Pre-primary School Teachers' Knowledge of Characteristics and Nurturing of Gifted Children in Ondo West Local Government Area

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Abstract

There is virtually no pre-primary school classroom in which gifted children cannot be found. It is important therefore that pre-primary schools create the right opportunities for the gifted children to maximise their potentials. Despite the importance of providing the gifted children with right opportunities however,the gifted children remain unchallenged in regular pre-primary school classrooms. This situation, as revealed in literature, can be traced to many factors. However, one other factor that can also be held responsible but which seems to have gained only little research attention, is the knowledge that pre-primary school teachers have regarding characteristics and nuturing of gifted children. This study thus investigated pre-school teachers' knowledge of characteristics and nurturing of gifted children. The study adopted descriptive survey design. One hundred and twenty one preschool teachers from public and private schools constituted the sample. Instruments used were "Knowledge Test on Characteristics of Gifted Children" and "Knowledge Test on Nurturing of Gifted Children". Data was analysed using percentage, mean and standard deviation. Findings revealed low knowledge of pre-primary school teachers regarding characteristics and nuturing of gifted children. Government as well as school owners' needs to employ the service of special education professionals to train pre-primary school teachers on issues related to characteristics and nuturing of gifted children. The curricula used for professional preparation of pre-primary school teachers should be innovated to feature sufficient contents on gifted and talented children.

Introduction

The early years in a child's life are formational. The years are characterised by remarkable growth and development in children. Children experiences during these years have long lasting impacts on their development and learning. It is during this period thatmany children attend pre-primary schools where they are expected to be provided with appropriate experiences relevant for their further development and learning. In the pre-primary schools, some children learn in different ways due to their social and cultural back ground. As a result, some of them display exceptional characteristics which distinguish them from other children in the classrooms. Such children are often referred to as gifted children. Like any group of children, attention needs to be given to the promotion of well-being of the gifted children during this crucial phase, as these seminal years are influential in the life of a gifted individual (McGee and Hughes, 2011; Walsh, Hodge, Bowes, and Kemp, 2010; Delaune and Tapper, 2015).In this paper, the terms "gifted" and "talented" are both used to describe this group of children. This is in line with the 6th edition of the nation's National Policy on Education in which both terms are used to refer to this group of children (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013).

According to National Association for Gifted Children (2010), giftedness is the act of demonstrating outstanding levels of aptitude or competence in one or more domains. In the words of Clark (2002), gifted and talented children are those who usually exhibit the ability to generalise, to work comfortably with abstract ideas, and to synthesise diverse relationship to a far higher degree. Okereke (2008), while citing the definition proferred by Marland in a report to US congress, states that gifted and talented children are those identified by professionally qualified persons who by virtue of outstanding abilities are capable of high performance.In the 4th edition of the nation's National Policy on Education, gifted children are recognised as special children who are intellectually precocious (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004).

Being gifted and talented is more than just being academically inclined. According to Smutny (2000), giftedness in young children refers primarily to "precocity," a rapid rate of development in one or more realms. Young gifted children are intensely curious, learn quickly and remember easily, and think about the world differently than their age-mates (Smutny, 2000). They showcase creative or productive thinking. Theyare easily attracted to learning and often excercise leadership traits. In short, gifted and talented children often exhibit characteristics and give evidence of high performance capability in the following areas: intellectual ability, creativity, leadership capacity, specific ability,motivational traitsand psychomotor ability (Morrison, Rizza and Jones, 2005; New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2009; Silverman, 3013; Okoye, 2013; Oguntade, 2013; Awandu, 2014; Montgomery County Public Schools, Maryland, 2016).

With the fact that gifted and talented children exhibit these special characteristics, it is obvious that they have different learning needs from those of their age peers and therefore require differentiated educational programmes and/or services beyond those normally provided by the regular school programme in order to realize their contributions to self and society (Clark, 2002; Okereke, 2008; Kerry, 2013; Walden, 2015). This idea is equally supported by the Federal Government of Nigeria in the 6th edition of the nation's National Policy on Education where one of the aims of Special Needs Education is stated as providing opportunities for exceptionally gifted and talented persons to develop their talents and natural endowments/traits at their own pace in the interest of the national development. However, to provide the gifted children with these differentiated educational programmes, it is important to identify them early based on their characteristics and equally nuture them.

To this end, Prieto, Parra, Ferrándiz and Sánchez (2004) note that one of the needs that classrooms teachers have is to know the characteristics of the precocious and gifted students. Prosper (2013) submits that teachers need to recognise the characteristics of young gifted children and provide them with optimal intervention and educational opportunities. Altıntas and Ilgun (2016) equally assert that the characteristics of gifted children should be well known for gifted and talented children to develop their potentials, to be useful to the society and to discover their capacity.As noted above, nurturing is next to identifying the gifted children. According to Oguntade (2013), nurturing is the act of giving opportunity to the gifted and talented children to develop their ability and interest. Mcleod and Cropley (1989) submit that nuturing gifted children can prevent them from dropping out, having poor achievement and becoming

delinquents. In respect to identifying and nurturing gifted children therefore, the main focus in pre-primary schools, according to Annesley (2008), should be to create the right opportunities, with support and encouragement, to help the gifted child develop a desire to learn and to achieve as much as possible.

Despite the obvious importance of providing the gifted children with differentiated educational programmes in order to help them achieve their full potential, literature revealed that they usually remain in regular classrooms where they are not provided with learning opportunities that can help to maximise their abilities and potentials (Diezmann and Watters, 1997; Akinsola, 2008; Pfeiffer and Petscher, 2008; Radue, 2009; Page, 2010; Fakolade and Adeniyi, 2010; Wormald, 2011; Adetoro, 2014; Awandu, 2014). Worried by this saddening reports that permeate literature concerning the situation of gifted and talented children, the authors of this paper carried out a painstaking observation to examine the situation of gifted and talented pre-school children in many public and private pre-primary schools in Ondo West Local Government Area. The result of our observation confirmed the available literature reports. Many gifted pre-school children in the local government area are experiencing the same situation. The gifted children are kept in regular classroomswithout being provided with special educational programmes and opportunities that could help them to maximise their potentials. This situation must not be left to persist. This is because if the special learning needs of the gifted children are not met, it can lead to frustration, a loss of self-esteem, boredom, laziness and underachievement (Diezmann and Watters, 2006; Wortham, 2008; Page, 2010).

Searching literature further, the authors discovered that many factors could be held responsible for this situation of gifted children in pre-primary schools. Among such factors are attitude towards gifted children (Colangelo and Kelly, 1983; Al-Makhalid, 2012; Benny and Blonder, 2016), lack of professionally qualified teachers (Karnes and Johnson, 1991; Akinsola, 2008; Benny and Blonder, 2016), lack of appropriate facilities and learning materials (Awandu, 2014), challenges of identifying gifted children (Smutny, 2000;Al-Makhalid, 2012), lack of acceptance and understanding of giftedness (Ogbonnia, 2009; Omede, 2016), policy implementation problems (Okereke, 2008) and financial constraints (Karnes and Johnson, 1991) among others. However, there is one other factor which seems to have been less explored by researchers especially in Nigeria and in Ondo West Local Government Area in particular. This factor is knowledge of pre-primary school teachers regarding the characteristics and nurturing of the gifted children. It is possible that the gifted pre-primary school children in Ondo West Local Government Area are not being provided with special educational programmes and opportunities that could help to maximise their potentials due to poor knowledge of their teachers regarding their characteristics and nurturing.

In fact, because of the importance of teacher'sknowledge in the issue of characteristics and nuturing of gifted children, much research efforts have been revealed inliterature especially in other countries. A study in Saudi Arabiaby Al-Makhalid (2012) revealed that regular primary school teachers of gifted children had low knowledge regarding gifted pupils and their education. Wormald (2011) found that teachers in New South Wales exhibited inconsistent knowledge regarding the education of gifted students with learning disabilities.In a study by

Alshurman and Alkhateeb (2015) in Jordan, it was revealed that the degree to which teacher of gifted students possess knowledge and skills of basic knowledge, learners characteristics, teaching strategies, was medium.Radue (2009) investigated teachers' knowledge of gifted education and found that identifying gifted children is generally not being carried out in most early childhood education services. Dal Forno, Bahia and Veiga (2015)however reported that pre-school teachers have knowledge of characteristics of gifted children as they analyze the engagement and behaviour of gifted children through the characteristics most present in literature.

In relation to nurturing, Sambu, Kalla and Njue (2014) carried out a study in Kenya and findings from the study revealed that the teachers preferred using only one strategy, which is, giving extra work. This indicates a limitation on the teachers' competence to meet the diverse needs of gifted and talented children. This also implies that the teachers lacked knowledge ofhow to nurture the gifted children. In Turkey, a study by Şahin and Levent (2015) revealed that the strategy which is the most known and used by teachers is "resorting to the supplementary reading sources". This implies that the teachers do not have the requiredknowledge of the various educational strategies in the education of gifted and talented children. Equally in a study by Čotar Konrad and Kukanja Gabrijelčič (2015) in Turkey, findings revealed that preschool teachers are inadequately informed about the issues concerning working with gifted children and they tend to have low self-competence in the appropriate use of teaching strategies when working with them.

In light of the fact that poor knowledge of pre-primary school teachers regarding the characteristics and nurturing of gifted and talented children may be the reason for not providing special educational programmes and opportunities for gifted pre-primary school children in Ondo West Local Government Area, it is appropriate to conduct this study. This study is also highly imperative as the issue of teacher's knowledge is yet to be given much research attention especially in Nigeria. This study thus assessedpre-primary school teachers' knowledge of the characteristics and nurturing of gifted children in Ondo West Local Government Area.

Research Questions

1. What is the level of pre-primary school teachers' knowledge regarding the characteristics of gifted children?
2. Which area of the characteristics of the gifted childrenis/are more known to the pre-primary school teachers?
3. What is the level of pre-primary school teachers' knowledge regarding nurturing of gifted children?

Methodology

The researchers adopted descriptive survey design for this study. The population of the study consisted of all pre-primary school teachers' in Ondo West Local Government Area. In all, the sample of the study comprised one hundred and twenty one pre-school teachers. Twenty five public and private pre-primary schools were purposively selected for the study based on the criteria that they were accessible, had qualified and experienced preschool teachers, have been established for over 10 years and that the private schools were officially registered with the government. All preprimary school teachers were selected from each of the schools using purposive sampling technique. The criteria used in selecting

them were that they had at least NCE and they have been working in the schools for over 3years. Two self-designed instrumentstitled "Knowledge Test on Characteristics of Gifted Children (KTCGC)" and "Knowledge Test on Nurturing of Gifted Children (KTNGC)" were used for data collection.

Both instruments had sections A and B. For both instruments, the section A was based on the teachers'school type, gender, qualifications and teaching experience. The section B for KTCGC had twenty five (25) objective test items which were based on the following characteristics of gifted children: intellectualability, creativity, leadership capacity, specific ability, motivational traitsand psychomotor ability. Each item was alloted 4 marks making a total score of 100. The section B of KTNGChad only twenty (20) objective test items which were used to measure the pre-primary school teachers' knowledge on different ways of nurturing gifted and talented children.Each of the twenty items was alloted 5 marks to also give a total score of 100. The two instruments were given to Special Education experts in the Department of Special Education and Curriculum Studies, Adeyemi College of Education, Ondo, Ondo State, for corrections and suggestions. The suggestions of the experts were used to rework the instruments. After this, twenty copies of each of the instruments were administered on pre-primary school teachers in Akinyele Local Government Area, Ibadan, Oyo State. The data gathered were subjected to reliability test using Kuder-Richardson 20 formula. KTCGC yielded reliability index of 0.74 while KTNGC yielded reliability index of 0.71.The data collected was analysed using descriptive statistics of frequency counts, percentage, mean and standard deviation.

Results

Research Question 1: What is the level of pre-primary school teachers' knowledge regarding the characteristics of gifted children?

Table 1: *Level of Knowledge of Pre-primary school Teachers regarding Characteristics of Gifted Children*

Score	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	Std. Deviation
0-19	7	5.8	52.96	27.68
20-39	20	16.5		
40-59	76	62.8		
60-79	18	14.9		
80-100	0	0.0		
Total	**121**	**100.0**		

Highest Mark Obtainable = 100

Decision Value: Low ($\bar{x}$ = 0.00-59.00), **High** ($\bar{x}$ = 60.00-100.00)

Table 1 shows the level of pre-primary school teachers' knowledge of characteristics of gifted and talented children. The result of the teachers' performance in KTCGC shows that5.8% of them scored0to 19, 16.5% of them scored 20 to 39, 62.8% of them scored 40 to 59 while the remaining ones who constitute 14.9% scored 60to79. None of the teachers scored 80 and above. The overall mean score of the pre-school teachers' knowledge is 52.96 (a value within the range of decision value for low) with a standard deviation value of 27.68. Based on this result and in line with the decision value, it can be

inferred that the level of pre-primary school teachers'knowledge regarding characteristics of gifted children is low.

Research Question 2: Which area of the characteristics of gifted childrenis/are more known to pre-primary school teachers?

Table 2: *Characteristic of Gifted Children that are more Known to Pre-school Teachers*

S/N	AREAS	Mean	Std. Deviation	Rank
1.	Intellectual Characteristics	9.79	6.81	2nd
2.	Creative Characteristics	10.37	4.92	1st
3.	Leadership Characteristics	7.56	7.16	3rd
4.	Specific Ability Characteristics	7.13	4.76	4th
5.	Motivational Traits Characteristics	3.84	3.34	5th
6.	Psychomotor Ability Characteristics	3.10	3.01	6th

Table 2 shows the order in which areas of characteristics of gifted children are known to pre-primary school teachers. The mean scores revealed that the first characteristics that is more known to the pre-primary school teachers is creative characteristics ($\bar{x}$ = 10.37). This is followed byintellectual characteristics ($\bar{x}$ = 9.79),leadership characteristics($\bar{x}$ = 7.56), specific ability characteristics ($\bar{x}$ = 7.13), motivational traits characteristics ($\bar{x}$ = 3.84) and psychomotor ability characteristics ($\bar{x}$ =3.10). The results from this table implies that the areas of the characteristics of gifted children that are more known to the pre-school teachers are creative, intellectual and leadership characteristics.

Research Question 3: What is the level of pre-primary school teachers' knowledge regarding nurturing of gifted children?

Table 3: *Level of Pre-primary School Teachers'Knowledge of Nurturing Gifted Children*

Score	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	Std. Deviation
0-19	52	43.0	20.54	12.71
20-39	61	50.4		
40-59	8	6.6		
60-79	0	0.0		
80-100	0	0.0		
Total	**121**	**100.0**		

Highest Mark Obtainable = 100
Decision Value: Low ($\bar{x}$ = 0.00-59.00), **High** ($\bar{x}$ = 60.00-100.00)

Table 3 shows the level of pre-primary school teachers' knowledge regarding nurturing of gifted children. The result of the teachers' performance in KTNGC shows that 43.0% of the teachers scored 0 to 19, 50.4% of them scored 20 to 39and the remaining ones who constituted 6.6% scored 40 to 59. None of the pre-primary school teachers scored 60 and above. The overall mean score of the teachers' knowledge is 20.54 with a standard deviation value of 12.71. Based on this result and in line with the decision value, it can be inferred that the level of pre-primary school teachers'

knowledge regarding nurturing of gifted children is low.

Discussion of Findings

The first finding from this study revealed that the pre-primary school teachers in Ondo West Local Government Area have low knowledge of the characteristics of gifted children. A possible explanation for this is that the pre-primary school teachers that were selected for this study were not professionally trained in the field of Special Education or Early Childhood Education. This finding may also be linked to the fact that the teachers have not had any opportunity to attend trainings programmes where they could learn about various characteristics of gifted children. Still, the finding may not be far-fetched from the fact that Gifted Education policy is not effectively implemented in both public and private pre-primary schools. This finding supports the results of some previous studies (Al-Makhalid, 2012; Wormald, 2011; Radue, 2009). The finding however does not corroborate the finding of Dal Forno, et al. (2015) that pre-school teachers had knowledge of the common and many characteristics of gifted and talented children.It also failed to support the finding of Alshurman and Alkhateeb (2015) that the extent to which teacher of gifted students possess knowledge of basic learners' characteristics was medium.

Another finding from this study revealed that the areas of the characteristics of gifted children that are more known to pre-school teachers are creative, intellectual and leadership characteristics. This is to say that even though the pre-school teachers had low knowledge regarding the characteristics of gifted and talented children, they can recognize few of the indices of the characteristics they display in each of the areas identified. This finding may be linked to the fact that the creative, intellectual and leadership characteristics are usually demonstrated more by brilliant children irrespective of whether they are gifted or not. It is also possible that the teachers are familiar with these three characteristics because of the experience in working with different categories of children. This finding has upheld the finding of Dal Forno, et al (2015) that preschool teachers analysed the engagement and the behaviours of gifted and talented children through the characteristics most common in literature.

It is equally found that the level of pre-primary school teachers' knowledge regarding nurturing of gifted children is low.This may not also be unconnected to the fact that the pre-primary school teachers were not professionally trained in the field of Special Educationor Early Childhood Education.It could also be explained from the angle that the pre-primary school teachers have not had any opportunity to attend training programmes and seminars where they could have gained knowledge on how to nurture gifted children. The poor implementation of Gifted Education policy may also be the reason for the finding. Meanwhile, this finding lends credence to the findings from previous studies (Čotar Konrad and Kukanja Gabrijelčič, 2015; Sambu, et al., 2014; Şahin and Levent, 2015).

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it is concluded that pre-school teachers in Ondo West Local Government Area cannot help the gifted and talented children to maximise their potentials since they do not have the required knowledge of how to identify and nuture them.

Recommendations

Government as well as private school owners should give opportunity to pre-school teachers that are working with

children to attend training programmes, workshops and seminars, which are facilitated by Speical Education or Early Childhood Education experts, on issues related to characteristics and nurturing ofgifted and talented children. The pre-school teachers, on their own, should also attend training or short time courses in Special or Early Childhood Education to improve their knowledge on the characteristics and onhow to nurture gifted and talented children. Equally, the policy on Gifted Education should be effectively implemented in all pre-primary schools irrespective of whether they are public or private. When this is done, it could spur pre-primary school teachers to engage in activities that could improve their knowledge on characteristics and nurturing of gifted children. Likewise, curriculum developers should ensure that the curricular that are used in professional preparation of pre-school teachers are innovated to acommodate sufficient information on gifted and talented children. Doing this would enable the teachers to have better awareness and knowledge on issues that are related to characteristics and nurturing of gifted children before they start practising.

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