performance include those who have shown accomplishment and/or potential talent in any of the single or

combined areas listed: general intellectual capacity, specific academic aptitude, the capacity for creative and constructive thought, leadership potential, the capacity for the arts (visual and performing), and psychomotor capacity. Renzulli, (1978) came up with three conceptions to define giftedness. According to Renzulli, persons who have achieved recognition because of their unique accomplishments and creative contributions possess a relatively well-defined set of three interlocking clusters of traits which consists of above-average (though not necessarily superior) general intellectual ability, task commitment and creativity. Renzulli further emphasised that no single cluster makes giftedness, but (that) giftedness is the interaction among the three clusters.

However, Clark (2002) said, "the interaction of biological inheritance and environmental opportunities determines the growth of intelligence." By using this expression, Clark implied a fusion of the nature versus nurture argument, labelling giftedness as partially owing to inherent features of information processing and a substantial portion owing to the environmental experiences the kid encounters to develop those traits. Clark added that "gifted" is a label for the biological concepts of superior development of various brain functions. These functions may be manifested in the areas of cognition, creativity, academics, leadership, or the arts. In his theory of successful intelligence, Sternberg (2003) said that gifted people are those who can take the unfinished products of their circumstances and turn them into successful experiences. Having a general awareness of the traits intellectually gifted kids display will help classroom teachers better comprehend gifted children and giftedness. The classroom teacher may notice traits in the cognitive and emotive domains since they are more frequently present in regular classroom conduct. The general cognitive traits of kids that are gifted and talented are highlighted: brilliant children frequently have a strong desire to learn more about their interests. Intellectually gifted children require advanced content and choice in learning activities since they can think abstractly earlier than their peers of the same age and develop their methods of thinking about issues and concepts. Too, gifted children routinely exhibit academic and emotional traits that may be described as intense and, at times, even extreme. They are more curious, demanding, and sensitive than their typical developing peers. Gifted children are unique and require parents and educators to modify both home and school environments to meet their strong need to know. Modification is imperative if gifted children are to reach their full potential. Children that are gifted are special, and parents and teachers must adapt to the circumstances at home and at school to satisfy their intense curiosity. If gifted children are to achieve their greatest potential, modification is essential. For these pupils, gifted children frequently display high academic and emotional characteristics.

and even extreme at times. They are more inquisitive more difficult and delicate than their typical development peers. Children who are gifted are special and need parents. and teachers to change both the home and the school surroundings to satisfy their intense curiosity. It is essential to modify the curriculum if talented students are to maximise their potential (Manning, 2006).

Crammond (2011) mentioned that early definitions of giftedness frequently equated intelligence and giftedness, and creativity is typically thought of as encompassing originality and usefulness or value. Both constructs have evolved over time and have been influenced by many historical, geographical, cultural, and philosophical factors. Since creativity is frequently included as a sort of giftedness, formal criteria of giftedness have been developed by the federal and state governments for educational services. Crammond (2011) concluded that the hierarchy between creativity and giftedness may be reversed as a result of the recent increase in interest in creativity on a global scale, which may also lead to increased interest in formal definitions of creativity. As

per Heller (2001), giftedness can generally be defined as the individual potential for exceptional performance in one or more domains. Whereas traditional (psychometric) approaches to giftedness are dominated by prospective—longitudinal—studies into the prediction of excellence in school, university, and at work, the expert-novice paradigm attempts retrospectively to analyse the development and determinants of exceptionality. The use of both research paradigms is necessary in that synthetic approaches in the modern theories of giftedness are preferred. In contrast to older unidimensional (IQ-based) theories, modern research relies almost entirely on multidimensional, classificatory models. Descriptive as well as explanatory concepts of giftedness depend not only on the related theory (giftedness model) but also the intended use, e.g., talent search for gifted programmes or identification as an aid in prevention and intervention. Heller had therefore highlighted methods for identifying the gifted and talented with the aforementioned statement. What impact does identifying the gifted have on counselling and special education practices is the key question at this point.

The identification of gifted children in Nigeria has significant implications for special education going by what is elucidated above regarding their characteristics. For instance, Adirika & Okoye (2017) highlighted the need for specialised educational programmes tailored to their unique cognitive, social, and emotional needs. Without proper identification and support, gifted children may become disengaged, underperform, or exhibit behavioural issues due to an unchallenging curriculum. Similarly, the process of recognising and nurturing these children requires trained educators and adequate resources, which are often lacking in Nigeria's educational system. Addressing these gaps is crucial for maximising the potential of gifted children and ensuring their meaningful contributions to society.

Connectedly, the implication of identification of gifted children influences counselling practices. For instance, counsellors should understand that gifted children vary widely in abilities and needs, necessitating a broader identity consideration that includes factors like race, gender, and socioeconomic status. There are challenges in identifying gifted students, pointing out the limitations of relying solely on IQ tests or standardised achievement scores. Relying solely on IQ for identification poses counselling challenges for gifted children, such as stress, anxiety, social difficulties, and perfectionism, which can lead to underachievement and emotional distress. Counselling approaches such as Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) and Solution-focused brief therapy (SFBT) are recommended to address perfectionism and academic anxiety. It is therefore important for counsellors to be equipped with skills in therapy, consultation, and advocacy, as well as teaching stress management techniques to help gifted children manage their perfectionistic tendencies and anxiety. In all the approaches to counseling must recognise the diversity of gifted children and tailoring interventions to their individual needs by focusing on both their strengths and challenges.

The Rationale for Identification of the Gifted and Talented

Since gifted and talented students are a diverse group of learners, it is impossible to categorize them in a rigid way. These people come from all different racial, ethnic, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Because of this, it is essential for every special education and counselling practice to have a variety of tools at their disposal to record these diversities. To attain this feat the following questions should be answered according to Heller and Schofield (2008):

- What needs to be recognised? Additional to conceptual issues, queries about the pertinent diagnostic variables surface.
- For what reasons or goals is the identification being made? Between talent searches (for specialized gifted programmes or educational measures) and single case diagnostics (e.g., in the context of school counselling and/or for intervention purposes), a significant distinction has been made in the literature. The benefits and risks of identification techniques must be weighed in both situations.
- How are students who are talented and gifted identified? This inquiry focuses on the sources of diagnostic data and measurement tools, information processing and decision-making processes related to whether a person is gifted or not, the alignment of personal (learning) needs with social (instructional) requirements of gifted education, etc. Evaluation of the programme and identification.

In a similar vein, the National Policy on Education (1977, 1981, 2015) required that all children, regardless of their differences, be given equal opportunities. The policy specifically acknowledged the unique role that gifted people played in the development of the nation as future scientists, original thinkers, and capable and efficient functionaries; as a result, it stipulated that educational provisions that are appropriate for gifted children's needs be made available. It is clear that the gifted and talented identification programme is essential for: i. generating general knowledge of the general characteristics of the gifted; ii. equipping student teachers and counselors with the skills for screening, identifying, and evaluating the special needs of the gifted; iii. ensuring the placement of gifted children in the appropriate settings and the effective management of the gifted and talented programme.

Raising Children Network (2021) noted while justifying the identification of gifted children that learning new things is essential to the well-being of gifted children. The main advantage of having a child identified as gifted and talented is that it makes it easier to decide what kind of advanced learning would be best for the child. Additionally, this can promote the child's overall development and well-being by helping him learn at a higher level. Too, identifying a child's talent or gift is beneficial for a number of additional reasons. For instance:

- Determining the ideal age for the child to begin daycare, preschool, or school is made simpler.
- Collaborating with the child's teachers to plan educational opportunities for your child at a daycare, preschool, or school is facilitated
- The child may be able to avoid some of the difficulties that come with being gifted like boredom at home, preschool or school.

Identification Approaches in Gifted Education

For this paper, we have broadly classified the approaches for identifying the gifted and talented into two: the informal approach and the formal approach.

The Informal Approach

This is otherwise called the subjective approach. The major players in this approach are the parents, teachers, siblings, peers and prospective gifted learners. According to Purcell and



Eckert (2006), the nominees include oneself, one's peers, teachers, administrators, and one's parents. Nominations aid in casting a wide net by identifying the most students who might be qualified for gifted services. To provide a less formal perspective, students, parents, teachers, and administrators frequently complete nomination forms, inventories, and checklists for giftedness. screening, identifying, and evaluating the special needs of the gifted. proper placement of gifted children and efficient management of the gifted and talented programme.

More so, teacher observations and ratings, learning and motivation scales are instruments by which teachers may make observations and use rating scales or checklists for students who exhibit a certain trait or characteristic during instruction. In addition, portfolios or work that is collected over time should include student reflections of their products and/or performances. Portfolios may be developed for both academic (language arts, math) and creative (speech, arts, music) pursuits. The concluded that student educational profiles may be collected through forms may be used to identify gifted children while an academic or artistic case study approach can offer a more comprehensive process. Case studies may include data, observations, and growth demonstrated in various settings.

The major players in the subjective approach for identifying the gifted and talented would be on the lookout for the following characteristics in the individuals concerned:

- a. Early development of language
- b. High level of abstract thinking
- c. Strong memory
- d. Capacity to focus and concentrate on tasks of interest
- e. A strong motivation for learning; among others

Upon suspecting gifts or talents in a student, assessment, observation and documentation of traits of gifts and talents are carried out using anecdotes, student portfolios etc. Using this approach, one could build, over time, a profile of the students to support formal identification approach.

The Formal Approach

Following the collection and evaluation of information gathered through the informal identification approach, teachers, parents and peers, as the case maybe, refer the prospective gifted for formal assessment. This approach involves the use of standardised tools to gather appropriate data in the domains of general cognitive ability, specific aptitude in visual and performing arts, leadership ability, creative ability and specific academic aptitude. The standardised test score of all the students in the domains above are screened for incidence of exceptionality in levels of performance. The formal instruments of assessment are essentially objectively used to sample the behaviours of giftedness. Some of the instruments are described briefly below:

Intelligence Test

A test of intelligence is designed to formally study, under test condition, the success of an individual to adapt to specific conditions. The Intelligence Quotient (IQ) is the method measuring the intelligence of an individual. Different IQ tests as captured by the intelligence test represent age-related measures of the intelligence level. IQ is calculated by dividing the mental age of an individual by his chronological age multiplied by 100. When calculating the IQ of prospective gifted child, he will attempt an IQ test which had been standardised with an average score recorded for

each age group. Thus, a child aged 10 who scored the results expected of a child of 12 would have an IQ of 120. On the other hand, adult intelligence is judged on an IQ test whose average score is 100 and their results graded above and below this norm according to known scores. Notable examples of individual intelligence tests are Wechsler Intelligence Scale (WISC), Slosson Intelligence Test (SIT) and Written and Oral Reading Test (SORT)

Creativity Test

Creativity tests measure specific cognitive processes and are typically divided into four main components: divergent thinking, convergent thinking, art assessments and self-assessments. Specifically, divergent thinking is scored based on originality – the rarity of solutions generated to a given problem, fluency – the number of solutions to a given problem, fluency – the diversity of solution generated and lastly, elaboration – how detailed the solutions provided are. Ibadan Creativity Assessment Scale (ICAS) and Torrance Test of Creative Thinking (TTCT) are notable examples of creativity tests.

Conclusion

Gifted and talented individuals worldwide require special education services to meet their unique needs. Identifying these individuals is the first step to meeting these needs. Meanwhile, the gifted has been plagued by the difficulty associated with identifying gifted children. Having a general awareness of the traits intellectually gifted kids display will help class teachers and counselors better comprehend gifted children and giftedness. The early conceptualisation of giftedness as a single human factor had given way to the multifaceted conceptualisation such a multidimensional approach to identifying the gifted and talented is favoured. However, the informal and formal approaches of identification is such that they complement each other. The former been subjective while the latter is objective. In conclusion, the effective combination of these approaches is the necessary ingredient for the success of any counselling and special education practices designed for the gifted and talented.

Recommendations

The following are recommended as result of submissions derived from this paper:

1. A clear definition of giftedness and talentedness in relation to the multidimensional concept of intelligence should be submitted by experts as this remains a pre-requisite for successful identification of the gifted and talented in Nigeria.
2. Identification must be based on the needs of the students, and should be continuous repeated at regular intervals
3. A multi-dimensional approach is the sure bet for capturing the actual traits of giftedness and talentedness.
4. There should be continuous cognitive stimulation for all gifted and talented persons in schools to further draw out their innate potentialities.
5. Early identification is key for special and counselling practices for the gifted and talented.
6. Family therapy should be ensured for families of gifted and talented children. This can be in the form of psycho-education and periodic family conferencing.

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