



CHAPTER 19

MANAGING THE GIFTED LEARNER IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND MATHEMATICS CLASSROOMS

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Introduction

The gifted are those who have exceptional talent or natural ability. This work looks at the gifted as learners who possess far more advanced ability or potential than their classmates in English language and Mathematics. Whenever mention is made of learners with special needs, some people think mostly about those that are either physically or mentally challenged in different ways, without considering the gifted as learners that also ought to be given special attention. For there to be proper education for the gifted learner, the knowledge of how to identify them and the right perception of these learners ought to be imbibed by the educators, policy makers and the learners themselves. Studies of scholars which are centred on students' and teachers' perception of the gifted (Coil, 2012; Wright, 2016; Yildirim & Akcayoglu, 2018; and Handa 2020) reveal that some educators do not even have a clear understanding of the concept of the gifted, let alone identifying them or being prepared for the specialised pedagogical strategies to cater for their needs.

English language and Mathematics usually have the largest number of learners because these subjects are compulsory courses for learners, without which they cannot make advancement in their educational lives. Managing the gifted in these subjects is therefore an imperative as proper handling here is likely to help them in all other subjects. Gifted learners often perform far above their mates. Their intellectual age is higher than their chronological age. Scholars (Winner, 1996; Taylor, 2003; and Coil, 2012) aver that their high intellectual capacities generate in them a great measure of restlessness because such learners may finish their class assignments long before some of their peers even get to understand how to go about the work they have been given. This creates a form of dissatisfaction that if not well managed, may lead the learner to start making a noise or disturbing other learners who are yet to finish the exercises that they have been given. Gifted learners are creative personalities whose potentials need to be cultivated so that society can gain maximally from them and achieve faster development. This necessitates the introduction of differentiated learning in favour of the gifted, especially in our public schools.



Gifted learners are said to be those identified by professionals as having very high performance as a result of their outstanding abilities (Heward, 2009). There is need for ensuring that not only that gifted learners are well managed, but that the mind-set of learners in general are modelled to grow to embrace being counted among geniuses (Coleman, 2014). According to Taylor (2003) and corroborated by information from Encyclopaedia of Educational Psychology (2008), teachers ought to encourage the following in all learners:

- a. The curiosity for creating something special instead of holding unto the usual and generally acceptable.
- b. Help learners to try to do things generally considered impossible.
- c. Teach learners about different forms of genius; that making mistakes is a valuable aspect of learning, that perseverance, risk taking and appropriate behaviour are all important in self-building.

According to researchers (Heward, 2009, Sparks & Harwin, 2017), educational tools and facilitates (like Gifted Apps and audio-visual instructional materials), together with adequate pedagogical strategies should be harnessed to make sure that the obvious gifted learners' needs are met. Again, emphasising the importance of specialised educational environments in maximising the talents of the gifted, Coleman (2014) points out that 'rough diamonds' should be recognised and encouraged to discover themselves and soar, as research reveals that learners that fall in the class of the gifted are few; probably fewer than they should be, perhaps because they are not given the best learning environment and opportunities.

It is crucial for educational stakeholders to note that the gifted also have weaknesses in different facets of their lives. Scholars such as Crawford, Snyder, K. E. & Adelson, J. L. (2020) have researched into obstacles faced by the gifted. Their findings reveal that gifted learners especially those at societal margins or from the minority have emotional needs that should not be allowed to reduce their intellectual capacity and creativity.

Studies have also indicated that gifted learners in some school settings are stigmatised and even bullied (Cross, Coleman, & Terhaar-Yonkers, 2014; Striley 2014; Frazier, Cross, Cross, & Kim, 2021). Such learning environment kills rather than develop intellectual capacities of learners in general. The facilitators of learning need to be at alert and see that their schools are gifted friendly and that the bullied or stigmatised gifted are taught social adaptable skills in order to enhance their social cognition.

Ronksley-Pavia, Grootenboer, & Pendergast (2018) and (2019) in their studies advocated that the stigmatised gifted should be given a voice and listened to in order that strategies are put in place to ensure that there is zero tolerance for intimidation. Corroborating this, Mueller, & Winsor (2018) strongly stated that the gifted need to be protected as some of them entertain suicidal thoughts as a result of prolonged depression. Sahin (2014) emphasises the psychological trauma the gifted go through as a result of the awareness of the excessive expectation and pressure on them because of their gifted status. Pandya (2017) even advocates a



spiritual education programme that would help to improve the emotional intelligence of gifted children. It is therefore pertinent to help the gifted to have a healthy self-perception and to learn to be socially and emotionally competent as education is supposed to be holistic.

There is also the debate among scholars about whether or not the gifted should be kept in special schools, in separate classrooms or they should be allowed to mix with other learners, but teachers should apply differentiated pedagogy to cater for their peculiarities. While Conejeros-Solar & Smith (2019) looked at how home-schooling could help the gifted, Goodowens & Cannaday (2018) express a parent's view-point of home-schooling as a result of lack of trust in the competence of the public school system to cater for the needs of the gifted. Rubenstein, Gilson, Bruce-Davis, & Gubbins, (2015) and Shaunessy-Dedrick, Evans, Ferron, & Lindo (2015), on the other hand aver that the gifted could stay in the same classroom with other learners but there should be pre-differentiated curricula to help them get occupied with more complex learning material. Such graded learning will help to curb the restlessness of gifted learners who already have the knowledge of what many of their mates may still be trying to grasp.

From the foregoing, the urgency and necessity of taking care of the needs of the gifted have been unmistakably spelt out. The learning atmosphere should be conducive and supportive to meeting the needs of the gifted and to discovering those covert gifted ones. As researchers like Salmela, &Maata (2015) have discovered, even the best do sometimes have academic difficulties in certain areas of their studies. The gifted also have to be trained to be emotionally and socially competent. English is the language of education and instruction and a subject that all candidates should pass in Nigerian schools. Again, the knowledge of Mathematics provides a strong foundation for understanding core science and social science subjects including music and the art. It is encouraging logical reasoning and mental discipline (Hodanova and Nocar, 2016). It is therefore, the duty of the English language and Mathematics teachers to employ strategies and tools to ensure differentiated learning experiences that will make all learners aspire to work on themselves in order to achieve greater academic heights.

In the light of the above, this thesis of this paper will address issues on the characteristics of the Gifted Learner which will include such traits as cognitive, creative, affective, and behavioural attitudes. Another aspect of the thesis is the Gifted Learner in Nigeria which addresses the general policy on education concerning the Gifted Learner. The management of the Gifted Learner is the core of this paper, and this includes the pedagogical strategies to manage these kinds of learners in English Language and Mathematics class. Thereafter, the Conclusion and Suggestions form the last part of the work.

Characteristics

There are certain traits that mark out the gifted learner. From the Encyclopaedia of Educational Psychology (2008) and Oluseyi&Olujide (2014) work



and reference to the National Association of Gifted Children, there is a classification of these characteristics into the cognitive, creative, affective and behavioural. Though a gifted child is not likely to have all the following mentioned characteristics, a learner who possesses a few prominent traits from all the following discussed aspects should qualify as a gifted learner.

In this aspect, the gifted learner is said to have keen power of abstraction. He/she often has a keen interest in problem-solving and applying concepts; is a voracious and early reader; and is often found to possess large vocabulary. The cognitive gifted learner has intellectual curiosity; power of critical thinking and expresses scepticism about knowledge that he/she finds questionable. Most cognitive gifted learners engage in self-criticism. They are persistent in their bid to achieve their goals. Many of such learners are known to prefer independence in work and study; and they exhibit a diversity of interests and abilities.

The gifted learner has the power of creativity and inventiveness. Some of them may have a keen sense of humour and the ability for fantasy. Their openness to stimuli, wide interests, intuitiveness, flexibility and independence in attitude and social behaviour mark them out among their peers. However, some of them struggle with self-acceptance and are concerned about social norms. Some gifted children are perceived as radical because of their penchant for being aesthetic and their commitment to self-selected work.

On the affective side, the learner that could be termed gifted may have an unusual emotional depth and intensity. They may be sensitive or empathetic to the feelings of others. A high expectation of self and others often leads to feelings of frustration. There is also a heightened self-awareness, accompanied by feelings of being different. This often makes them feel easily wounded and exhibit the need for emotional support. They are also marked for advanced levels of moral judgement, idealism and sense of justice.

The gifted learner is said to exhibit spontaneity, boundless enthusiasm and focus on passions which sometimes make them resist changing activities when engrossed in their own interests. Gifted learners are often highly energetic. They constantly ask questions because of their insatiable curiosity and impulsive trait. Gifted learners also exhibit perseverance - a strong determination in areas of importance. However, there is a high level of frustration - particularly when having difficulty meeting standards of performance (either imposed by self or others). They may also have volatile temper, especially related to perceptions of failure; and non-stop talking or chattering.

Gifted Learner in Nigeria

Stakeholders in the educational sector in Nigeria, such as policy makers, ministers and commissioners in the field of education, and teachers have dealt with the issue of how to identify and cater for the needs of the gifted. The question has been. Whether they should be separated from other learners ii. Put them with other learners, but devise means by which their peculiarities can be taken care of. Kolo



(2010) for example, points out that the gifted learners could be managed through two major methods, namely, separation and integration. The policy of separation maintains that the gifted should be identified and put in separate schools or classrooms. In the process of integration learning however, the gifted ones learn in the same school and classroom with other learners but activities are organised such that the needs of the gifted learner is creatively met within the general classroom scenario.

In recognition of the need of attending to the gifted children in the country, the Federal Government has established Federal schools. The Federal Government Colleges are also called Unity Schools because they are supposed to admit brilliant students from all parts of Nigeria. In recognition of the fact that some of the brilliant students are indigent, the Government ensures that their fees are subsidised. Candidates for the Unity Schools are supposed to make up to certain cut-off points to be admitted. However, scholars (Joshua, Loromeke & Olanrewaju 2014) aver that with quota system introducing varying cut-off marks for children from different regions of the country, the objective of selecting only the gifted for those schools has been thwarted.

Apart from Unity Secondary Schools, other institutions of learning like demonstration secondary schools and several University secondary schools have begun to spring up all over the country. One objective common to these institutions is to get the gifted and ensure that they are well nurtured to maximise their potentials for the betterment of themselves and society. However, some of the fees that are charged are often out of the reach of the poor students.

In an attempt to see to it that the gifted are well trained through separated teaching and learning rather than integrated teaching and learning in public secondary schools, in 1986, the Federal Government, under the Babangida regime, decided that there has to be a special school for the gifted. Consequently, the Federal Government Academy (for the gifted) was established in Suleja at the site of the former Federal School of Arts and Sciences. There, gifted children are taught tuition free with opportunities of travelling overseas for further studies. However, there are also reports that the method of selection of candidates over the years is no longer strictly by merit for all students (Dada & Ani, 2019).

Managing Gifted Learners in the English Language and Mathematics Classrooms

Since not all gifted children have the opportunity of attending a special school for the gifted, teachers need to be prepared for integrated learning through gradation of learning experiences in order to accommodate the peculiarities of the gifted who are often far above their peers in intellectual ability. It is imperative that the teacher in the English language class is able to take care of (through differentiated learning strategies) all cadres of learners especially the gifted ones. English language is a general subject for all students and as a result the English language teacher has the opportunity of meeting all categories of students. In



catering for the gifted, the teacher has to also be creative in selecting learning activities that can help the gifted learners put their creativity to use and also curb their propensity to restlessness. The teacher should ensure that the four major communication skills – listening, speaking, reading and writing, including grammar are all well covered.

It is recommended that there should be some flexibility in the curriculum to be able to meet the needs of the gifted. The multi-dimensional nature of most gifted learner makes them excited about learning more than one thing at a time according to Renzulli & Reis (2018). This marks out the gifted as co-creators of knowledge rather than remaining just assimilators of knowledge. For example, there could be created tiered assignments where tasks are given to groups of students, where each group participates in aspects that are challenging but not too difficult. In this wise the gifted learners get the most complex aspect of the work. In a narrative writing lesson for example, some students may be given a task to help them understand what narrative writing is all about. Some may read narrative essays and write the techniques used by the writers, while others will write the essay and identify the various techniques, they have employed to write their essay.

Gifted learners could also be given volley of questions that are open-ended for multiple possible answers. Apart from the general text, they could be given more complex comprehension and summary passages to attempt. The pace and depth of learning should be controlled by giving the gifted learners activities that will bring out their creativity and keep them meaningfully occupied for the period allotted. In listening comprehension exercises the gifted learner may need to answer more questions than others during the allotted time frame.

English language teachers could engage gifted students in the curriculum decision-making process, giving them an opportunity to learn how to take responsibility for their own learning. Draw the curriculum from the students' interests and educational needs. Then learning could be collaborative, with gifted learners being made leaders of small groups of learners. The gifted learners could help lead learners in their group to brainstorm on points for writing an essay before the essay is written. When learners are shared into groups, leaders of the group should summarise what members of each group have learnt for the benefit of the whole class and for the teacher to throw more light on areas that are still grey.

Allow talented students to pursue independent projects based on their own individual interests; such as allowing them to engage in independent projects on the basis of ability level. They could also be allowed to explore ways of connecting unrelated issues creatively. This will encourage creativity and original thinking among gifted students. For example, students could be made to investigate the use of symbolic language in their reading texts. This could be language used in the speeches of famous writers, in poetry or any other field. Students could also be made to debate on topical issues. They could be assigned to explore languages used in different fields and contexts and discuss with small groups with teachers monitoring closely what is going on.



The important thing to note about engaging the gifted in activities in the English language class is to have set goals which should address any one or more of the language skills – listening, speaking, reading and writing. If it is on vocabulary development, gifted students could be made to lead in the study of polysemous words. Writing competence could be improved by getting gifted students engaged in leading others in mastering spelling oddities. Hands-on learning can be done by carving out learning activities from videos, audios, newspapers and magazines and so on. In descriptive writing, students could be asked to write on the characteristic traits of some of their friends.

The comprehension and summary passages should be selected to reflect the objective of content and language integrated learning; whereby topics that catch students' interest are selected as a means of learning important life issues, as well as creating opportunities for better language mastery. While the generality of the students could be asked to answer the questions on the comprehension and summary passages for instance, the gifted could in addition to this be made to write parts of the passages in their own words or end the accounts of stories in the given passages different ways.

The gifted learners could be made to engage in activities like crafting posters out of the topics being taught or making PowerPoint presentations from assignments given. This could be of immense benefit to the gifted learner and the classmates. The gifted learners could even discuss with their teacher activities that reflect imaginative ways of bettering their communication skills.

In order to avoid the boredom of routine sticking to the use of prescribed texts only, especially for the gifted children (who may have read and worked through those exercises on their own) lessons should be innovative, inspiring and at the same time challenging. Their internal motivation causes them to be task committed; taking assignments as creative outlets.

Mathematics is the foundation for advancement in various fields of scientific study. Scholars (Johnson, 2000; and Rotigel, 2004) have discovered that the gifted mathematics learners have mental agility in spontaneous formation of problems. They have been discovered to be good at organisation of data and their interpretation. They possess inferential thinking and deductive reasoning skills and transfer ideas with great originality and are computationally proficient. However, these abilities should not preclude the mathematically gifted learner from being given special attention to meet their needs, as they need a curriculum that can meet up with their fast pace and can challenge their deeper and broader insight in tackling their class work and assignments. The imperative of managing the mathematically gifted is unquestionable in the quest for a more technologically advanced society. Catering to their needs will help society and the world at large to maximally tap the potentials of the mathematically gifted for their good and that of society.

According to Guido (2021) one of the strategies to manage gifted learners in a mathematics class is to give them pre-assessment exercises. This should be carried



out to ascertain what the gifted learners already know so the mathematics teacher could implement an individualised plan with the gifted learners working on an enriched, compacted and differentiated curriculum that would be satisfactorily challenging and therefore meet their needs. Though the same learning goal is targeted, the content and activities may slightly differ. For instance, for class work and assignments on the same topic, and the same exercise, the gifted learners may be asked to work on numbers that are more difficult than the ones the general class would work on.

The gifted could be given more tasking exercises on a given topic. While other students are focused on general Mathematics questions that the gifted have already mastered, they could be given additional (further) Mathematics questions, like Calculus. For instance, the gifted could work on questions on differentiation and integration. Again, giving such learners mathematical puzzles is another useful way of meaningfully occupying the gifted in a mixed ability class.

While not discountenancing the use of the generally recommended mathematics textbooks for teaching the gifted in Mathematics, Ulman (2022) points out that most gifted learners usually work through such textbooks ahead of the class and working with the recommended texts alone becomes a repetitive ritual. Such gifted learners could therefore be allowed not only to work from generally recommended texts but to also work from additional materials that deal with concepts that are beyond the basics. The pacing of learning materials should be made to match their level of mastery of problems.

The teacher could engage learners in small group activities where gifted learners, with the supervision of the teacher, can teach others who are yet to grasp basic mathematical concepts or those who are less grounded in certain aspects. The gifted learners who have mastered what is being taught could be made to give detailed explanation to others about how they arrived at the solutions to the given problems. Such small groups could be made rotational to give learners the opportunity to interact with many groups and gain knowledge from different group leaders and classmates who are versatile in different content areas. It also builds positive team-learning culture, helps learners to work on more data and creates opportunity for more practice.

Recreational games and puzzles in mathematics could also advance the constructive problem-solving abilities of the gifted. The teacher could select mathematical games that address various aspects of the curriculum, and that will improve computation, fact fluency and problem-solving skills. The fun atmosphere that games provide will eliminate the formal and rigid learning environment that may pervade the usual atmosphere of a math class. This is also likely to help the gifted develop their explorative aptitude and, in the process, maximise their potentials. Fun maths books and games from Math websites could be helpful here.

Institutions of learning could organise their mathematics curriculum to include internal and external contests. Within the school, different classes could send representatives for periodic inter-class contests. The learners that are gifted in



Mathematics could also be groomed to take part in national and international Mathematics contests organised by different groups, companies and Associations. Opportunities for contests will create a platform for Mathematics teachers to give the gifted time for more grooming during preparations for such contests. Such opportunities could also be avenues that could connect the gifted to their mentors.

Occasionally, the Mathematics teacher could create learning stations in which learners can engage in different activities in the Maths class, according to their taste. The learning stations could be rotational but not mandatory. The stations could include learners listening to audio/audio-visual instructions, a small group being asked to tackle a mathematical problem, or give students some objects to help solve a mathematical problem. The use of occasional learning stations will help to take care of the individual differences of the mathematically gifted learners.

Conclusion

It has been established from the foregoing that it is important that the gifted learners in English language and Mathematics, especially in our public institutions of learning, should be specially managed to ensure that their potentials are fully tapped for their benefit and that of society. In order to achieve this, would-be teachers should be acquainted with skills to identify and groom the gifted. Curriculum planners should also ensure that syllabi are structured to meet the needs of the gifted. In their preparation before each lesson, teachers should ensure that their lesson plan is modified to allow the gifted fit well into their teaching routines.

Suggestions

The learning atmosphere should be conducive and supportive not only to meet the needs of the gifted but to also discover those covert gifted ones. Schools should ensure that there are tools, facilities and infrastructure to meet the needs of every learner, particularly the gifted. Teachers should endeavour to employ various learning methods and media in teaching in order to accommodate the gifted learners. The gifted also need to be groomed to be emotionally and socially competent.

Apart from the afore-mentioned, institutions of learning should provide the gifted with opportunities to enjoy special programmes for their enrichment. They should be given apps to perform at naturally higher levels of creativity and academic performance. Gifted learners in English language should be made to watch instructional videos and be introduced to platforms for personalised grammar. The mathematically gifted should be given apps that explore topics at deeper levels. Both in the English language and Mathematics classrooms, self-pacing curricula that will help the gifted tackle higher level problems in English language and Mathematics in actual and virtual learning environments should be provided.



It is therefore imperative that English language and Mathematics teachers employ strategies and tools to ensure differentiated learning experiences that will groom all learners and especially the gifted, in language fluency and communicative competence. The mathematically gifted are also to be well managed in order to ensure that Nigeria grows to become a techno-scientifically viable society.

Implications

The implications of the findings of this paper, and the suggestions are germane in achieving the best from Gifted Learners in English Language and Mathematics classes. A prime implication is that, the Gifted Learners will be able tackle higher level problems in English Language and Mathematics in both actual and virtual learning environments. Another implication is that, when the objective of this thesis is achieved, a higher level of fluency will be achieved in the Gifted Learner and also, it will ensure that Nigeria is put on the path to becoming technologically and scientifically viable society when these learners are properly managed. A final implication is that specialised curriculum and vigorous and intentional training of teachers of the Gifted Learners will be in the front burner of the managers of education in the government and the society.

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