

Assessment of Teacher Awareness of Gifted Children and Resource Availability for their Learning in Regular Public Primary Schools of Mwatate Sub-County, Kenya

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Abstract

Among the pupils with special needs in education to be found within regular public primary schools, are gifted children. The purpose of this study was to assess whether regular public primary school teachers of Mwatate Sub-county were aware of gifted children and whether resources were available within these schools, to meet their unique learning needs. The study employed a survey research design. The population of the study constituted regular public primary school teachers and special education teachers in all the fifty nine (59) regular public primary schools of Mwatate sub-county in Taita Taveta County. Purposive sampling and random sampling methods were used to select a sample of one hundred and eighty nine (189) respondents. Questionnaires were used to collect data. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics including frequencies and percentages. The research findings were summarized using tables. The study revealed that regular public primary school teachers were not well informed about giftedness. In addition, there were hardly any specialized approaches for teaching these children. Special education teachers attached to the regular schools and teacher counselors did very little towards helping gifted children. Workshops, seminars and in-service courses were recommended to create awareness of giftedness among regular public primary school teachers.

Keywords: *Giftedness, teacher awareness, regular public primary school teachers, special education teachers, resource availability.*

INTRODUCTION

Most nations have not only recognized the rights of children with special needs to education, but also, the need for these children to be educated in an inclusive setting (Child rights Information Network, 2010; Tan, 2012; European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2017). This involves providing appropriate education to learners with special needs within the regular classroom (M.O.E., 1999; M.O.E., 2009). Gifted children are among learners with special needs. However, they are usually overlooked when special needs are discussed. It is usually assumed that they would always make it even without any special assistance (M.O.E., 1999). Research

shows that many identified gifted children are unsuccessful both in their academic efforts and careers (Wang'ombe, 1991; Miraca, 1998). Due to being subjected to a curriculum that is way below their intellectual ability, these children get bored and frustrated. Some end up dropping out of school while others develop discipline problems (Tan, 2012).

Gifted children have social and emotional needs arising from their asynchronous development (Mendaglio, 2003). Their intellectual age is way above their chronological age and they are able to perceive issues that their physical size and strength cannot enable them to resolve. Thus, among other issues, they become overly concerned with social problems such as violence, social injustice and the plight of the poor which are way beyond their control. According to Moon (2002) and Cartwright *et al*, 1984, gifted children find themselves in a society that is somewhat unfriendly towards giftedness. Some teachers may express discomfort towards their inquisitive nature and they may also face hostility from their peers due to their superior academic achievements (Education and Training Committee, ETC, 2012). Thus, the gifted child has to conform to being an average achiever so as to win both the teachers' and the peers' approval. This brings about internal conflict. Gifted children are highly sensitive individuals, who are very conscious of their own uniqueness and the environment around them (Mendaglio, 2003 & Miraca 1998). Gifted children are perfectionists (Schuler, 2002) and they heavily punish themselves even when they commit minor mistakes.

There are hardly any special public primary schools for gifted children in Kenya. In addition, the Policy on Special Needs in Education (SNE) in Kenya, advocates for a departure from the traditional way of providing special education within special schools and special units, to an inclusive setting in which; special needs in education are provided for, within the regular classroom (M.O.E.S.T., 2004). Furthermore, the needs of gifted children are not as obvious as those of children with physical handicaps and they do not appear to be in need of specialized help (Wang'ombe, 1991 & Tan, 2012). These factors imply that, most of the gifted children enroll within regular public primary schools. However, the learning needs of these children cannot be adequately provided for, within the regular classroom, unless teachers are aware of them and resources are available to meet their unique learning needs. The aim of this study was to assess teacher awareness of gifted children and resource availability for their learning in regular public primary schools of Mwatate sub county, Kenya.

METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out in regular public primary schools of Mwatate Sub County. This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. According to Cohen and Manion (1994), the aim of conducting a survey is to obtain data that can be used to describe an aspect of interest. Therefore, this design was considered appropriate for the study because the researcher endeavored to give an account of conditions as they were; concerning teacher awareness and resource availability, within regular public primary schools.

This study targeted all teachers in regular public primary schools of Mwatate Sub-county. These totaled to five hundred and fifty two (552) teachers. However, the researcher was particularly interested in the lower primary teachers, teacher counselors and teachers trained in special education. The lower primary school teachers were considered ideal for the study, since they handled the pupils at their earliest stages of interaction with the academic content. Thus, they were best placed to identify any deviations from the norm. In addition to assisting with the identification of children with special needs, the teacher counselors have the responsibility of helping the children to develop copying skills, to enable them to be correctly disposed in order to learn. Teachers trained in special education are in a strategic position to foster the learning of children with special needs. Thus, the accessible population included two hundred and ten (210) lower primary school teachers, 51 special education teachers and fifty nine (59) teacher counselors. This gave a total population of three hundred and twenty (320) respondents.

Purposive sampling was used to include all the schools which had at least one special education teacher. They totaled to 30 schools. All the lower primary school teachers, heads of guidance and counseling, and one special education teacher in these schools, were included in the sample to give a total of one hundred and sixty one (161) respondents. The special education teachers were randomly selected in the schools which had more than one.

Questionnaires were used to collect data. These included the questionnaire for regular teachers (QRT), questionnaire for teacher counselors (QTC) and the questionnaire for special education teachers (QSET).

The validity of the instruments was established by subjecting them to the scrutiny of the researcher's supervisors and other experts from the department of Guidance and Counseling and Educational Foundations of Egerton University. The questionnaires were pilot tested in two schools purposely selected from a neighboring zone owing to their similarity to the schools in the study population. After seeking permission from relevant authorities, the researcher administered the questionnaires once and then analyzed the responses using SPSS. The QTC had an alpha of 0.84, QRT yielded a Cronbach alpha (α) of 0.76 and QSET had an alpha of 0.76. George and Mallery (2003) argue that although a coefficient of >8 is considered to be good, a coefficient of >7 is still acceptable. The raw data was subjected to computation of descriptive statistics including frequencies, means and percentages with the help of the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS). The results were summarized using tables.

RESULTS

Awareness of Giftedness among Regular Teachers

To determine regular teacher's awareness of giftedness, respondents were given seven statements which required them to state whether they thought the statements were true or false or if they were not sure about them. The results are shown on table 1.

Table 1

Regular Teachers' Awareness of Giftedness

No	Statement	TRUE	FALSE	NOT SURE
1.	Gifted children do not find fulfilling Relationships among their age mates	48.8	35.7	15.5
2.	Gifted children fear to fail and may never raise their Hands to answer questions during the lesson.	34.5	56.0	9.5
3.	Gifted children are highly disturbed by global problems Such as war and famine.	50	26.2	23.8
4.	Gifted children can have dyslexia.	41.7	32.1	26.2
5.	Gifted children get bored when placed in the same Classroom as their age mates.	78.6	16.7	4.8
6.	Gifted children will always do well, with or without The teachers help	47.6	52.4	0
7.	Children who are always topping the class are not Necessarily gifted.	76.2	16.7	7.1

The teachers' responses to items 1 to 7 were used to calculate the groups mean score (see table 2). Teachers had a mean score of 54.59% and a mode of 57%.

Table 2

Regular Teachers' Group Mean Score on Awareness of Giftedness

N	Mean	Mode	Std. deviation
84	54.59	57.14	12.17864

35.5% and 15.5%, of the teachers respectively, responded with FALSE or NOT SURE to statement 1; gifted children do not find fulfilling relationships among their age mates. 56% responded with FALSE and 9.5% with NOT SURE to statement 2; gifted children fear to fail and may never raise their hands to answer questions during the lesson. 26.2% and 23.8% of the teachers respectively, responded with FALSE or NOT SURE to statement 3; gifted children are highly disturbed by global problems such as injustices upon other human beings, war and famine which are way beyond their capacity to resolve. 58.3% responded with FALSE or NOT SURE to statement 4; gifted children can have dyslexia. 78.6% responded with true to statement 5; gifted children get bored when placed in the same classroom as their age mates. 47.6% responded with TRUE to statement 6; gifted children will always do well, with or without the teachers help.

76.2% responded with TRUE to statement 7; children who are always topping the class are not necessarily gifted.

Role of Teachers Trained in Special Education Towards the Learning of Gifted Children.

The items on the role played by teachers trained in special education were rated on a 5 point Likert scale in which, a score of 1 indicated that the service was always offered, a score of 2-the service was very often offered; 3-often; 4-sometimes and 5-never offered. This is illustrated in table 3.

Table 3

Role of Teachers Trained in Special Education towards the Learning of Gifted Children

Role	N	Always %	Very Often%	Often %	Sometime %	Never %
1. Sensitizing other teachers about giftedness	24	8.3	16.7	25	37.5	12.5
2. I do not have any specific role but just teach in the regular classroom.	24	45.8	4.2	8.3	4.2	37.5
3. Help in assessing gifted children	24	16.7	16.7	33.3	20.8	12.5
4. Help in preparing IEP for gifted children	24	4.2	4.2	16.7	16.7	58.3

Only 4.2% and another 4.2% were always or very often involved in preparing IEPs for gifted children. 58.3% indicated that they were never involved. Quite a number of special education teachers indicated that they often played no specific role but taught in regular classes like other teachers (45.8%) responded with always. Majority of the teachers were only often involved in assessing gifted children and in sensitizing other teachers about giftedness (33.3% and 25%) respectively.

Methods Used to Identify Gifted Children

Most teachers hardly ever got recommendations from the EARC (3.6%) or used Standardized IQ tests (13.1%). 96.7% of the respondents indicated to have used self prepared tests. Table 4 shows these results.

Table 4

Methods Used to Identify Gifted Children

Statement	N	YES %	NO %
1. Have you ever taught a gifted child?	84	72.6	27.4
2. If yes, what method did you use to assess them?			
a. Recommendation by EARC	61	4.9	95.1
b. Self-prepared tests	61	96.7	3.3
c. Standardized Intelligence Tests	61	13.1	86.9
3. Do you prepare Individualized Education Programmes (IEP) for them?	61	18	82

Methods Used to Teach Gifted Children

Table 5 shows the results of the methods that were commonly used to teach gifted children in regular schools of Mwatate Sub County. Respondents included those who had indicated to have ever taught gifted children.

Table 5

Methods used to Teach Gifted Children in Regular Public Primary schools

No.	Method of teaching gifted children	N	Always (%)	Very Often (%)	Often (%)	Sometimes (%)	Never (%)
1.	I do not give them any special treatment	61	10	55	9	2	24
2.	I give them extra work that is deeper in scope.	61	28	18	12	42	0
3.	They are usually doing the next topics ahead of the other pupils.	61	23	13	24	36	5
4.	Highly gifted children are allowed to skip classes.	61	0	20	5	54	39

A greater percentage of teachers indicated that they always (10%) and very often (55%) never gave any special treatment to gifted children. A few indicated to always (10%) or very often (18%) give work that was deeper in scope.

The approach of allowing gifted children to do the next topics ahead of others was quite popular; 23%, 13% and 23% respectively; indicated to always, very often and often use the method. On skipping classes, regular teachers indicated that this only happened sometimes or never (54% and 39% respectively).

Services offered by the teacher counselors to gifted children

Items on the services offered by guidance and counseling department were rated on a 5- point Likert scale ranging from Always to Never. Low scores indicated that the service was always offered while high scores indicated that the service was rarely offered. Table 6 shows the results.

Table 6

Services Offered by Teacher Counselors to Gifted Children

Service	N	Always (%)	Very Often (%)	Often (%)	Sometimes (%)	Never (%)
1 We invite resource persons to mentor them	25	4.3	4.3	34.8	39.2	17.4
2 We provide spiritual guidance	25	27.3	13.6	22.7	22.7	13.6
3 We help in preparing individualized education programmes for them.	25	8.3	4.2	25.0	45.8	16.7
4 We sensitize other teachers on the needs of gifted children	25	21.7	26.1	8.7	34.8	8.7
5 We are not doing anything as of now	25	4.3	4.3	4.3	17.4	69.6

The results show that there was hardly any service which was consistently offered in regular schools. 4.3% of the teachers always or very often, invited resource persons to mentor gifted children. Only 8.3% and 4.2% of the teacher counselors were involved in the preparation of IEPs (item 3). Only 21.7% and 26.1% of the teachers always or very often, engaged in sensitizing teachers on the needs of gifted children (item 4). Even spiritual guidance was only always provided by a paltry 27.3%.

DISCUSSION

From the results in, it can be concluded that regular school teachers had little to average knowledge of the characteristics of giftedness. However, a consideration of individual statements revealed that a majority of the teachers were not aware of some core characteristics of gifted children. 35.5% and 15.5%, of the teachers respectively, responded with FALSE or NOT SURE to the first statement implying that teachers were not aware of gifted children's internal conflict between the need to fit in with peers and the need to be oneself. A majority of the teachers were unaware of the fact that gifted children feared to fail and may never raise their hands to answer questions during the lesson. This could result in the children being regarded as rude when they don't participate in class. Teachers may therefore, develop a negative attitude towards such children. Over 50% of the teachers were either unaware or not sure of the fact that, gifted children are highly disturbed by global problems such as injustices committed against other human beings, war and famine which are way beyond their capacity to resolve. This means that

the teachers may not be there to provide the much needed support as gifted children grapple with these global issues. More than half of the teachers were not aware that gifted children can have dyslexia. Gifted children who are dyslexic therefore, risk going through primary education unidentified. This lack of awareness may be attributed to lack of adequate training on how to handle gifted learners. This aligns with studies by Szymanski, Toni and Thomas (2013) who found out teachers mostly lacked training on how to handle gifted learners. Furthermore, most of the teachers felt that their teacher training courses had little or no content on teaching gifted children.

Majority of the teachers were only often involved in assessing gifted children and in sensitizing other teachers about giftedness. From the results, it can be concluded that majority of teachers who trained in special education did very little towards helping gifted children. They were hardly ever involved in preparing IEPs for gifted children, and quite a number indicated that they often played no specific role but taught in regular classes like other teachers. This can be attributed to the fact that there were no school policies that directly addressed the needs of gifted children. These results are in line with the findings of Wairire Ndungi and Kang'ethe, (2013). Their research findings show that there were virtually no policies being implemented for gifted children in public schools in Kenya. According to Fisher, Frey and Thousand (2003), the special education teacher ought to be centrally involved in the process of preparing IEP's for gifted children. Gifted children are a great resource to a nation (ETC (2012). They are the future inventors and carry in them the potential of resolving global problems by making discoveries in the fields of medicine and science. Special education teachers attached to regular schools can do a lot to improve the welfare of gifted children. They can be actively involved in creating awareness among other teachers of the unique needs of these children. They need to help other teachers to appreciate the learners' unique needs and this way, the teachers' attitude can improve.

Most teachers hardly ever got recommendations from the EARC or used Standardized IQ tests to assess the children. This could be due to the limited access to standardized IQ tests in Kenya (Ogoda, 2000) and also lack of conscious awareness of the need to identify gifted children. The method that was most commonly used was the second one in which teachers prepared their own assessment tests. 96.7% of the respondents indicated to have used this method. These findings concur with the research findings by Bundotich and Kimaiyo, (2015) who found out that there were no standard techniques of identifying gifted learners in the secondary schools of Uasin Gishu County, Kenya and teachers used class evaluation tests. This method is susceptible to teachers' bias and subjective opinion and may not capture all gifted children. Gifted children, who are underachieving for some reason, may go unidentified. In addition, there is the risk of classifying students who score highly as being gifted whereas their IQ does not qualify them.

The results reveal that there was not much specialized approach to teaching gifted children. A greater percentage of teachers indicated that they did not give any special treatment to gifted children. A few indicated to always (10%) or very often (18%) give work that is deeper in scope. The approach of allowing gifted children to do the next topics ahead of others was quite popular. On skipping classes, most regular teachers indicated that this only happened sometimes or never.

These results augur with studies by Sambu, Kalla and Njue, (2014). In their research, they found out that giving extra work, ability grouping were among the teaching methods for gifted students in Uasin Gishu district. In addition, most of the teachers in their study expressed the need for a gifted students' curriculum.

There was hardly any guidance and counseling service which was consistently offered to gifted children in regular public schools. Resource persons to mentor gifted children were hardly invited. Resource persons play a big role in inspiring gifted children (Tan, 2012) and therefore, primary schools should invest in this area. Very few teacher counselors were 'always' and 'very often' involved in the preparation of IEPs. According to Cartwright *et al* (1984), the school counselor should be a member of the committee for preparing IEPs. Very few of the teacher counselors were 'always or very often', engaged in sensitizing teachers on the needs of gifted children (item 4). Even spiritual guidance was only always provided by a paltry 27.3%. Several authors have discussed the counseling needs of gifted children. Gifted children have social and emotional needs arising from their asynchronous development. According to Moon (2002) gifted children need counselors to help them to develop coping skills to fit in a society that is somewhat unfriendly towards giftedness. Gifted children are highly sensitive individuals, who are very conscious of their own uniqueness (Mendaglio, 2003). Gifted children are perfectionists (Schuler, 2002) and they heavily punish themselves even when they commit minor mistakes. According to the ETC (2012), gifted children are usually bored to death by the non-challenging curriculum; they may also be segregated or bullied by peers due to their exceptional academic performance. Gifted children have immense challenges which pose a threat to their academic progress and therefore, teacher counselors need to be deeply involved in helping the gifted children in their schools. The research findings of Bundotich, and Kimaiyo (2015) revealed that lack of guidance and counseling services had negative effects on the academic performance of gifted children in Uasin Gishu County. Therefore, it is important for teacher counselors in regular primary schools to be well informed on the needs of these children.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that regular public primary school teachers of Mwatate District had minimal awareness of giftedness. Teacher counselors were hardly involved in the making of Individualized Education Plans for gifted children. Teacher counselors were not aware of some significant challenges facing gifted children. There was hardly any use of standardized intelligence tests for assessing these children. These facts indicate that the learning needs of gifted children were not being adequately provided for and chances are that some may not have been identified in the first place. In addition, the children may not have any relevant guidance and counseling services available to them from the school counselors.

Using the findings of this study and its conclusions, the study recommends that workshops and in-service courses be organized for regular public primary schools, to create awareness of giftedness. Teacher training courses should give emphasis to the less obvious special education

needs such as giftedness. The training courses should also have a practical element on handling an inclusive class.

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