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Strategies for Gifted Students: Exploring Primary School Teachers' Approaches

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Abstract

This qualitative study explores how primary school teachers meet the needs of gifted children in regular classrooms. Six elementary school teachers were interviewed using a semi-structured approach, in Malappuram district, Kerala, India. The analysis of the study uncovered six themes that provide insightful perspectives on how primary school teachers perceive and comprehend giftedness. These themes shed light on teachers' beliefs, attitudes, and practices related to gifted children, contributing to a deeper understanding of their perspectives. The themes highlight the multifaceted excellence of gifted students, the amplification of their exceptional qualities, the importance of empowering and nurturing their brilliance, and the need to create enriched learning environments that cater to their unique needs. The findings of this study provide valuable insights into how primary school teachers meet the needs of gifted students, thereby enhancing gifted students' education in regular classrooms.

INTRODUCTION

Education for gifted children is a topic of extensive research and discussion. Typically, repetitive curricula present unique challenges for gifted students in formal education contexts. This can cause these students to

experience feelings of discouragement and frustration. Unfortunately, the classroom environment does not always encourage students to reach their maximum potential, resulting in insecurity for both students and instructors (Rocha et al., 2017).

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It is essential to recognise and acknowledge gifted children's distinct cognitive, creative, affective, and behavioural characteristics. They have high levels of intellect, cognitive self-awareness, and leadership skills; but they may also be afraid of failure due to the pressure to perform well (Narimani & Mousazadeh, 2010). These children are frequently persistent and ardent learners, but they can also be perfectionists and emotionally sensitive (Clark, 2008). While they may reach early milestones in language, reading, and writing, they may experience frustration when they struggle to meet performance standards and value independence in learning (Altintas & Ilgun, 2016). The field of education acknowledges the need for specialised support to nurture the abilities of exceptional children. These children require assistance from institutions, families, and society to continue to develop (Little, 2012). Well-educated, talented individuals are essential for addressing global challenges and advancing societal progress.

Consistently, the research emphasises the distinctive learning requirements of exceptional students and the need for appropriately challenging instruction (Gallagher, 2013). Without such instruction, gifted students may become disenchanted with formal education and disengaged (Preckel et al., 2015). Many educators lack the knowledge and training necessary to accurately

identify gifted students and implement effective differentiation strategies. Significant concerns exist regarding the underrepresentation and under-education of exceptional students from disadvantaged backgrounds, with disabilities, or who face cultural biases (Assouline et al., 2014). These students are frequently overlooked, resulting in a loss of human capital and potential. Identifying and supporting exceptional students from diverse backgrounds is crucial for promoting social justice and prospering economies. Assouline et al, argue that universal teacher preparation in exceptional education is crucial to ensuring that every child has the opportunity to learn and flourish.

Understanding teachers' perspectives and approaches to giftedness is crucial in the Indian context. Exploring the perceptions of primary teachers in India regarding gifted education, including their understanding of giftedness, identification practices, instructional strategies, available resources, and areas requiring additional support, can shed light on the strengths and weaknesses of the Indian educational system. This exhaustive investigation seeks to provide insights for targeted interventions and policies that improve the provision of quality education to exceptional students in India. Educators, policymakers, and researchers can work together to ensure that gifted children in India receive the education they need to

realise their maximum potential and contribute to the advancement of society as a whole.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Gifted Education in India

In India, the primary challenge in gifted education revolves around the absence of suitable policies and identification criteria. Unfortunately, gifted education in the country tends to be accessible primarily to students from affluent backgrounds. Consequently, children from underprivileged and economically disadvantaged families face significant obstacles in accessing gifted education opportunities. This disparity results in a substantial gap in gifted education provision within India. In the context of India's vast and diverse population of 1.21 billion people, which encompasses various cultural and linguistic backgrounds, the inclusion of gifted education in the formal educational policy is yet to be realised. Although research on giftedness in India has been conducted for the past 50 years, it lacks a systematic and empirical foundation. Until recently, the term 'gifted' was not commonly used in the Indian context, with most studies focusing on creativity instead (Roy, P., Güçyeter, S and Zhang, S. Z., 2017). While talented children in India may be recognised by their families and schools, formal identification and support for giftedness are sporadic and often depend on the child's selection

for limited gifted programmes. The scarcity of comprehensive information and a database regarding programmes, policies, practices, and outcomes in gifted education in India hinders accurate evaluation and review (ibid, 2017).

Teachers' Perception of Gifted Education

Teachers play a crucial role in the development of gifted children, both academically and holistically. Gifted students need well-informed, trained, and supportive teachers. Positive views of giftedness and gifted education affect teaching. To meet teachers' requirements and recognise their best practises, it is important to evaluate their comments (Kettler, et al., 2017). Different giftedness theories emphasise general intellectual ability, domain-specific talents, creativity, and talent development (Sternberg and Kaufman, 2018). Teachers' perception of giftedness is shaped by their education, training, philosophy, and experiences with regular and gifted students (Kettler et al., 2017b; Margrain and Farquhar, 2012). Teachers generally see talented children as having superior cognitive, social, and physical skills (Moon and Brighton, 2008; Yazici et al., 2017). Gifted students are known for their thinking, knowledge, reading, problem-solving, creativity, friendliness, and leadership (ibid). Preschool gifted education programmes face a shortage

of policies, skilled professionals, resources, and time (Kettler et al., 2017). Due to worries regarding children's growth and emotional maturity, several pre-schools are hesitant to start gifted programmes (Margrain and Farquhar, 2012).

Despite these hurdles, instructors know talented children's specific needs and behaviours must be addressed (Cosar et al., 2015). Teachers feel gifted education should be considered special education and that professional development training improves attitudes and skills (Margrain & Farquhar, 2012; Vreys et al., 2018). Some teachers use observation and evaluation to identify talented students, whereas others feel unprepared and offer extra help (Senicar & Senicar, 2018; Konrad & Gabrijelcic, 2015). Conflicting views and concerns about differentiation and curricular alignment make enriched learning environments for talented children difficult (Grant, 2013; Kettler et al., 2017). Teachers value emotional security and strong social interactions and believe in encouraging talk and peer engagement (Grant, 2013; Margrain & Farquhar, 2012). Early childhood gifted education programmes are understudied (Kettler et al., 2017). Most researches examine talented preschoolers' identification, features, and educational programmes. Teachers help talented toddlers develop, and their training, attitudes, and views are crucial to effective educational interventions. Addressing obstacles and creating

meaningful learning settings for brilliant youngsters is crucial.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How do primary school teachers perceive giftedness and gifted students in the context of regular classrooms?
2. What strategies do primary school teachers employ to meet the advanced learning needs of gifted students who are integrated into their regular classrooms?

METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

In the present study, the researchers utilised a phenomenological methodology to generate insightful results. Phenomenological research is a qualitative research method that seeks to describe individuals' lived experiences. This method emphasises on comprehending the specific phenomena that have influenced an individual, as well as how that individual perceives and interprets those phenomena in a given context. It enables researchers to investigate the similarities and shared behaviours of a group of individuals. By employing the phenomenological method, the researchers were able to investigate the unique perspectives and experiences associated with the investigated topic.

Interview Process and Participants' Selection

In the study, the researcher utilised a semi-structured interview approach

and employed the purposive sampling method for participant selection. The interviews were conducted in a duration ranging from 30 to 45 minutes. During the interviews, the interviewer utilised probing questions to elicit detailed and insightful experiences from the participating teachers. A total of six primary school teachers from Malappuram district of Kerala state took part in the study, all of whom had more than five years of teaching experience. Two teachers had seven years of teaching experience and were currently teaching Class II students. Three teachers had 13 years of teaching experience, and the classes they taught varied from year to year. One teacher had 23 years of teaching

experience, with the past 18 years dedicated to teaching Class I students. These teachers were selected as participants based on their extensive experience in the field, which provided valuable insights into the topic under investigation.

Data Analysis and Deriving Themes

In the data analysis process, the researcher employed five steps: meaning unit, condensed meaning unit, code, sub-theme, and theme. By following these steps, the researcher was able to analyse the data, identify codes, and arrive at the main themes that captured the primary findings of the study.

Table 1
A Model of Analysis Deriving Codes and Themes

Meaning Unit	Condensed Meaning Unit	Code	Sub Theme	Theme
How would you define giftedness in the context of primary school education? R1: “Giftedness in primary school education refers to students with exceptional	“Students who display exceptional abilities and talents in various domains, including intellectual, creative, artistic, leadership and social skills.”	“Emphasising that giftedness means recognising and encouraging each child’s unique gifts and strengths.”	Multidimensional talent	

<p>abilities or talents in specific areas. These students frequently have outstanding problem-solving and creative talents. Identifying and cultivating these skills is vital to provide suitable educational opportunities and challenges.”</p>				
<p>R2: “As a primary school teacher, giftedness extends beyond academic success. It comprises kids with remarkable intelligence, creativity, leadership, and social skills.”</p>			<p>Beyond academics</p>	
<p>R3: “Giftedness in primary school education is not only defined by high IQ scores or academic performance.”</p>	<p>“Giftedness goes beyond academic excellence and includes recognising and supporting the diverse talents and strengths of each child”.</p>			

<p>R4: “As a primary school teacher, I feel giftedness embraces many abilities and strengths. It comprises students with strong problem-solving, literary, creative, musical, or leadership talents.”</p>		<p>“Considering students’ advanced intellectual talents, enthusiasm, and willingness to learn.”</p>	<p>Passion and curiosity</p>	<p>Multifaceted Excellence</p>
<p>R5: “In my experience, recognising giftedness in elementary school students involves a holistic approach. Gifted children are motivated, smart, and eager to learn.”</p>	<p>“Giftedness involves identifying students with a deep passion and intense curiosity for specific subjects or areas, and nurturing their enthusiasm for growth and development.”</p>	<p>“Gifted children display varied academic, creative, artistic, leadership and social traits.”</p>	<p>Holistic approach</p>	
<p>R6: “As a primary school teacher, giftedness is a continuum, not a set group. Student skills and talents vary.”</p>	<p>“Giftedness requires a holistic approach, inclusive of students’ advanced intellectual capabilities and motivation.”</p>			

Table 2
Item Wise Codes and Themes

Items	Codes	Subthemes	Themes
<p>“What indicators or characteristics do you look for when identifying gifted students in your regular classroom?”</p>	<p>“Exceptional critical thinking skills, quick grasp of new concepts, advanced problem-solving abilities, and abstract thinking” “High levels of motivation, curiosity, enthusiasm for learning, and perseverance in pursuing challenging tasks.” “Ability to make connections between ideas, thinking from different perspectives, and displaying innovative approaches to problem-solving” “Exceptional talent in specific domains, such as art, music, mathematics, or leadership qualities.”</p>	<p>Cognitive abilities and critical thinking Intrinsic motivation and curiosity Creativity and innovation</p>	<p>Giftedness Amplified</p>
<p>“Could you describe your experiences in teaching and supporting gifted students who are integrated into your regular classroom?”</p>	<p>“Use of differentiated instruction, advanced materials, and opportunities for independent research to meet the unique needs of gifted students in the regular classroom.” “The innate drive and enthusiasm for acquiring knowledge and engaging in deep learning exhibited by gifted students.” “Creating a classroom environment</p>	<p>Personalised learning and growth Academic excellence and social integration.</p>	<p>Empowered Brilliance</p>

	that encourages collaboration, interaction, and the sharing of perspectives among gifted students and their peers.”		
What instructional strategies do you employ to meet the advanced learning needs of gifted students in your regular classroom?	<p>“Tailoring instruction and assignments to meet the specific learning needs of gifted students in the regular classroom.”</p> <p>“Providing additional learning opportunities, resources, and activities that go beyond the standard curriculum to challenge and engage gifted students.”</p> <p>“Fostering collaboration, discussions, and group projects among gifted students to enhance their learning experience and to promote social interaction.”</p> <p>“Creating individualised learning plans and pathways that cater to the unique abilities, interests, and goals of gifted students.”</p>	Customised instruction and enrichment Collaboration and social integration	Empowering Excellence
“Have you encountered any challenges in meeting the specific needs of gifted students? If so, how have you addressed or overcome these challenges?”	“Providing guidance and creating a supportive environment to address the social and emotional needs of gifted students.”	Social and emotional well-being and engagement Academic challenge	Nurturing Giftedness

	<p>“Finding and utilising appropriate resources and materials to meet the advanced abilities and interests of gifted students.”</p> <p>“The implementation of differentiated instruction and providing advanced learning opportunities to challenge and engage gifted students academically.”</p>		
<p>“Are there any specific resources or support systems that you find helpful in catering to the advanced learning needs of gifted students in your regular classroom?”</p>	<p>“Utilisation of a variety of resources, including online platforms, community organisations, and digital libraries, to meet the advanced learning needs of gifted students.”</p> <p>“Working closely with parents, other teachers, specialists, and gifted education associations to establish a network of support systems for addressing the needs of gifted students.”</p> <p>“Incorporating educational technology, online platforms, and digital tools to provide personalised and differentiated instruction for gifted students.”</p> <p>“The importance of attending conferences, workshops, and</p>	<p>Enrichment and depth Resourcefulness and adaptability.</p>	<p>Empowering Excellence</p>

	engaging with online communities to enhance knowledge and skills in supporting gifted learners.”		
“In your opinion, what additional support or professional development opportunities would be beneficial for teachers to effectively meet the needs of gifted students in regular classrooms?”	<p>“Implementation of instructional strategies and techniques that cater to the unique needs of gifted students in regular classrooms.”</p> <p>“Providing guidance and creating a supportive environment to address the social and emotional needs of gifted students”</p> <p>“Recognising and nurturing the diverse talents and strengths of gifted students in various domains.”</p>	<p>Pedagogical expertise</p> <p>Holistic support.</p>	<p>Empowering Gifted Education</p>

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The rigorous qualitative analysis uncovered six themes that provide insightful perspectives on the perceptions of giftedness among primary school teachers. These themes provide valuable insights into how teachers in primary schools perceive and comprehend the concept of giftedness. The identified themes cast light on the beliefs, attitudes, and practices of teachers regarding gifted education, contributing to a greater understanding of their perspectives.

The six themes uncovered by the research provide a comprehensive picture of how primary school teachers perceive giftedness. These themes are significant indicators of teacher comprehension of giftedness and inform their approaches to educating gifted students. By examining these themes, the study provides a complex and nuanced depiction of the perspectives of primary teachers on giftedness and provides valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities associated with supporting and nurturing gifted students in primary classrooms. The main themes are:

- 1. Multifaceted Excellence:** Gifted students exhibit a range of exceptional abilities across multiple domains, including intellectual, creative, social, and physical skills (Moon & Brighton, 2008; Yazici et al., 2017). Their excellence goes beyond academic achievements and encompasses various dimensions of talent and potential.
- 2. Giftedness Amplified:** Different theories of giftedness emphasise various aspects, such as general intellectual ability, domain-specific talents, creativity, and talent development (Sternberg & Kaufman, 2018). Giftedness is not limited to a single definition but rather encompasses a broad spectrum of exceptional abilities.
- 3. Empowered Brilliance:** Teachers play a crucial role in empowering gifted students to realise their full potential and brilliance (Kettler et al., 2017). Well-informed and supported teachers who hold positive views of giftedness can positively influence the educational experiences and outcomes of gifted students.
- 4. Empowering Excellence:** Gifted education should be considered a form of special education, and teachers' professional development training is essential for improving their attitudes and skills in catering to the needs of gifted students (Margrain & Farquhar, 2012; Vreys et al., 2018). By empowering teachers with the necessary knowledge and resources, excellence in gifted education can be fostered.
- 5. Nurturing Giftedness:** Teachers recognise the specific needs and behaviours of gifted children and acknowledge the importance of addressing these needs in their

educational journey (Cosar et al., 2015). Providing nurturing environments and appropriate educational interventions are crucial in supporting the development of gifted students.

- 6. Enriching Gifted Education:** Creating enriched learning environments for talented children can be challenging due to conflicting views and concerns about differentiation and curricular alignment (Grant, 2013; Kettler, et al., 2017). However, teachers value emotional security, strong social interactions, and peer engagement as key factors in fostering meaningful learning settings for gifted students (Grant, 2013; Margrain & Farquhar, 2012).

These six themes emphasise the significance of recognising and nurturing the multifaceted excellence of gifted students. Empowering teachers through professional development and support is essential for creating enriched educational experiences that cater to the unique needs of gifted learners. By addressing obstacles and promoting meaningful learning settings, the brilliance of gifted youngsters can be fully realised.

CONCLUSION

The study investigated the perceptions and strategies utilised by regular teachers in primary schools to meet the needs and demands of gifted students. The findings emphasised the significance of teacher awareness and comprehension of giftedness, as well as the need for professional development and training. The advanced cognitive, social, and problem-solving skills of gifted pupils were acknowledged by

their teachers. The study revealed that teachers use a variety of methods, including observation, evaluation, and differentiated instruction, to recognise and assist gifted students. The creation of enriched learning environments for these students was hindered however by contradictory views and concerns regarding curriculum alignment. The findings highlight the importance of emotional security, robust social interactions, and peer involvement in nurturing the development of gifted students. The study contributes to a deeper understanding of the perceptions and strategies of primary school teachers for meeting the requirements of gifted students, providing insights for improving educational interventions and creating more inclusive classrooms.

LIMITATIONS OF STUDY AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The qualitative phenomenological approach of the study limits

generalisability to a wider population. The study was done in Malappuram district, Kerala, which may restrict its applicability to other regions or cultures. Purposive sampling increases selection bias since participants are picked based on particular criteria. A future study should include comparable studies in other regions of India to capture primary school teachers' varying viewpoints and experiences in serving talented children's needs. Expanding the sample size and using a comparison technique with control groups or various schools might improve knowledge. Longitudinal studies can also assess strategy and intervention efficacy. Viewpoints of parents, administrators, and gifted kids' may also shed light on gifted education's obstacles and prospects in the education of gifted children. Finally, studying how cultural and socioeconomic variables affect views and tactics for exceptional kids might deepen our knowledge.

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