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EXISTENCE AND EFFECTIVE USE OF FOOD TECHNOLOGY SPECIALISED RESOURCES FOR EXCEPTIONALLY GIFTED LEARNERS AT A HIGH SCHOOL IN MUTARE, ZIMBABWE

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ABSTRACT: *The study aimed at assessing the existence and effective use of Food Technology specialised resources for exceptionally gifted learners at high school level. The objectives of this study were to assess if Food Technology specialised resources existed for gifted children in the high school as well as to examine how specially gifted children can effectively use available provisions to facilitate learning of Food Technology. The qualitative study was a case of one selected high school in Mutare district, Manicaland province. Six teachers and two administrators (school head and head of department Food Technology) were purposively selected from a population of 32 high school teachers. In-depth interviews were the study instruments used to collect data. Data collected were thematically analysed and discussed. The major findings revealed that Food Technology specialised resources existed in very limited quantities for gifted children in the school. In some instances, these resources were hardly noticeable, thus making it difficult to effectively use available provisions to facilitate learning. In the few instances where exceptional learners were identified, they were not given any work different from the average or slow learners. Three major strategies were identified as ideal in helping exceptional learners. These were acceleration, enrichment and segregation/grouping. It is recommended that teachers and school administrators be continuously trained on correct handling of learners with exceptional abilities, especially in technical subjects. They can also develop and make correct use of available resources to help the learners reach their full potential.* Contribution/Originality of study*:* This research article addresses aspects on how high school learners who are exceptionally gifted in the Food Technology discipline can be helped to realise their full potentials. The study contributes to the body of knowledge in Food Technology education which gives an insight to educationists and parents, that failure to adequately equip gifted learners with specialised resources may discourage their learning, thwart the great potential in them, thus depriving communities of great technological advancement.

KEYWORDS: Effective, Food Technology, Specialised Resources, Exceptionally Gifted Learners, Intelligent Quotient (IQ).

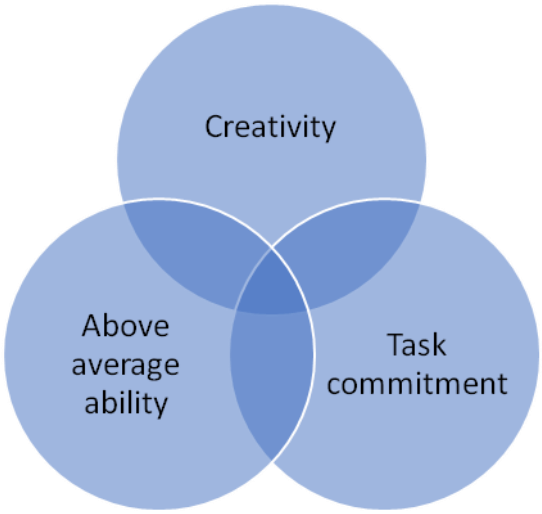
INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

The study to assess the existence and effective use of Food Technology specialised resources for specially gifted high school learners arose due to poor performance in local, as well as public examinations by pupils who seemed to have potential to excel. When it came to

examinations, these learners were not excelling as was expected (IEA, 2014). According to Gatens (2013), teachers may not succeed by teaching all students the same all the time. Therefore, teachers need to craft strategies for individual learners that will challenge them but not overloading them. The study assumed that Food Technology specialised resources existed in schools but were usually inadequate to meet the needs of the fast learners. However, according to Institute for Educational Advancement (IEA) (2014), some gifted learners may end up developing deviant characteristics based on the way they are treated or sometimes labelled by the teachers.

According to National Association of Gifted Children (NAGC) (2018), specially gifted learners are those pupils with exceptional or outstanding abilities in learning. Such learners have a high intelligent quotient (IQ) of over 130, and usually show social maturity which is higher than normal and are always ahead of others in participating [Estes Park School District-R3 (EPSD) 2018; NAGC 2018; IEA 2014]. These learners, just like any other category of learners, need the teacher's special attention and support. If this support lacks, the child will develop a character which is exactly the opposite of what he really is. The ingredients of giftedness can be summarised as creativity, above average ability and task commitment (EPSD 2018; NAGC 2018; IEA 2014).



It has to be noted that being intellectually gifted is an asset and not a liability, yet it is difficult for many teachers to realise why such children need any special attention and provisions (Mofield, 2010). However, one of the prime objectives of schools is to help pupils develop their potentials and talents to the fullest, and yet it is probable that many schools fail to attain this objective for a large proportion of learners with exceptionally high abilities.

Lamah University (2015) state that the tips on how to teach gifted children involve recognising that these are high achievers, who need to be given enrichment activities. Accordingly, teachers and parents must ensure that abilities of gifted learners are effectively nurtured in order to avoid under-achievement (IEA, 2014). Therefore, when classroom teachers expand their knowledge, this will enhance their teaching and boost student learning (NAGC 2018; Mofield 2010). Teachers should also stay in touch with parents. According to Tommis, Poh-teen, Wan, Chow, Chan, Lai and Mo-yam (2010), parents need to note that a never-ending stream of questions may be exhausting, but a lack of encouragement and nurture may lead to an individual's gifted abilities not being stretched. Therefore, parents

need to guide children to raise questions at the right time and place. Provide or point them to resources, such as internet or library where they can obtain information to satisfy their curiosity (NAGC 2018; IEA 2014; Tommis *et al* 2010).

The Children's Plan (TCP) (2008) emphasises that good provisions for exceptional learners is an important component of the personalisation and equal opportunities agendas driving most government initiatives. The initiatives are that every child matter, thus there is need to maximise opportunities for children (IEA 2014; Mofield 2010). Learning should be excellent, enjoyable, flexible and creative in responding to children's needs since they are excited by excellent teaching (NAGC 2018; Tommis *et al* 2010; TCP 2008). Therefore, schools need to maintain higher standards to develop a personalised curriculum to ensure all children fulfil their potential. This personalised agenda means support for most able pupils as well as those who are struggling. Institute for Educational Advancement (IEA) (2014) stipulates that teachers should celebrate diversity and acknowledge effort and achievement.

Many times, during the teaching and learning situation, the teacher's point of focus is on the majority of the learners who are usually in the category of the average performers. In case there are some slow learners lagging behind, the teachers always assist by ensuring that further explanations, demonstrations and sometimes remedial activities are conducted so that these learners catch up with the majority. However, for those learners who usually display exceptional abilities or those who usually operate at a level well ahead of the rest, not much attention is given. No specialist resources or Food Technology labour saving devices are availed to them to enhance their learning as they are believed to be on the right track already. This then causes their ability to dwindle and fail to realise their full potential, since work given is not challenging enough to encourage critical thinking as demanded by their high intelligent quotient (IQ). This has therefore prompted this study to assess if Food Technology specialised resources exist for specially gifted learners in high schools, and also to establish if these provisions are being effectively used for the benefit of these learners.

The following aim and objectives guided the study:

Aim: To establish the existence and effective use of Food Technology specialised resources for exceptionally gifted learners at high school level.

Objectives

The study sought to:

- Assess if Food Technology specialised resources existed for gifted children in the high school
- Examine how specially gifted children can effectively use available provisions to facilitate learning of Food Technology

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS FOR GIFTEDNESS

There are many theoretical conceptions of giftedness. Francoys Gagne and Joseph Renzulli are two of the most prominent theorists (NAGC 2018). Hence, they are used in the current study. According to NAGC (2018), Gagne (1985) developed the differentiated model of

giftedness and talent and proposed a clear distinction between giftedness and talent. In his model, giftedness means the possession and use of untrained and spontaneously expressed natural abilities, (called aptitudes or gifts) in at least one ability domain to a degree that places a child among the top 10% of his/her age peers. By contrast, talent designates the superior mastery of systematically developed abilities (or skills) in at least one field of human activity to a degree that places a child's achievement within the upper 10% of age-peers who are active in that field(s). His model presents 5 aptitude domains; intellectual, creative, socio-affective, sensory-motor and others such as extra-sensory perception. These natural abilities, which have a clear genetic substratum, can be observed in every task child are confronted with in the course of their schooling (NAGC 2018).

According to NAGC (2018), Renzulli (1978) proposes that gifted behaviour occurs when there is interaction among 3 basic clusters of human traits: above average general and or task specific abilities, high levels of task commitment (motivation) and high levels of creativity. Gifted and talented children are those who possess or are capable of developing this composite of traits and applying them to any potentially valuable area of human performance. As noted in the school-wide enrichment model, gifted behaviours can be found in certain people, at certain times and under certain circumstances (NAGC 2018). Schools use varied strategies and procedures to facilitate the learning among gifted learners. The three major strategies used are acceleration, enrichment and grouping/segregation (Johnson 2011; EPSD 2018; IEA 2014). These have their merits and demerits and the most desirable strategy to follow depends on the particular situation. This study adopts grouping/segregation and **Grouping/segregation**- involves gifted children being isolated to learn on their own, away from average and lower performing counterparts. This is done to allow gifted children to compete on their own, rather than leaving them in a normal class. It becomes easier for the Food Technology teacher to teach learners of similar capabilities. It can also be referred to as the pull-out program because gifted learners are pulled out of their regular classrooms to participate in advanced learning [EPSD 2018; IEA 2014; Special Education Support Services (SESS) 2013]. Enrichment strategies as they are relevant to the teaching of Food Technology.

Enrichment or adaptation involves material being adapted or enriched to the child's level of ability. Thus, enrichment means that in the basic curriculum, the pupil proceeds at the same rate as the class, but does supplementary work as each teaching topic is covered. The syllabus for Food Technology is extended sideways. It seeks to avoid the social and emotional harm caused by acceleration. Individual study projects, poem writing, art-work are excellent enrichment alternatives (Johnson 2011; EPSD 2018; Kessler 2018; IEA 2014).

Methodology

A qualitative research paradigm was adopted in this study, with the case study research design being selected. The research participants comprised two administrators namely the school head and head of department Food Technology and six Food Technology teachers were selected from a population of 32 teachers from one high school. All the eight participants were purposively sampled by virtue of their positions in the high school. The high school had four classes per stream taking Food Technology as their practical subject from forms one to four, while forms five and six comprised of one class per stream, giving a total of 18 classes. The six teachers were purposively sampled from a population of 32 teachers manning the school. Data collection was done using in-depth interviews from all participants.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY AND DISCUSSION

The major findings of the study revealed that Food Technology specialised resources existed for gifted children in the high school, but these were generally very limited to make any meaningful contribution to cater for the specialised and diversified needs of the learners. In other teaching and learning situations, there was not even a single provision made available to enhance learning of exceptional pupils. The school did not also have adequate ingredients for conducting practical lessons, and there were no computer laboratories to facilitate e-learning enrichment exercises. There was nothing much in the library in terms of books except for a few novels, some books donated by some religious organisations and old newspapers. The school administrators concurred with the teachers that there were no particular provisions set aside by the school specifically for gifted children. They pointed out that resources in the school were for all learners and these were inadequate, meaning the resource situation in the school under study was the first cause of concern. Sometimes, these Food Technology specialised resources were too unnoticeable to be used effectively to benefit the exceptional learners, even though specially gifted children are not usually many.

It was also revealed that in the few instances when the special resources were available, effective use of the available provisions was a challenge to both teachers and learners. This was attributed to failure by teachers to identify elements of giftedness in some learners. According to Johnson (2011) teachers need to be observant enough to notice student potential in whatever form it is demonstrated and to be aware of the fact that giftedness is not always found in the eager beavers of the class. Thus, resources can be made available depending on the area and level of giftedness portrayed by a learner. Failure to identify and assist gifted learners accordingly also resulted in such learners being problematic and nuisances to the teachers, because some misbehaved. Results also indicate that most of these learners would then become rebellious, playing truancy or channelling their energies towards making noise, and thus disturbing other learners especially during practical sessions. Johnson (2011) stresses that when teachers fail to accept that the student is gifted, or fail to praise the learner, this can have a detrimental effect on the gifted learner, who is shackled and not allowed to explore their gifts or even worse accept them. This may result in some learners feeling neglected by the teachers and thinking that they are worthless. According to EPSD (2018) and NAGC (2018), learners who portray traits of special giftedness, always exist in every community and school set up. As such, these learners require special handling and assistance according to the level and form of gifting.

The current researchers discovered that in most instances, these Food Technology specialised resources, though inadequate, were also being under-utilised or not used at all. It was assumed that most teachers were not adequately trained or prepared to handle gifted learners in the Food Technology discipline, along with specialised resources necessary for their learning. Teachers who lack necessary skills face challenges in trying to meet the different needs of learners (Manwa & Manwa, 2012; Tope, 2012). Only one of the teacher participants at the school under study pointed out that, in as much as she could manage to identify the fast or gifted learners, there was not much she could do. Thus, in most cases, teachers did not pay adequate attention to the needs of such learners, in accordance to their varied specific needs. Most teachers would indicate that their classes were composed of learners of a mixed ability. Thus, teachers only concentrated on the average performers and the slow learners, at the expense of those with exceptional learning abilities. However, according to Institute for

Educational Advancement (IEA) (2014), some gifted learners may end up developing deviant characteristics based on the way they are treated or sometimes labelled by the teachers.

Most teachers at the school under study indicated that they were not comfortable giving specially gifted learners the next day's work to start working on before the actual day. They cited boredom would result on the fast learners as they would not have anything new during the lesson time. This would actually increase the learners' chances of absconding school due to boredom; as such resources should be availed to them. According to Sahin (2015), schools need to share with other resource centres, connected to detailed and useful websites and interesting journal articles so as to cater for the gifted students. Since such children can get by without effort and are able to look after themselves academically, this will encourage them to develop their talents (Kessler 2018; Şahin 2015). However, IEA (2014), states that teachers have to note that a high IQ does not guarantee success at all and in many cases, it is actually a handicap. It has to be noted also that highly gifted children are not necessarily gifted in every subject and the teacher should consider the child's strong and weak points.

The study findings showed that only few teachers indicated that they gave gifted learners work in advance. They also revealed that the few gifted learners whom they identified were usually given the task of being 'junior teachers.' In this case, the teachers would assign them tasks to make presentations to the class, to help other learners who were lagging behind or who needed clarification. While helping other learners could boost their own confidence and help them comprehend better what they had learnt, it was not much of a benefit to the fast learners to keep repeating to other learners what they knew already at the expense of their own advancement. According to Tope (2012) and Johnson (2011), a skilled teacher will push gifted students to higher personal standards rather than just giving them more work or forcing them to tutor other students who are less capable. Therefore, the need to ensure availability and adequacy of Food Technology specialised resources at the school was a necessity, if ever the gifted learners were to benefit from the teaching-learning process. If teachers were properly enlightened on who gifted children are, and what they were capable of doing, teachers could as well improvise resources if need be. Teachers would also arrange the available resources in such a way that individual autonomy is promoted, thus giving the child a greater control of the learning situation (Prober 2018; SESS 2013; Johnson 2011). Therefore, resources for educators need to appropriately identify, develop and nurture individual talents.

It was also revealed that some gifted learners got tokens of appreciation, usually in form of money from other learners in exchange of answers to the class and homework tasks given by the teacher. In other words, the gifted learners would do homework on behalf of the other learners, and in return they would be given a 'thank you.' Teachers would discover this when heated arguments would ensue especially when one learner would fail to pay the money as per agreement. This was seen to be a cause of concern since no learning was taking place regarding home works and class work. Therefore, giving the gifted students more work was necessary to occupy them. According to EPSD (2018), if teachers help students to identify and appreciate their academic gifts early, give students the necessary support material or resources, it will instil in the learner resilience to persist in the more challenging tasks of learning.

It came out from this current study that the school regarded it as an unnecessary expense to acquire provisions for use by the gifted children, since they were believed to be well ahead of

others already. It was discovered that the focus of most teachers was mainly on the slow learners only, because of the fact that many gifted learners do not put much effort to grasp concepts, as they learn with ease. However, it is equally important to focus on needs of exceptional learners as well, as these are usually the pace setters in the community and society at large. Educators at every level from the classroom to the district office must understand the strategies, practices and tools. Once understood, there is need for up-to-date information, analysis of the latest education research and access to professional development opportunities and resources. Science, Technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) issues remain in the forefront of discussion of competitiveness (Kessler 2018; NAGC 2018).

The present study also discovered that the only strategy being used to help gifted learners by the high school was grouping or segregation of learners according to their performance based on end of year examinations. This enabled the gifted learners to compete amongst themselves, albeit with inadequate resources. According to IEA (2014), grouping/segregation encompasses isolating gifted learners away from average and lower performing counterparts, to allow gifted children to compete on their own. The unchallenging environment in which the exceptional learners are usually exposed in mixed classes, promotes laziness and deviant characteristics.

However, there is need for the school to use varied strategies and procedures to facilitate the learning of gifted children. Other strategies such as enrichment and acceleration can also be used, depending on the particular situation (IEA, 2014). According to IEA (2014), depth or extension, allows learners to delve deeper into a given subject to promote intellectual thinking. On the other hand, enrichment or adaptation is another strategy where material is adapted to the child's level of ability to avoid the social and emotional harm caused by acceleration. Thus, supplementary work may be extended sideways.

Findings also revealed that failure by most teachers to easily identify traits of giftedness in their learners, made it difficult for them to suggest and come up with distinct provisions necessary for enhancing learning of such exceptional learners. The continuous pestering and asking of questions by the fast learners were a bother to some of the teachers, resulting in neglect of the gifted learners. These findings are consistent with those of Johnson (2011), who stressed that some teachers view gifted learners as nuisances, while others were intimidated by them. Thus, these learners suffered a lot of discouragement, threats and labelling by the teachers. However, if these learners are not properly nurtured, this would deprive communities of dynamic planners and advancements in the scientific, mathematical and technological disciplines (EPSD, 2018). When gifted learners are not helped to reach their full potentials, they may face the inevitable experience of their own human frailty and subsequently, to the depths of despair, the heights of frustration and rage and the refusal to try again (EPSD 2018; NAGC 2018; Connecticut Association for the Gifted [CAG] 2010).

The study findings revealed that inadequacy and ineffective use of resources often resulted in gifted learners' facing many challenges in their learning. One major challenge was frustrations and a widening gap between their intellect and their social and emotional behaviour. According IEA (2014), because of such gaps, it is crucial to provide appropriate resources and opportunities that best identify, challenge and assist each gifted child's specific needs. Gifted children need to be given the tools they need to live a purposeful, meaningful and rewarding life in whatever way they choose, to avoid boredom or other frustrations.

The fact that the specially gifted or exceptional learners operate at a level way ahead of their peers, resulted in isolation. This was another challenge faced by the few identified specially gifted learners, as revealed by the study. These learners were said to be usually lonely, thus making them misfits among other learners and with no one to share with or to understand their experiences. However, EPSD (2018), sharing the same sentiments with IEA (2014) emphasise that no child should be isolated by their gifts. Therefore, there was need to make sure that the young bright minds get not to only excel in school, but in life. While no two gifted learners are the same, other studies has shown that most gifted learners exhibit many common characteristics and behaviours, and thus should be assisted accordingly (EPSD 2018). Failure to handle exceptional learners properly leads to neglect as a major challenge faced by many such learners, with the end result being a character exactly the opposite of what she/he really is. The child is usually a forgotten student and the specific needs of gifted children are often neglected leading to shrivelling of their abilities and potential (Benny & Blonder 2016; Universitaet Tübingen, 2018).

Some teacher participants indicated that the challenge of trying to assist the gifted learner in a mixed class is that other learners would also want the 'special treatment'. The majority of the learners will end up mistaking the assistance for favouritism, so at the end of the day, the gifted child is left unattended and treated just like the rest of the class, thus thwarting the potential. As a result of this neglect, the intelligence of the gifted is often not fully recognised, partly because many conceal their ability so that they don't appear different (EPSD 2018). Instead of being encouraged to make contributions, in keeping with their ability which is superior, they are often forced into habits of indifference, carelessness and indolence by being made to adjust to the pace of the class (EPSD 2018; IEA 2014).

In truth, the effective instruction of gifted students requires a gifted or skilled teacher who will help the learner to utilise his or her own giftedness. The teacher should establish a warm and accepting classroom environment, identify available resources and then effectively channel them towards enhancing learning opportunities so as to enlarge the student's natural gifts (Kessler 2018; Johnson 2011). The skilled teacher would easily pick early reading and reasoning capabilities and leadership traits among learners and would also note that such learners usually operate at a higher level than their ages (Manwa & Manwa, 2012; CAG, 2010). As emphasised by Johnson (2011), teachers need to identify and recognise area of giftedness in a learner, accept it and utilize it to help the gifted learners realise their full potentials. This can be achieved by the teacher concerned to see if Food Technology specialised resources exist and whether they are adequate for use by the gifted learner(s). If there are no Food Technology specialised resources put in place by the school, a skilled teacher can improvise in order to help catapult the learner to perfectionism, which according to Maslow (1971), is in reality, a healthy part of self-actualisation. Thus, students should experience fully, vividly, selflessly, with full concentration and total absorption.

CONCLUSIONS

Conclusively, it has been noted that limited Food Technology specialised resources exist for gifted children in the high school. As a result, specially gifted children cannot effectively use available provisions to facilitate learning. As such, they need to be catered for according to their exceptional capabilities. Food Technology specialised resources have been found to be

inadequately provided in the school. The already inadequate provisions are also not being fully utilised to benefit the needs of the specially gifted children. This neglect of the gifted learners ends up disadvantaging them and their maximum potential may not be fully realised, as they shrink back their potential.

Some teachers had difficulty in identifying outstanding learners, and thus failed to cater for them accordingly. Even though specially gifted learners normally have high IQs, they still need the support and guidance from the teachers and school at large. All schools need to ensure that Food Technology specialised resources are made available and are effectively used to enhance learning among gifted learners according to their line of gifting.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the aforementioned findings, the following recommendations were made:

- Food Technology specialised resources, such as well-equipped Food Technology laboratories, computer labs to facilitate e-learning and guided discovery, extension workbooks, recipe books, ingredients and labour-saving devices should be availed, for learning to be meaningful and interesting to the exceptional pupils.

- Special schools can be set specifically for the gifted learners, where there are opportunities for advancement in a classroom environment that is sensitive to their needs and provides adequate stimulation. This will also help teachers to teach accordingly, as there will be no mixed ability of learners.

- It is recommended that schools consider parental involvement and contribution towards acquiring some specialist resources for use by their children. Teachers can also improvise on the available resources to make the teaching and learning process more meaningful and rewarding.

- The ministry concerned should conduct seminars for teachers and school administrators so that they improve their competencies in handling, developing and acquiring resources for learners who are specially gifted so that they realise their full potentials using available specialised resources. This training will also enable teachers to cater for these exceptional abilities even in a mixed ability set up, where advance subjects are offered one on one, so that accelerated gifted learners may benefit.

- It is recommended that high schools identify and cater for gifted learners from a very tender age so that their specific potentials are fully realised and utilised as they grow.

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