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The Issue of Gifted Children: Between Accurate Identification and the Challenges of Providing Support

إشكالية الأطفال الموهوبين بين دقة الاكتشاف وصعوبة الرعاية

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Abstract:

Caring for and supporting gifted children is one of the primary goals of special education, as it contributes significantly to the development and advancement of society. This is because gifted children, as a group with special educational needs, have the potential to make remarkable achievements, generate innovative ideas, and provide original and effective solutions that can help address many of the challenges facing humanity in this era of rapid technological and scientific progress.

Achieving this requires providing exceptional care for this creative and extraordinary group, as well as developing appropriate educational policies, plans, and strategies. Such efforts should include specialized programs, tailored curricula, and effective teaching methods that take into account the unique psychological, intellectual, and cognitive characteristics and needs of gifted children, which distinguish them from their typically developing peers.

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This article focuses specifically on the concept of giftedness and gifted children, highlighting the key characteristics that distinguish this group, the methods and measures used to identify giftedness, the challenges they face, and the strategies for nurturing their abilities and fulfilling their aspirations. By doing so, giftedness can become a guiding force that inspires its bearers and leads them toward creativity, excellence, and outstanding performance.

Key words: Giftedness, Gifted Children, Identification, Nurturing.

الملخص:

يعتبر الاهتمام بالأطفال الموهوبين ورعايتهم من الأهداف الرئيسة للتربية الخاصة والتي تهتم بتنمية المجتمع وتقدمه، نظرا لما يمكن أن تسهم من خلاله هذه الفئة من ذوي الاحتياجات الخاصة من إنجازات وابتكارات وحلول أصيلة وجادة، قد تهدئ من حدة مايعانيه الانسان في عصر التقدم التكنولوجي والمعرفي المتسارع، ولا يتأتى هذا دون العناية الفائقة بهذه الفئة المبدعة وغير العادية والتي تحتاج منا إلى رعاية على نحو خاص ومعرفة بكيفيات رسم سياسات وخطط واستراتيجيات تربوية ملائمة من برامج ومناهج خاصة وطرائق تدريس مناسبة، تأخذ بعين الاعتبار حاجات الأطفال الموهوبين وخصائصهم النفسية والعقلية والمعرفية، والتي تختلف عن غيرهم من الأطفال العاديين. وفي هذا المقال سوف نتطرق على الخصوص إلى مفهوم الموهبة والموهوبين، وأهم الخصائص المميزة لهذه الفئة، مقاييس اكتشافها، الصعوبات التي تواجها وأساليب رعايتها لانماء قدراتها واشباع تطلعاتها، كي تكون نبراسا يميز أصحابه ويقودهم إلى الابداع والتميز في الآداء.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الموهبة، الموهوبون، الإكتشاف، الرعاية.

1. Introduction:

The identification of gifted children is one of the most important components of gifted education programs, as it represents the first step and the natural entry point for providing appropriate educational services. The success of programs designed for gifted

children largely depends on the accuracy and effectiveness of the identification process in selecting the target group. The significance of this process lies in matching the right child with the most appropriate program. Consequently, the identification process influences all subsequent stages of gifted education.

Given its critical importance, the identification of gifted children has received extensive attention in the literature on gifted education. Entire chapters have been devoted to this topic in textbooks on the psychology of giftedness. The importance and complexity of the identification process have also been emphasized in the giftedness literature. For example, in a study by **Cramer (1991)**, 29 experts in the field of gifted education were asked to rank 12 major issues related to gifted children according to their importance. The identification of gifted children was ranked as the most important issue. Despite this broad consensus among experts regarding its significance, the volume of empirical research and practical studies devoted to this topic remains disproportionate to its recognized importance (Attaallah, 2008, p. 2).

Although gifted children do not necessarily experience difficulties simply because they are gifted, they are particularly vulnerable to certain challenges due to their exceptional characteristics. Social attitudes and biases toward individuals who differ from the norm may hinder their personal growth and the development of a healthy self-identity. In addition, some parents seek self-fulfillment through their gifted children or attempt to live vicariously through them. The difficulties faced by gifted children often manifest as problems of adjustment, especially when their emotional development does not correspond to their advanced intellectual abilities or when they excel in a specific domain. In such cases, developing a stable sense of identity can become difficult, particularly when they

experience deprivation, whether material, physical, or otherwise. These and other challenges make gifted children a particularly important group deserving of attention and support (Freeman, 2014, p. 47).

Interest in gifted children dates back to the earliest human civilizations, where individual achievements were recognized and valued according to the type of accomplishment and creative contributions esteemed by society. According to Al-Surour (2009), this interest can be attributed to several reasons:

- Recognizing the importance of investing in the abilities of gifted children to promote societal development and progress.
- Protecting gifted children from school dropout and preventing them from leaving school at an early age.
- Maximizing the productive and creative potential of individuals over the longest possible period of their lives, thereby enabling them to contribute to development for as long as possible (Ziyad, 2013, p. 69).

2. Study Terminology:

2.1. Giftedness:

a. Linguistic Definition: according to Arabic lexical sources, the term *giftedness* is derived from the Arabic verb *wahaba* (وهب), which means "to give something without expecting anything in return." Accordingly, giftedness is understood as a gift or endowment granted without compensation (Ben Hadiya et al., 1991, p. 505).

b. Educational Definition: from an educational perspective, giftedness is considered an innate potential that is nurtured and refined by an appropriate environment, allowing it to emerge in one or more specific domains. According to many educators, a gifted individual is one who demonstrates outstanding performance or excellence in any field of life.

2.2. Gifted Child: a gifted child is generally defined as a child whose intelligence places him or her within the top 2% of individuals of the same age group. However, most scholars agree that a gifted child is one who possesses exceptional intellectual ability that can be assessed through intelligence tests designed to measure:

- The ability to think and reason.
- The ability to understand and define verbal concepts.
- The ability to perceive similarities among objects or ideas.
- The ability to relate previous experiences to present situations (Abdel Wahid, 2012, p. 25).

2.3. Identification (Discovery): identification refers to the process of revealing or recognizing something that was previously unknown, thereby arriving at its true nature or essence.

2.4. Care (Support for Gifted Children): care refers to the set of procedures and services provided with the aim of developing gifted children's abilities to their fullest potential and fostering their talents through balanced development. These services include the systematic and objective identification of gifted children using standardized assessment methods, the provision of specialized educational programs and instructional strategies, as well as counseling and guidance services designed to support their academic, social, and emotional development.

3. The Concept of Giftedness and the Gifted Child:

Giftedness is considered one of the categories of individuals with special needs; however, it differs from other exceptional categories in that it represents a positive form of exceptionality. The concept of giftedness is both ancient and modern. It is ancient because the phenomenon itself has long existed, with people observing that certain children possess talents and characteristics that distinguish them from their peers. At the same

time, it is modern because researchers have gone beyond simple observation by subjecting giftedness to systematic scientific investigation and experimentation, leading to the development of operational definitions and standardized instruments for its assessment.

Numerous definitions of giftedness have been proposed, reflecting the considerable expansion of knowledge in this field. Today, a wide range of methods is available for identifying different types of gifted individuals, and definitions vary according to theoretical perspectives and identification models. Moreover, definitions of giftedness are influenced by cultural, social, economic, and political considerations. Some definitions emphasize general intellectual ability, whereas others focus on creativity, high academic achievement, or specific behavioral and cognitive characteristics. More recent approaches emphasize social performance and the social value of giftedness, while also recognizing other forms of exceptional performance, such as academic excellence, creative thinking, special talents, and distinctive behavioral characteristics.

The *Dictionary of Educational and Psychological Terms* defines gifted individuals as:

"Children who demonstrate exceptional talent, potential, or special abilities; possess outstanding leadership qualities; consistently exhibit superior performance in mechanical skills, everyday practical abilities, oral or written expression, music, art, interpersonal relationships, or any other domain of distinguished human achievement" (Shehata & Al-Najjar, 2003, p. 307).

Currently, many researchers endorse **Renzulli's** model of giftedness. According to this model, a gifted individual possesses a high level of intelligence—typically an IQ of at least 130 as measured by standardized individual intelligence tests—high academic achievement as measured by standardized or school achievement tests, a high degree of creativity as measured by

creativity assessments, and a set of distinctive behavioral characteristics evaluated through behavioral rating scales and personality measures.

Behavioral characteristics are defined as "a relatively enduring predisposition that leads an individual to behave in a particular manner across different situations" (Weiten & Margret, 1994, p. 36).

3.1. Behavioral Characteristics of Gifted Children:

The behavioral characteristics of gifted children have attracted considerable attention from researchers in education and psychology. The most prominent characteristics are summarized below.

3.1.1. Cognitive Characteristics: Gifted children generally outperform their peers in intellectual ability, with a mental age that often exceeds their chronological age. They typically learn to read and write at an earlier age and demonstrate advanced language skills, including exceptional comprehension abilities. They possess extensive knowledge across a wide range of subjects and display high levels of motivation, perseverance, concentration, and sustained attention compared with their age peers.

According to **Al-Sa'adi (2007)**, the cognitive characteristics of gifted individuals include:

- Exceptional ability to infer, reason, generalize, process information, and think logically.
- Rapid learning, understanding, memorization, perseverance, sustained concentration, and long-term retention of knowledge and procedures.
- Rich and extensive vocabulary, particularly in the use of original and expressive language.

- The ability to generate organized and original ideas and express them clearly; they often propose ideas that others may consider unusual.
- A preference for imaginative and creative thinking while actively exploring new ideas and experiences.
- Abstract and objective thinking, often accompanied by a desire to learn before entering formal schooling.
- Alertness, keen observation, and rapid responsiveness.
- Strong organizational skills and an attraction to concepts or phenomena that others may overlook.
- Insightful and flexible approaches to problem-solving, often generating multiple solutions.
- High capacity for conceptual thinking and mastering new ideas.
- A love of reading and the ability to comprehend complex material with ease (Al-Sa'adi, 2007, pp. 35–36).

Similarly, **Salama (2013)** identifies the following cognitive characteristics:

- Quick responsiveness, mental alertness, broad-mindedness, and strong analytical and reasoning abilities, with the capacity to connect past and present experiences.
- Intellectual curiosity and inquisitiveness, reflected in frequent questioning.
- Clear and accurate thinking, vivid imagination, alertness, and exceptional powers of observation, memory, and comprehension.
- A desire to acquire knowledge in both breadth and depth, accompanied by a strong interest in words and ideas.
- Enjoyment of reading stories, writing poetry, and engaging with linguistic concepts.
- Ability to classify, infer, generalize, formulate concepts, and think abstractly.

- Willingness to take risks, set high personal standards, and accomplish difficult tasks with relative ease.
- Diverse interests and hobbies.

It should be noted that not every gifted individual displays all of these characteristics, as considerable individual differences exist even among gifted and high-achieving children (Salama, 2013, pp. 14–15).

3.1.2. Social Characteristics: social characteristics include participation in social activities, adherence to social values and norms, tendencies toward leadership or compliance, and the ability to cooperate and compete effectively (Gean, 2003, p. 290).

3.1.3. Emotional Characteristics: gifted children often demonstrate moral maturity, a strong sense of justice, concern for the problems of others, heightened sensitivity, a well-developed sense of humor, and leadership qualities (Abdel Wahid, 2012, p. 88).

3.2. Methods for Identifying Gifted Children:

The identification of gifted children is a complex process that requires the use of multiple assessment tools because giftedness is multidimensional. As indicated by the various definitions presented earlier, **Al-Khawaldeh and Al-Qamish** argue that identification criteria include intelligence, creative thinking, behavioral characteristics, academic achievement, general and specific aptitudes, and evidence of early productivity. The selection of identification methods depends on the particular criterion and domain of giftedness being assessed. The use of multiple assessment methods reduces the likelihood of error in the selection process, provided that the collected data are analyzed scientifically and accurately (Al-Khawaldeh & Al-Qamish, 2013, p. 140).

The principal assessment methods include the following:

3.2.1. Measures of Intellectual Ability: general intelligence tests, such as the **Stanford–Binet Intelligence Scale** and the **Wechsler Intelligence Scales**, are among the most widely recognized instruments for assessing the general intellectual ability of gifted individuals. Since superior intellectual ability is considered one of the primary indicators of giftedness, an individual is generally regarded as gifted when their intellectual performance exceeds the population mean by at least two standard deviations, corresponding to an IQ score of **130 or above** (Al-Wassan, 1996, p. 126).

3.2.2. Measures of Academic Achievement: academic achievement tests, including school entrance examinations and standardized achievement tests, are commonly used to evaluate scholastic performance. A child is generally considered academically gifted when his or her academic achievement reaches **90% or higher**.

3.2.3. Measures of Creativity: common creativity assessments include the **Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking (TTCT)**, which comprise both verbal and figural forms, and **Guilford's Creative Thinking Tests**, which assess fluency, flexibility, and originality. A child is considered creatively gifted if he or she obtains high scores on standardized measures of creative thinking (Nail Al-Sayyid & Al-Arishi, 2013, p. 31).

3.2.4. Behavioral Rating Scales: behavioral rating scales focus on assessing the observable behavioral characteristics associated with giftedness through carefully constructed, operationally defined items. Among the most widely used instruments are the **Renzulli–Hartman Rating Scale** and the **Callahan Behavioral Characteristics Scale**. These instruments are designed to assist educators and psychologists in identifying gifted children based on consistent patterns of behavior associated with high ability and exceptional potential.

4. Challenges Faced by Gifted Children:

Gifted children encounter a variety of challenges that may affect their academic performance, social relationships, emotional well-being, and overall development. These challenges can be classified into the following categories:

4.1. Internal Challenges:

Internal challenges are those that originate within the gifted child and are associated with their personal characteristics and developmental patterns. These include:

- Asynchronous development between intellectual and physical growth.
- Imbalances between cognitive and emotional development.
- Heightened sensitivity and self-criticism.
- Early philosophical questioning about the meaning of life and existence.
- Multiple and diverse interests.
- A tendency to establish rules and systems at an early age.
- Susceptibility to certain physical or psychological conditions.
- Perfectionism and the persistent pursuit of ideal standards.

4.2. External Challenges:

External challenges arise from the child's social environment and include:

- Peer pressure.
- Pressure from siblings.
- High expectations imposed by parents, teachers, and others.
- Environmental stressors and depression.
- Evaluation based primarily on school grades rather than on the child's overall abilities and personal qualities.
- Excessive parental involvement in the child's academic affairs and achievements.

4.3. Family-Related Challenges:

The family plays a crucial role in the social and emotional development of gifted children and significantly influences the development of their intelligence and creativity. Family-related difficulties often result from a lack of awareness regarding the characteristics and needs of gifted children and the appropriate ways to support them. Common family-related challenges include:

- Frequent family conflicts.
- Excessive parental interference in the child's life.
- Difficult sibling relationships.
- Inadequate emotional and educational support.

4.4. School-Related Challenges:

Gifted children may also face several challenges within the school environment, including:

- School curricula and teaching methods that are designed primarily for average learners and emphasize obedience and conformity rather than creativity and independent thinking.
- Teachers' limited awareness of the educational and psychological needs of gifted students, with greater emphasis placed on memorization than on creativity and innovation.
- The use of inappropriate identification criteria that rely mainly on academic achievement while overlooking other dimensions of giftedness.
- Limited opportunities for gifted students to choose activities that match their interests, abilities, and talents.
- A lack of educational resources, facilities, and specialized materials needed to develop and nurture gifted students' abilities.

4.5. Challenges Related to Community Perceptions of Giftedness:

Community attitudes may also hinder the development of gifted children. According to **Abu Saad (2014)**, the local community includes the media, economic and political conditions, and societal attitudes that may discourage creativity and innovation. Gifted children often face:

- Media influences that fail to encourage creativity.
- Economic and political circumstances that foster discouragement and frustration.
- Individuals who resist or reject innovative ideas proposed by gifted students, sometimes even opposing them openly.
- Difficulty forming friendships with age peers.
- Communication difficulties resulting from differences in intellectual and linguistic development.
- Challenges in finding peers with similar interests and abilities.
- Difficulties progressing through the educational system.
- Feelings of alienation, isolation, or inadequacy.
- A tendency to establish their own rules and systems (Abu Saad, 2014, p. 202).

In addition, **Abdul Rahman Jarwan** identified three major categories of challenges faced by gifted children:

1. **Cognitive challenges**, including inadequate school curricula and underachievement despite high intellectual ability.
2. **Emotional challenges**, such as heightened sensitivity, emotional intensity, and perfectionism.
3. **Career-related challenges**, including difficulties in choosing appropriate career paths, setting professional goals, and a tendency to reconsider or frequently change career interests (Abu Saad, 2014, p. 174).

5. Care and Education of Gifted Children:

The care provided to gifted children begins with an accurate and systematic identification process, followed by comprehensive and continuous educational interventions supported by specialized guidance and counseling services. Effective gifted education requires not only the recognition of giftedness but also the implementation of appropriate instructional strategies and sustained psychological and educational support.

5.1. Methods and Approaches to Educating Gifted Children:

Approaches to educating gifted children vary across educational systems. In many countries, gifted students are educated within regular schools while spending part of the school day in special classes where they receive educational programs beyond those offered to their peers. **Gallagher** argued that the regular classroom can be the most appropriate setting for educating gifted students, provided that suitable instructional adaptations are implemented. This perspective has led to the development of three principal educational approaches: **enrichment**, **acceleration**, and **grouping**.

a. Enrichment

Enrichment refers to providing students with additional learning experiences, either vertically (increasing depth) or horizontally (broadening content), in order to expand both the depth and breadth of learning. An effective enrichment program should address all aspects of the gifted child's personality and development.

This approach involves enriching and diversifying the regular curriculum to better meet the interests, abilities, and educational needs of gifted learners. Enrichment may be quantitative, through increasing the number of subjects or learning activities, or qualitative, by presenting more complex and challenging content. The primary objective of enrichment is to foster and develop giftedness and high achievement (Al-Sharbini, 2002, p. 294).

b. Acceleration

Acceleration refers to allowing gifted students to progress through the educational system at a faster pace than prescribed by the standard curriculum. It provides gifted children with learning experiences that are typically designed for older students.

Early graduation from school and university enables gifted learners to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary for creative and productive contributions at an earlier age. Some researchers consider acceleration more effective than enrichment in meeting the educational needs of gifted students. Common forms of acceleration include:

- **Early school admission**, where admission is based on mental rather than chronological age.
- **Grade skipping**, which allows gifted students to advance to higher grade levels according to their intellectual abilities, readiness, and maturity rather than their age (Al-Sharbini, 2002, p. 300).

c. Grouping

Grouping is an instructional strategy used in gifted education programs in which students with similar levels of ability and potential are taught together. **Krik (1997)** and colleagues emphasized that the primary purpose of grouping is to provide gifted children with opportunities to interact, collaborate, and be intellectually stimulated by peers of comparable ability.

5.2. Guidance and Counseling Services for Gifted Children:

Interest in the counseling needs of gifted children began with the pioneering work of **Leta Hollingworth**, whose research highlighted gifted children as a group with distinctive educational and psychological needs within the broader category of individuals with special educational needs. Recognition of these needs led to the development of preventive, developmental,

and therapeutic counseling programs (Al-Biblawi & Badawi, 2014, p. 280).

The foregoing discussion demonstrates that gifted children require comprehensive counseling services that complement specialized educational programs. These counseling services should constitute an integral component of a comprehensive gifted education program rather than being viewed as an optional addition. Furthermore, counseling should not be limited to gifted children alone; it should also involve their families, teachers, and school administrators.

The primary objectives of counseling services are to promote healthy personal development, facilitate social and emotional adjustment, support cognitive and career development, and help parents and educators better understand the unique characteristics, needs, and abilities of gifted children. Such support contributes to creating educational and family environments that nurture giftedness while addressing the distinctive challenges these children may encounter.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, it is essential to give special attention to gifted children, particularly in countries that seek to invest in human capital as the most sustainable and productive form of national development. Meeting the psychological, social, and educational needs of gifted children should be regarded as a priority. This requires accurate early identification, the implementation of specialized educational programs, and the provision of comprehensive guidance and counseling services that address their unique developmental needs and help them overcome the challenges they may encounter.

Supporting gifted children enables societies to make the best possible use of their exceptional abilities and creative potential,

thereby contributing to economic growth, scientific advancement, and sustainable national development. Achieving these outcomes requires the adoption of high-quality policies and programs dedicated to the identification, education, and support of gifted learners. Such efforts help prevent the loss or neglect of a generation whose future contributions in innovation, research, leadership, and excellence can play a pivotal role in advancing science, knowledge, and society across all fields of human endeavor.

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