

The Issue of Talent in the Arab World

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Abstract: The current study addressed the issue of talent in the Arab world from a different perspective, represented by the background of the increasing interest in talented individuals who have not yet achieved the goals and objectives set by the relevant institutions in a manner that aligns with international standards, despite the efforts exerted. Therefore, the research focused on the factors influencing the effectiveness of programs and services adopted by some countries, noting the overlap of concepts and terms related to talent, particularly academic excellence, which primarily affected the process of identifying and recognizing talented individuals. This process no longer provides an opportunity for all individuals to develop their hidden talents in fields other than academic achievement. Consequently, this study aims to shed light on an important aspect, which is the search for obstacles and challenges that hinder the care and support of this category and prevent their success.

Keywords: *Talent in the Arab world, academic excellence, identification of talented individuals.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Arab countries pay great attention to the category of talented individuals, similar to other foreign countries. This is evident through their continuous efforts to develop methods and teaching techniques, while keeping up with all the modern changes regarding training programs and mechanisms for caring for individuals in this category. They consider them as a human resource that can be invested in by various fields, thus necessitating spending on developing their abilities, skills, and increasing their efficiency.

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We also appreciate the Arab society, represented by the ministries of education, for their keenness on talent development. This is evident in the cooperative efforts through holding international conferences with an educational focus since 1998, organized by the Arab Organization for Education, Culture, and Science. The sixth conference, held in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, was dedicated to studying the phenomenon of talent and was titled "Educating the Gifted as an Optimal Competitive Choice." Its content addressed important elements, including diagnosing the reality of gifted education, developing methods of identifying gifted individuals, and implementing care programs for them on one hand, and training their teachers on the other hand (Arab Organization, 2008).

In reality, there are several indicators that reflect the interest in the phenomenon of talent by Arab researchers. For example, the establishment of scientific research projects titled "Educating the Gifted" as a specialized field dedicated to studying this category, distinct from other categories of individuals with special needs, in one of the Saudi universities. Additionally, some scientific journals in the Arab Republic of Egypt are limited to topics that exclusively address the phenomenon of talent, making them important research references that enlighten us about the facts and available mechanisms in the field of caring for them in the Arab world. Particularly, studies on the current situation are considered one of the best ways to provide assistance in terms of the stages of activity implementation, ranging from design and establishment to examining the differences between the expected performance and the actual performance (Al-Haddabi & Al-Jaji, 2016, p. 139).

However, many Arab studies that have addressed the reality and evaluation of experiences related to the care of the gifted indicate that the phenomenon of talent still faces obstacles that hinder the achievement of desired goals by governmental institutions. This explains the continued pursuit and growing interest in finding strategies and solutions. For example, the results of a study by Jarwan and Al-Muharama (2009) suggest that public policies and procedures used in the identification of the gifted, enrichment curricula, teacher selection, and training in the King Abdullah II Schools for Excellence in Jordan have achieved a low level compared to international standards for gifted education. Similarly, the results of a study by Saleh, Al-Balushia and Al-Atiqi (2018) conducted in Oman indicate that the efforts made lack proper planning, starting from unqualified human resources for the care of the gifted, followed by the absence of tools and methods for identifying them and the weakness of specialized enrichment curricula. Furthermore, the study by Al-Haddabi and Al-Jaji (2010) in the

Republic of Yemen emphasized the importance of understanding the gifted population through theoretical and research foundations conducted by experts in specialized care institutions in order to develop an effective and advanced program. Similar findings have been observed in local studies in Algeria. For instance, a study by Bouzouika (2021) revealed that Algerian schools do not provide diagnostic methods to identify the gifted or specialized teachers, which is supported by Acheche and Lamnouar (2021). Additionally, Sherifi's study (2020) indicated that the educational system does not meet the needs of the gifted in primary schools, while the intervention should take place at an early stage of learning. As an initial evaluation of the recorded observations, we find that the process of caring for the gifted in the Arab world faces opposing currents that reduce the effectiveness of the adopted strategies. One of the prominent challenges is the lack of adoption of methods and means of identification that confirm high-level performance of the gifted. This is a result of the overlap of concepts and confusion between intellectual giftedness and academic excellence, as well as the persistence of the idea of integrating the gifted with regular learners and relying solely on scientific competitions.

Within this context, this study aims to shed light on the reasons and factors that hinder the process of caring for the gifted in the Arab world, despite the efforts made. These hindrances lead to the ineffectiveness of programs and a significant deviation from international standards for talent nurturing and investment. What are the main reasons and factors that impede the process of caring for and developing the talented?

2. Definition of Talent

Al-Shakhs (1990, p. 46) mentions that the term "giftedness" is used to refer to a group of individuals who possess special abilities that qualify them for excellence in specific fields, such as scientific fields like mathematics, literary fields like poetry, artistic fields like drawing and music, or practical fields like carpentry. It does not necessarily mean that they are distinguished by a high level of intelligence or academic achievement compared to their peers.

Jarwan (1998, p. 467) defines giftedness as an innate readiness in one or more areas of intellectual, creative, emotional, and artistic abilities. It is likened to a raw material that requires exploration and refinement in order to reach its fullest potential.

Meanwhile, Renzulli (1998, p. 16) considers giftedness as a behavior resulting from the interaction of three basic clusters of human traits. These

clusters include above-average general abilities, high levels of task commitment, and high levels of creative ability.

Through combining the content of the definitions that have been the subject of research on the concept of giftedness, we can conclude that high-level performance in one or more areas of abilities, accompanied by a type of creativity, excellence, and uniqueness, is a fundamental criterion for indicating giftedness. Therefore, any individual who possesses this characteristic distinguishes themselves from others and is considered gifted according to the definition established by the Renzulli model. This model emphasizes that a gifted person is someone who has a high intelligence quotient of no less than 130, which refers to general intellectual ability, along with a high degree of creativity, in addition to a set of behavioral traits (Ben Najjar, 2022, p. 520).

In this context, Denton and Postwaithe (1985) present a list of characteristics of gifted individuals, summarized as follows: exceptional reasoning ability, ease and speed of learning, attentiveness and concentration, keen observation and problem-solving skills, independence and originality in performance, and the ability to recall and quickly respond to new ideas.

3. Concepts Related to Giftedness

The linguistic explanation of the concept of giftedness has led to the use of multiple terms such as excellence, intelligence, creativity, and academic achievement to express it, while the terminological and implicit definition of these concepts varies and differs in terms of performance levels and distinction.

Giftedness is an inherent potential and natural readiness present in an individual, through which it is confirmed that they possess the ability to perform in a specific field or more. On the other hand, excellence is the conversion, activation, and utilization of those potentials in that field to achieve above-average performance. This means that giftedness represents the domains of general ability that require supportive factors in the form of intrinsic motivators like motivation and environmental factors like family and school, ultimately leading to excellence, according to Jeanne's differentiation model. (Jarwan, 2008, p. 65).

As for intelligence, it is one of the fundamental dimensions that can be measured, representing general mental ability. If it exceeds the average standard by two levels, it is an indicator of talent in some areas but not others. This means that a low intelligence score can be recorded when it comes to talents with special artistic, musical, and athletic abilities. (Al-Qurayti, 1989, p. 31).

The same applies to the term creativity, which is considered one of the essential dimensions of giftedness. This falls under what Jannier referred to as the

domains of ability in his previous model. Creative thinking is the individual's ability to generate solutions and ideas characterized by a high degree of fluency, flexibility, and originality.

3. Factors Influencing the Effectiveness of Gifted Care Process

3.1 Random Use of Terminology

We previously mentioned an important element represented by the interplay between concepts and the differences between them, in order to avoid the random use of terminology that would inevitably affect the process of identifying the category of the gifted individuals who will benefit from appropriate care and support. In a study by Fares and Bahri (2019), they point out that the process of diagnosing and measuring giftedness faces the problem of defining the term itself and the problem of the relationship between this term and other concepts such as academic success and intelligence, which are used as benchmarks for measurement, similar to other core benchmarks. Fakhro (2015) emphasizes that one of the most important requirements for identifying gifted individuals as a stage preceding the design and implementation of care programs is to determine the general definition of giftedness and excellence based on a foundational theoretical basis adopted by the researcher, indicating the specific area they intend to address, whether it is performance or academic-related, in order to minimize the margin of error in diagnosis and measurement. Through her examination of various definitions of giftedness, she finds that educators in the past used to rely on intelligence and academic achievement as the main criteria until it became clear that there are many academically high-achieving individuals who are not necessarily gifted and creative. The reality reminds us of that group with low academic achievement who are not interested in pursuing regular education while excelling in areas such as arts and sports.

3.2 Focusing on Academic Excellence without Performance Excellence

Most of the experiments related to care of the gifted in the Arab world have focused on a sample of academically excellent individuals, who occupy the top ranks within regular educational institutions. An example of this is the Yemeni experience, which involved the establishment of an educational institution that focuses on teaching the gifted and academically excellent students in the primary and secondary stages in 2009. One of the objectives of their national program was to identify academically gifted students, as mentioned by Al-Ashool her study on the problems faced by the gifted at Al-Mithaq School (2013). Another example is the Algerian experience, which involved the establishment of the Mathematics Excellence High School in El-Qubbah. Admission to this school is based on a

national competition, where students who rank first or second in mathematics are considered successful. This means that the selection process is primarily based on excellent academic achievement in a specific subject Ben Najjar (2022). Furthermore, the Kuwaiti experience prioritizes academic excellence as the primary criterion for the inclusion of gifted students in care centers. It sets a requirement that students must score 90% or higher in Arabic language and mathematics (Al-Maajini, 2008, p. 36). Additionally, numerous research studies have targeted academically excellent students as a sample to address various variables related to giftedness.

Having addressed the aspect of focusing on academically excellent students as representing the gifted category, we should now discuss the negative background of this methodology followed in take in charge and caring for the gifted. It is worth noting that the current reliance on academic excellence is based on tests and assessments in which students are examined according to a predetermined educational program that emphasizes memorization and recall of information. Therefore, it measures the ability to remember and is primarily directed towards average students. The difficulty or ease level of the tests is unknown to us. In the same context, Lazaar and Al-Aswad (2019) add that academic achievement is measured through standardized achievement tests, such as the California Achievement Test, which is administered from the first grade to the third year of high school in areas such as reading vocabulary, comprehension, numerical reasoning, and expressive language and the assess basic skills Iowa Test. However, if we intend to adopt it as a component and indicator of giftedness, there are considerations to be taken into account.

This idea is further supported by the researcher Al-Rais (2014) in a study aimed at developing innovative thinking skills among a sample of intellectually gifted individuals with learning difficulties and that was by designing a training program that proved its effectiveness based on pre- and post-measurements of innovative skills.

3.3 Methods of Identifying Gifted Individuals

The process of identifying the target group for caring talent programs is considered the most important and influential in achieving goals. The higher the quality of selection, the more positive impact and effectiveness the strategies and services provided to the gifted individuals will have. Researchers in the Arab world have shown great interest in this topic, as demonstrated by a study conducted by Al-Haddabi and Al-Jaji in 2016. They analyzed the content of 188 relevant Arab studies conducted between 2006 and 2014. The results showed that

66.5% of the research focused on measurement, diagnosis, and identification of giftedness. The research samples mainly targeted secondary school students, accounting for 30.3% of the studies, which is significantly higher than the percentage of studies focusing on primary school samples (14.4%). Surveys were used as a tool in 65.4% of the studies, followed by intelligence tests at 35.6%. This indicates that the process is highly complex, and researchers cannot rely on a single type of tool, whether it is surveys or standardized tests. The diagnosis of giftedness is related to its development, manifestation, and persistence, which makes the process of identification challenging (Al-Dreweesh, 2022, p. 147).

The researcher Al-Dreweesh (2022) in his study emphasizes the importance of utilizing the identification methodologies adopted by the American Association. These methodologies adhere to initial criteria that generally require providing equal opportunities for all students to compete for entry into giftedness programs and to provide a wide range of identification tools and not restrict oneself to a single tool. These tools should be adapted according to the context of each American state in which the assessment is conducted. Using the information provided by diagnostic tools to design care programs differs from the approach adopted in the Arab world, which involves preparing the program first and then selecting the appropriate sample. These tools reveal the strengths and weaknesses of the individual being examined, and the selected sample represents a group of distinguished individuals in multiple fields, not just one field. The diagnostic results are matched with the recognized and scientific definition of giftedness. The diagnostic process is conducted throughout the year and includes individuals with disabilities. The diagnostic procedures begin with the use of standardized screening tools and from various sources, employing individual measurement tools for each field, which are continuously evaluated by experts.

The researcher addressed this study with the aim of benefiting from and transferring the experiences related to gifted identification methodologies from foreign countries to their local community, specifically within the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Arab world in general. One notable difference between the American and Arab methodologies lies in providing equal opportunities for all individuals being examined and not relying on academic achievement as a differentiating factor among them, while giftedness is a complex combination of interconnected components.

4. CONCLUSION

The process of take charge and caring for gifted individuals in the Arab world faces a range of challenges and obstacles. To overcome this, it is necessary

to focus on and prioritize the early stages that form the foundation. This includes engaging experts and experienced researchers in the field of special education to build and design programs based on a comprehensive framework aimed at developing and enriching hidden talents in all their forms and domains. To achieve this goal, it is necessary to reconsider the adopted procedures for identifying and recognizing gifted individuals, which currently primarily focus on academically high-achieving students, neglecting others. To address this, it is important to transition to a different and more widely practiced approach found in foreign societies that allows for equal opportunities for all segments of society, including schools. This implies the necessity of being familiar with all the indicative and predictive indicators of exceptional abilities in individuals by applying multiple tests and measures, rather than relying solely on intelligence levels, for example, to assess giftedness. It is also important to recognize that the significance of the identification and recognition process of gifted individuals lies in the outputs and results of the process itself. We may uncover a range of data about the sample individuals that were not initially apparent to the examiner, which will greatly contribute to determining the overall framework of the gifted education program and, consequently, achieving positive effectiveness and transitioning from the experimental phase to the implementation and generalization phase.

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