

School For Talented Students In Asian Countries, A Comparative Study

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Abstract

This study has been performed regarding the academic standards and rules of school for talented students in Asian Countries. By reviewing the educational system for the gifted, it was evident that Asian countries such as Iran and India are trying their best for achieving higher standard for gifted by educating them in the available education system up to school level. There are no specific educational programmes and some private sectors are active in helping the gifted children in both the countries. The gifted students remained undiagnosed because of only one method used for assessing their giftedness. Since, there are many such students in schools, a more effective system is needed for proper diagnosis and selection of the gifted children.

INTRODUCTION

The Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary defines the term "gifted" as: (1) having great natural ability and (2) Revealing a special gift.

"Gifted" children have been defined as those "who by nature of outstanding abilities are capable of high performance". The term "outstanding abilities" refers to general intellectual ability, specific academic aptitude, leadership ability, ability in the visual or performing arts, creative thinking or athletic ability.

Most gifted children display a higher rate of concentration and memory capacity. There is no typical gifted child for particular talents and social environments give rise to varying personality patterns. Achievement patterns also vary. Differences among them are found, even when they are grouped together.

Statement of the problem

In the business world, many management studies attempt to find the traits and characteristics of the successful company leaders, as they

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believe that leaders can be nurtured and trained. Likewise, there are also qualities and characteristics that are frequently found among gifted children, although no single child will possess all of them. One way by which parents can tell if their children are gifted is to focus on a range of behaviours that occur in the daily conversations, activities and responses to learning opportunities. A list of characteristics common in gifted four-five- and six-years old includes abilities such as they express curiosity about many things, ask thoughtful questions, have extensive vocabularies and use complex sentence structure, are able to express themselves well, solve problems in unique ways, have good memory, exhibit unusual talent in art, music or creative dramatics, exhibit especially original imaginations, use previously learned things in new contexts, are unusually able to order things in logical sequence, discuss and elaborate on ideas, are fast learners, desire to work independently and take initiative, exhibit wit and humour, have sustained attention spans and are willing to persist on challenging tasks, are very observant, show talent in making and narrating stories and are interested in reading.

A gifted child might not show all the above mentioned characteristics but parents and professionals will

generally see a pattern while observing over an extended period of time.

Many parents feel that there is little practical value to get their 'potential' gifted child tested. But there are potential risks with putting off the testing. Knowing the pattern of cognitive strengths and weaknesses can help parents to plan the best learning experience. Also, waiting till school tests, the child can risk a ceiling effect on the tests, one that gets more pronounced each and every year. Many gifted students often appear to be troublemakers and often challenge authority figures by questioning classroom rules. Presently all over the world, there have been different methods and programmes for a better selection and education of the gifted students based on the original educational situation of the country. Some countries are following high standards in their educational centers and this policy has led them to better utilisation of gifted students. This study will compare Iran and India according to their educational system for gifted students.

Significance of the study

The behaviour of a gifted child is sometimes confused with attention disorders such as ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder) and ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder). Hence, the test would identify a gifted child from a possible learning disordered child such as ADHD, Asperger's

Syndrome and other problems as early as possible. Children who are gifted are more comfortable with children and classes that deal with them at their own level. Research has shown that gifted students thrive when placed with students of similar ability. In the wrong learning setting, giftedness can be as paralysing as a learning handicap. Unfortunately, these gifted children are terrible introverts, misunderstood by peers and parents, with their undiscovered exceptionalities leading to a dead end. Bored and unchallenged at school, they may drop out and choose a direction that will never make use of their exceptional abilities.

Defining the most practical standard regarding the education for the gifted is very important and this will lead us to gain more profit from gifted students.

Aims of the study

To study the educational programmes for the gifted children in India; Singapore and Iran.

Literature review

Nowadays, identification and programming for gifted and talented (GT) students is not only a part of school and university curriculum in developed countries⁴, but also is accounted as a model of progress for developing countries⁵. Although the best time for identification of gifted and talented students is at childhood⁶, but

several investigators have developed methods for identification of GTs before entering colleges⁷. They have proposed special measures for those identified, for example, acceleration or compacting the usual curriculum content, training the managers and teachers of GTs about the concept and needs of GTs, and annual evaluation of these programmes⁸. Regarding GT education, schools play crucial roles:

1. Conducting programmes to educate GTs from elementary to high school: examples are Colorado University training programme for students of elementary and middle schools (GTs go to some classes at the university on Saturday afternoons)⁹ and Georgia University programme for high school GTs¹⁰. Such programmes are also found in other countries such as UK¹¹.

2. Designing and conducting programmes for their own GT students. Examples are Johns Hopkins University programme (provision of financial aids, accelerated programmes and Early Entrance Programme for GTs)¹² and Brazil universities programmes. Here is a brief of the educational programme faced by Indian and Iranian gifted children have been given.

India

India is the second most populous country in the world with a population of 1.08 billion. The UN predicts that by

2025 India will surpass China as the most populous nation. Life expectancy in India is 64 years. The country is divided into 28 States and seven Union Territories, each with their own elected or appointed governments.

About 70% of Indians live in rural areas, which are often very remote; 64.8% of adults are literate, (75.3% are males, and 53.7% are females). Kerala is the only state that is completely literate. Officially, 23 languages are recognised by the constitution but over 840 dialects are spoken. Hindi and English are the official languages used by the central government.¹³

There are approximately 888,000 educational institutions in India enrolling around 189.2 million students.¹³

In its commitment to raise the quality of education, the central government has been steadily increasing the education budget since Independence in 1947. The goal is to allocate to it at least 6% of GDP (currently approximately 4% of GDP makes up the education budget). From this budget, 86% goes to support higher education - India's world class management and IT institutes. As a result India produces an elite number of highly educated graduates, but at the same time it is struggling to meet basic educational goals including universal elementary education, the

total eradication of illiteracy and improving access and the quality of education in rural areas.

In accordance with the National Policy of Education (1986), the central government envisaged a scheme in which intellectually gifted and talented rural students would be provided with quality residential education free of cost. The government decided to invest on gifted children because they are viewed as crucial to the social and economic development of India. One anticipated outcome of this scheme is that students will return to their rural villages in the future as professionals and thereby help to raise the overall standard of living in their communities. The scheme was started in 1986 with the opening of the first two Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya (JNV) schools. This has grown to 515 schools at present serving 158,897 gifted and talented students. The goal is to have at least one JNV in each district of India.¹⁴ According to the last results in 1986, Indian minority students were estimated 35,000 in more than 9000 schools. Also in 1994, there were 12,00,000 gifted students in 340 "Brilliant Talents" schools. Only 12% of such students have included in public schools educational service.

JNV schools are coeducational residential schools for students aged 11-17. Education is free for all enrolled

students which include residential care, uniform, textbooks, medical care and travel fares to go home. Many of the students come from uneducated and illiterate families, a trend which has never before occurred in Indian education. Admission of the 80 new students to each school each year is made on the basis of a selection test administered by the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE). It aims to be an objective, class-neutral test designed to ensure fairness regardless of prior educational attainment and is offered in 20 languages. It includes three sections covering mental ability, arithmetic and language, consisting of a total of 100 multiple choice questions. Admission is extremely competitive, the national acceptance rate being roughly 4%.¹⁵

The JNV head office in New Delhi provided the following list of key objectives of the JNVs:¹⁶

- **Quality education:** to provide a quality education including a strong component of culture, societal values, awareness of the environment and extracurricular activities to intellectually talented students from predominantly rural areas;
- **Language skills:** to ensure that all students attain a reasonable level of competency in three languages (i.e. Hindi, English and one regional language);
- **National integration:** to promote national integration through the migration programme, a one year exchange programme in which students from Hindi speaking districts attend a JNV in a Non-Hindi speaking district and vice-versa;
- **Social responsibility:** to improve the quality of education in all schools in each district by sharing JNV facilities, programmes and expertise.

All JNV schools follow the standard national CBSE curriculum which includes at least two languages, general studies, work experience, physical and health education and three of the following: mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, biotechnology, economics, political science, history, geography, business studies, accountancy, fine arts, agriculture, computer science, multimedia and web technology, sociology, psychology, philosophy, physical education, music and dance, entrepreneurship or fashion studies. The curriculum is not accelerated, but students are provided with enrichment opportunities. These are:¹⁷

- **Three languages:** Students have been educated in their mother tongue/regional language in their village school and at secondary

level at a JNV school they are instructed in English for maths and science, and in Hindi for social studies. As a result, students are fluent in atleast three languages

- **Computer education:** Each JNV school has a computer lab to which all students have access and all students take computer classes. In addition there is atleast one JNV 'Smart School' in each state with additional IT resources and expertise including teacher training for the staff of other schools
- **Extracurricular activities:** Sports plays an important role in schools. Each morning consists of an hour of yoga and a wide range of other sports are offered. The JNV head office organises regional and national sports meetings which also provide an extended community for JNV students. An 'Art in Education' programme is also offered which is led by invited guests and other extracurricular activities include Boy Scouts and Girl Guides, debating clubs, traditional dance, speech and song competitions and a youth parliament.

All students appear for exams at the end of Class X (age 15) and Class XII (age 17), which are extremely rigorous and competitive and they have been criticised for promoting rote-learning in Indian schools. JNV

students have successively scored much higher than the national average obtained by other students in these exams.¹³

Teaching staff at JNV schools stay on the campus with the students which facilitates a close-knit relationship. Incentives are provided to encourage good applicants to apply for the teaching posts, such as rent free housing at the school and the enrolment of two sons/daughters without having them appear the entrance test. The JNV head office organises extensive teacher training for the workshops to and upgrade skills and identify the needs of teacher. They are also offered extensive computer training in collaboration with IT organisations.¹³

JNV schools also provide educational opportunities to students attending local schools in the district as the goal is to raise the overall quality of education by extending JNV services and facilities to local teachers and students. For example, JNV 'Smart Schools' are part of a computer literacy programme that have been given the responsibility of providing computer training to students at 10 local schools. Till date, over 9000 rural students have benefited from this programme. JNV schools also support their local communities by providing free access to their libraries, by allowing local

teachers to participate in the workshops and seminars organised by JNVs, and also by providing health and hygiene services to local residents. JNV students are also encouraged to use their strengths and skills to contribute to their local communities. The teaching staff expressed the view that these students were part of a unique community that would open the door to many future possibilities. They encouraged the students to recognise this opportunity and search for ways in which they could help these less fortunate. A key feature of the model of gifted and talented education in India is that it is a holistic one, uniting academic development with character formation and the development of social responsibility, and viewing the individual as first and foremost a part of society. However, this should not be divorced from the contextual issues of Indian society and the views presented by government officials, teachers and students alike that education was crucial to social and economic change. Schools dedicated to the education of gifted and talented students are seen not only as a means of educating an elite group of gifted individuals who will go on to improve the quality of life in their communities, but centres of excellence from which the local community can draw on in a wide variety of ways.¹³

SINGAPORE

Gifted Education Programme (Singapore)¹⁷

The Gifted Education Programme (GEP) is a Singaporean academic programme designed for the gifted 1 % of pupils. The Gifted Education Programme was first implemented in Singapore in 1984. It was initiated by the Ministry of Education (MoE) in line with its policy under the New Education System to allow each pupil to learn at his/her own pace. The MoE has a commitment to ensure that the potential of each pupil is recognised, nurtured and developed. It was recognised that there are pupils who are intellectually gifted and that there should be provisions to meet their needs. It actually began with two primary centers and two secondary centers, but now it has expanded nine primary centers (as at October 2004).

As of 2007, nine primary schools and two secondary schools offer GEP.

In 2004, with the first five secondary schools implementing their own Integrated Programmes with their affiliated Junior Colleges, they are officially no longer under the GEP. However, they still have their own programmes within their respective Integrated Programmes to cater to these gifted students, who still retain their “gifted” status. Despite all the changes, there have not been any major changes to the programme, and this is basically just a change of name.

However, the Integrated Programme proved so popular that in 2004, the

remaining schools officially in the programme (Dunman High School and Victoria School) saw a drastic decrease in enrolment.

As of 2005, four of the secondary schools officially offer only the Integrated Programme (Hwa Chong Institution, Raffles Institution, Raffles Girls' School (Secondary), Nanyang Girls' High School).

Anglo-Chinese School (Independent) and Dunman High School are exceptions: it offers both the GEP and IP to its students. There are also two GE-IP classes in the school who are offered both the programmes of GEP and IP.

From 2008 year-end, the MoE will phase out the secondary GEP due to the impact of the IP. However, GEP pupils who do not wish to take up the Integrated Programme after 2008 can enroll in schools with school based special programmes at Secondary.

The mission statement of the Gifted Education Programme is to provide leadership in the education of the intellectually gifted. The programme is committed to nurture gifted individuals to their full potential for the fulfillment of self and the betterment of society. Their vision is to make the Gifted Education Programme a model of excellence in the education of the intellectually gifted. They will achieve

this vision by providing professional expertise and exemplary resources to develop intellectual rigor, humane values and creativity in gifted youths to prepare them for responsible leadership and service to country and society.

At Primary three students, at the age of nine, can choose to take 2 rounds of tests, the first round being the Screening Test, and the second round being the Selection Test. The 2 GEP tests allows the top 1 % pupils to enter GEP.

During the Screening Test, English and Mathematics are tested. After the Screening Test, a certain number of pupils are eliminated. The remaining will go through the Selection Test.

During the Selection Test, English, Mathematics and IQ are tested. Those who get through the second round are identified as the top 1 % pupils. Before 2003, there was a third round of testing to allow entry for pupils who missed the chance in P3, after the PSLE. This last round of testing was offered to students who achieved 3 or more A *s for the examination. Students who got in at this round were referred to as being Supplementary Intake students. However, this practice was discontinued as of 2003 statistics showed that it was too difficult for the Supplementary Intake students to catch up and excel in the Programme.

The pupils studied in this programme from Primary (4 to 6) and

after that, the pupils can choose to continue studying in the programme only, in the Integrated Programme, or in the mainstream. Some parents and pupils have argued that the stress in the programme is too much.

Schools in the programme set separate (sometimes jointly set with other GEP schools) test papers and generally hold more enrichment activities for the students in the programme.

In GEP, pupils in Primary 4 (P4) attend a programme which includes content like Chinese poetry, comics, riddles etc. The programme is called Chinese Language Appreciation (CLA) and is to be attended once a week. Individualised Research Study (IRS) is compulsory for pupils in Primary 4 or 5, wherein pupils do research on a specific topic. At the end of P4, the teachers would select approximately half the pupils to do the Innovation Programme (IvP), where pupils invent items to solve real life problems. Other pupils will have the option to do the Future Problem Solving (FPS), or continue staying in IRS.

Pupils in the GEP have to take Social Studies as a graded subject. They will study textbook based content in depth. Overall, lessons in the GEP are conducted with fewer textbooks and workbooks; lessons are mostly discussion worksheet and project based.

Pupils in GEP learn poetry and literature (Charlotte's Web in Primary 4, A Wrinkle in Time in Primary 5, and Friedrich in Primary 6) as part of the Concept Unit under the English Language subject. Charlotte's Web will be tested under the Miscellaneous section during the end-of-year-examination for P4. A project on A Wrinkle in Time and a Reading Journal will have to be completed in Term 4 at P5. These books replace the English textbook.

The GEP and its students have been criticised by many. The programme being labelled as elitist and the students as arrogant nerds. The issue of the GEP has been raised many times in Singapore, both online in blogs and in the mainstream media. GEP students are sometimes prejudiced against and insulted by others and portrayed as nerds who spend large amounts of time studying and have no interests in sports or other non-academic activities. While this perception may ring true for some GEP individuals, as a blanket stereotype of all GEP students it does not hold true as there have been and still are GEP students who have been good in sports and have taken part in numerous sports competitions, both at Inter School and National levels. The GEP is often criticised to be elitist, as highlighted by the Wee Shu Min elitism scandal, in which the 18 year old

Raffles Junior College and GEP alumnus student caused public outcry in november 2006 for making insensitive and judgemental remarks against others. There was a similar controversy a year before, whereby a Primary Six GEP student wrote a letter to Today openly declaring that Non-GEP students (referred to as “mainstreamers”) were immature, and that she preferred to mix with “(similar) people like us¹⁸”.

In an article in The Straits Times on 3 November 2007, the MoE announced its new scheme to “encourage” greater integration between GEP and mainstream students, to combat elitism and encourage socialisation. GEP students in the nine primary GEP centers would spend up to 50% of their lesson time with the top 2% to 5% of the cohort, or the top mainstream students. They would do activities such as building structures with plastic blocks. The announcement of the integration provoked much buzz on the blogosphere. While some felt that this might alleviate some of the stereotypes, prejudices and relieve the generally bad press that GEP students and the GEP had got over the past few years. Others raised objections such as the fact that the only mainstream pupils affected were the top students, which in their view did not eradicate elitism.

Gifted and talented education in Iran

In I.R. of Iran, development of rules and regulations is done by the Islamic Parliament, Higher Council of Education and the Cabinet.¹⁹

According to the article 30 of the IRI Constitution the government is obliged to provide all citizens with free education up to the end of secondary school and must expand free higher education to the extent required by the country for attaining self-sufficiency.

Compulsory schooling is for five years, at present, which covers 6 to 10 years old children. According to the Third Five Year Development Plan, it will cover 6 to 13 years old children which will improve compulsory schooling to 8 years.¹⁹

In order to improve the quality of education, the assessment system which is one of the effective factors in teaching-learning process has been revised. There are many reasons why this reform was made, some of which are outlined as: the previous system was based on traditional, non scientific and ineffective methods. The actual usage of the finding in the real life was neglected and there was overemphasis on a great deal of knowledge. In the reform process some objectives like, matching the assessment methods with scientific findings, increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of school teachings and students, active

participation in teaching-learning process were taken into consideration.²⁰ The I.R. of Iran has been trying hard, during the recent years, to increase the enrolment rate, in other words, to increase schooling chances for various groups of people regardless of their gender, age, tribal and ethnic diversities. In this regard the priority has been focused on the education of school age (6-10 year old) children. It has taken efficient measures and practical strategies in the framework of the country's second development plan to achieve this main objective. According to the CIA World Factbook, from information collected in 2003, 85.6% of males and 73% of females over the age of 15 are literate. Thus 79.4% of the population is literate.

Literacy training has been a prime concern in Iran. For the year 2000, adult illiteracy rates were estimated at 23.1% (males, 16.3%; females, 30.0%). A literacy corps was established in 1963 to send educated conscripts to villages. During its first 10 years, the corps helped 2.2 million urban children and 600,000 adults become literate. In 1997, there were 9,238,393 pupils enrolled in 63,101 primary schools, with 298,755 teachers. The student-to-teacher ratio stood at 31 to 1. In that same year, secondary schools had 8,776,792 students and 280,309

teachers. The pupil-teacher ratio at the primary level was 26 to 1 in 1999. In the same year, 83% of primary school children were enrolled in the school. As of 1999, public expenditure on education was estimated at 4.6% of GDP.

The National Organisation for Development of Exceptional Talents (NODET), also known as SAMPAD, maintains Middle and High Schools in Iran. These schools were shut down for a few years after the revolution, but later reopened. Admittance is based on an entrance examination and is very competitive, especially in Tehran (school names: Allameh helli for boys and farzanegan for girls. Their tuition is similar to private schools, but may be partially or fully waived off depending on the students financial condition. Some NODET alumni are world leading scientists.²⁰

Gifted Students' education in Iran is under supervision of Iranian Ministry of Education and this ministry manages and controls all Gifted students' centers all over the country.

A central headquarter is located in Tehran and approves all disciplinary terms and conditions for these schools in nearly 500 towns and cities in the country. Teachers and principals are selected and admitted through the yearly evaluation and assessment programme and a close investigation is held on their

yearly activities. These teachers are paid a considerable salary. Most of them have dedicated themselves to serve gifted students of their city. Most of the teachers in gifted high school system are of post graduate level.

At present time, there are 60 educational centres in 29 cities around the country including more than 15000 gifted students.

For admission in these schools a yearly examination is held all over the country for elementary and secondary levels and students who passed such exam are eligible for enrolling in the schools. The entrance rule for these students is the basic number of 19 from 20 in their total marks. But this does not guarantee their enrolment for all three years in each elementary level stage. Each student is closely monitored and evaluated by his/her teacher and all his/her activities are monitored in the system. If any weakness or failure is noted, students are referred to psychological consultants and monitored for their mental and emotional condition and It is tried to find out the predisposing or causing factors. It is possible that a student may be expelled from the school because of low adaptation ability .

All schools of gifted and talented students in Iran are supported

completely by Iranian Ministry of Education and there is a special budget for these educational centers. Educational material and curriculum are much different from ordinary education in the country and gifted students are supposed to pass many practical and theoretical examination in school.

At the end of each year more than 90% of Iranian talented students are enrolled in high level public universities and continue their study under the supervision of Talented Students System there.²⁰

Conclusion

As it is evident from the above detail, Asian countries such as Iran and India are trying their best for achieving higher standard for the gifted children in their educational system. The strategy is being managed by both the countries educational administration, although some private sectors are active in Iran in this field. But it is noteworthy that many Iranian gifted students may be under diagnosed in this system because of only one method of general testing in the country. Since there are many high level students in Iranian regular schools, a perfect system is needed for better diagnosis and selection of the gifted in the country.

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