

# RELEVANCE OF TEACHERS' COMPETENCE IN THE ASSESSMENT OF GIFTED CHILDREN IN AN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

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## Abstract

*The paper attempts to discuss relevance of teachers' competence in the assessment of gifted children in an inclusive education. It is evidently clear that improper assessment has been the major stumbling block towards achieving the set goals of individuals, especially in academic and vocational skills. This can be achieved through the provision of adequate educational opportunities and seminars for teachers of gifted children. It is on this premise, that the paper addresses the concept of inclusive education with a view to identifying the role of teachers' in curtailing the menace of schools' discrimination in an inclusive education as it deters progress and development of identification of such children. It also suggests that government has the responsibility of working relentlessly in an attempt to determine ways to restructure education with significant focus on the educational needs of gifted children. Policy makers must also focus their attention on inclusive education itself rather than specific problems that could result from discrimination so as to enable gifted children benefit from the teaching-learning processes. Recommendations were also provided in order for the children to explore their potentials for the benefit of society.*

## Introduction

Educating children to become effective citizens is one of the most challenging tasks the teachers face. Assessing the teachers' competence in the assessment of gifted children in an inclusive education is an important aspect of the teaching-learning process. However, assessment is a complex concept within the teaching-learning process, especially when dealing with students whose intellectual capacity is above average. Teachers are often called upon to recommend children for a variety of programmes in school. Therefore, teachers' competence in the assessment of gifted children depends on their ability to recognize the students' learning needs. Basing assessment of teachers competence on their ability to meet students' needs is influenced by the individual experience of teachers. In order to do that, teachers need education, training and support to develop the assessing techniques required to make these recommendations.

A teacher is a person who provides knowledge for all categories of students and gifted children in particular. Teachers' competence will aim at helping gifted children to learn effectively and efficiently. Therefore, an ideal teacher in an inclusive education setting is expected to possess some expertise in handling the gifted children in the classroom. The teacher's instruction in class is meant to organize the learning experience and provide the support necessary for effective teaching-learning process. Kiyomet (2000) describes teacher competence as “the set of management and instructional knowledge, skills and experience teacher's possess for necessary job performance.”

There are various ways through which teachers' competence may be assessed in order to enable them to perform effectively in an inclusive setting. These include: knowledge of content, processes, methods and content.

Glasser (2000) posits that inclusive education is all about meaningful education for all the children in respect of their needs. It is full acceptance of all students, including the gifted children, into the regular school classroom that leads to a sense of belonging. Therefore, the inclusion classroom gives the gifted children full opportunity to become members of the class like any other students.

### **Inclusive Gifted Education**

The concept of inclusive education was developed by UNESCO (1994). Inclusive education therefore, is an education which provides for the teaching of all children in regular local schools, not just children with special needs (UNESCO). According to Stainback (2005), inclusive education is the process of allowing all children the opportunity to fully participate in regular classroom activities regardless of their need, race or other characteristics. Osokoya (2007), citing Michigan (1991) sees inclusiveness in education as the provision of educational services for students with special need in schools where non-special need peers attend and which are equipped general education teachers, and appropriate special education support and assistance as determined appropriate through the individualized educational planning committee (IEPC). Farrell (2001), views it as the extent to which a school or community welcomes all people as full members of the group and values them for the contributions they make. Similarly, Staubs and Beck (1995), take inclusiveness as a placement alternative for accommodating all special needs children alongside their able bodied counterparts in the same learning environment for instructional purpose (Osokoya, 2007). Basically, inclusive development is based on a human rights perception of special needs. It highlights equal opportunity for persons with special needs and their right to function as part in the society (Gabriele, 2007).

Similarly, inclusive education encapsulates all students in school, regardless of their strengths or weakness in any area, and integrates them into the school community. A sense of belonging is fostered among all students, teachers, and supporting staff.

### **Role of inclusive education on teaching and learning**

- a. Inclusive education provides everyone in an inclusive system with the sense of belonging and thus can be accepted and supported by others.
- b. It emphasizes that there should be no segregation in educational settings of any type, as all children should be encouraged to participate in all indoor and outdoor curricular activities.
  - i. The environment should be well structured with instructional materials to facilitate individual development of learners. However, in order to incorporate special need equality in their operation, schools need to: promote equality of opportunity between special need and non-special need persons.
  - ii. eliminate discrimination that is unlawful under the law.
  - iii. eliminate harassment of special need persons that is related to their impairment.
  - iv. promote positive attitudes towards special need people.
  - v. encourage participation by special need people in public life.
  - vi. take steps to take account of special need person's impairments, even when that involves treating the special need person more favorably than other persons (Disability Discrimination Amendment Act, 2005).

Inclusive education therefore, gives all children with special needs the opportunity to learn together with their able bodied peers without discrimination. This means that schools where inclusive education takes place must be sensitive to the differences in the needs and services of various children with special needs. For instance, different provisions should be made for different inclusive situations-a class that has a gifted child must have support services that meet that child's needs. Their inclusiveness must be carefully planned in terms of the class size which must be drastically reduced. Furthermore, the level of inclusion will depend on the number of gifted children. The services of a teacher aide and resource specialist must be provided in order for them to assist with the development of the Individualized Educational Programme (IEP).

### **Role of teachers' in an inclusive education**

The role of teachers in the assessment of gifted children is of paramount importance and at the same time challenging to teachers' in a regular school because they will be dealing with different abilities at the same time. In order to work effectively, they need to possess high level of competence. Mastropieri & Scruggs (2004) state that for teachers to be able to engage in effective assessment in an inclusive education, the following should be taken into consideration:

- i. Ability and skills to plan for the content coverage. The difference between students by score and sequence should also be taken into account.

- ii. Ability to recognize unethical, illegal, and inappropriate assessment method.
- iii. Ability to use assessment information.
- iv. Ability to know the assessment methods appropriate for instructional decisions.
- v. Ability to use the child's results when making decisions about inclusion planning, teaching, and developing curriculum and school improvement.

Furthermore, Westwood, (1995) and Ozoji (2005) outline some competencies needed by a teacher in an inclusive education classroom. They are as follows:

- i. Ability to informally figure out what skills a child needs to succeed.
- ii. Ability to take advantage of children's individual interests and use their internal motivation for developing needs.
- iii. Knowledge of instructional strategies and how to use them effectively.
- iv. Ability to adapt materials and to re-write objectives to suit each child's needs.
- v. Ability to work as a team with other special teachers, regular teachers and all specialists in whatever way to provide the best teaching approach in the classroom.
- vi. Ability to be flexible and to develop a high tolerance for ambiguity.

It is very important that the teachers should have the ability to solve problems without affecting the students' personality. They should also be able to take time to understand the problem and make decisions in record time. Effective teachers in an inclusive classroom should be patient, respect their students, and organize their classrooms.

### **Relevance of teacher competence in an inclusive education**

The relevance of teacher competence in an inclusive education classroom cannot be overemphasized. An inclusive curriculum is as good as its application in the classroom. This foregrounds the importance of the teacher in ensuring an effective inclusive education. This is because, no matter how wonderful an inclusive curriculum may be, if there are no competent teachers who can handle it adequately, the curriculum remains only a document for the shelf. Quality teachers' training for inclusive education is, therefore, central to inclusive education, equitable teaching and fostering broadened concept of inclusive education.

Teachers' competencies help in the assessment of the potential of the gifted children, for the future, and for the teacher himself. Therefore, teachers should note that learning how to assess or provide instructions in the inclusive classroom setting does not only come to play in the accumulation of knowledge and skills but their utilization for better teaching for the good of the gifted children. Saleh (2008) recommends that teachers ought to have the courage to try new skills without apprehension, so that they are able to act as agents of change to fulfill the aspiration enunciation in Salamanca's philosophy of inclusion.

### **Factors affecting teachers' competencies in an inclusive education**

It is very important to note that some factors have accounted for lack of teachers' competence in an inclusive classroom. These factors include:

- i. Wrong placement of students in a particular class.
- ii. Lack of provision of supportive staff such as assessment staff by the schools to help place the gifted student in classes where they can benefit from.
- iii. The specific number of gifted children for a particular class to help teachers meet collaboration; co-teaching and individualized approach is not being taken into consideration.

Spasovski (2010) posits that teachers' competencies for assessing the gifted children may be affected when the teacher is unskilled in a particular area that is needed in the classroom, for instance the use of computer networking and software which keep changing and improving every day. This makes the teachers to be left out of the global world and adversely affects the work. Murphy & Edwards (2004) further state that a non-conducive classroom setting can affect teacher competencies.

### **Restructuring schools for inclusive education**

Inclusive gifted education should recognize the teacher as a very critical component that determines the overall success and failure of the system. Inclusion does not mean establishing a different school entirely but restructuring the existing school to include all learners regardless of ability or disabilities. Thus, school restructuring is a focal issue in successful implementation of inclusive education. In restructuring the school for inclusive gifted learners, the following should be noted: provision of e-learning facilities; provision of specialized facilitators; provision of laboratories and resources centers; provision and collaboration for community resources and restructuring of the school time and curriculum to accommodate mentors and resources.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has attempted a discussion of some of the ways through which teachers' competence can be assessed for the effective assessment of gifted children inclusive education classroom. Teachers have a vital role to play in making the gifted child literate in terms of reading, writing and socializing with the non-gifted in the society. Furthermore, teachers play significant roles in molding, guiding and bringing about inclusion of both gifted and non-students through inclusive education. There is no doubt that currently, many gifted children have gotten acceptance in the society and are contributing to national development. The government as matter of suggestion bears the responsibility of employing more of these qualified personnel and supplying the needed equipment/materials to schools and colleges/Universities so that inclusive education is achieved to the fullest.

### Recommendations

It is very important that the trained teachers should include programs that will adequately prepare the future teachers inclusive education system. There should be seminars and in-service trainings for teachers who are in schools already in order to bolster their confidence about their ability. Other recommendations are:

- Government should ensure that all teachers at all levels are exposed to special education. This will help the teachers to discharge their duties effectively in the inclusive education setting.
- Policy makers should make inclusive education compulsory by encouraging regular teachers to teach exceptional children alongside their peers in an inclusive classroom as this will promote positive attitudes in both gifted and non-gifted individual.
- Government should recognize the importance of teachers' in the successful and effective implementation of inclusive education in the educational system by giving them incentives.

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