



Journal of Arts & Humanities

Volume 13, Issue 01, 2024: 10-22

Article Received: 07-03-2024

Accepted: 08-04-2024

Available Online: 12-04-2024

ISSN: 2167-9045 (Print), 2167-9053 (Online)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18533/p87rz390>

Teachers' Reflections on Their Own Experience of Teaching Gifted Students in Homogenous Classes

Faisal Y. Alamiri, Ph.D¹

ABSTRACT

The study aimed to explore teachers' reflections on their own experiences in teaching gifted students in homogenous classes. The study employed the qualitative research design through the focus group interview method which included the focus group discussions to collect the qualitative data from six primary school teachers, who had over three years of experience in teaching gifted students in homogenous classes. The overall findings indicated the value of teachers' reflection on evaluating their own experiences and identifying the critical challenges they observed. Although teachers supported the additional lessons of enrichment and curriculum compacting as the most valuable experience, the findings showed the extent to which teachers became concerned about the utilization of the same curriculum content, assessment, and learning outcomes which are not different from heterogenous classes. Applying enrichment in all subjects for gifted students in mixed-ability classes needs to be considered as possible alternative option to homogenous classes. The findings raised critical challenges of homogenous classes regarding the social interaction of gifted students, parental involvement, and counselling services. Implications and recommendations for future research and practice are offered.

Keywords: Teachers' reflection, Homogenous classes, Gifted students.

This is an open access article under [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

1. Introduction

One of the most significant current discussion in gifted education is about the role of teachers in evaluating the models of teaching gifted students. Increasing interest in evaluating the educational practices has heightened the need for considering the reflection of teachers on their own practices. The relationship between teachers' perceptions and the quality of teaching models has been extensively studied. It became obvious that the effectiveness of teacher implementation of the educational models can be examined not only by observing teachers in action, but also by understanding teachers' perceptions about such models (Kennedy, 2004; Lassila et al., 2023).

¹ Department of Special Education, College of Education, University of Jeddah, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. Email: falamiri@uj.edu.sa

In the field of gifted education, the issues of grouping gifted students in special classes have become a favorite topic for analysis. Advocates of homogenous or ability grouping acknowledged its impact on meeting the academic, cognitive, and social needs of gifted students (e.g., Kulik & Kulik, 1992; Pedersen et al., 2023; Rogers, 1993). On the other hand, opponents of ability grouping raised a critical concern about the equity and socio-political issues (e.g., Boaler, 1997; Tirri & Kuusisto, 2013). In spite of this counter arguments, there has been a strong agreement among researchers about the profession of teachers and their valuable contribution to the decision making process for the best practices for teaching gifted students in the schools.

Questions have been widely raised among researchers and educators about the involvement of teachers in evaluating their own practices of teaching gifted students in homogenous classes. Although there has been a growing body of research in Saudi Arabian context for teaching the identified gifted students in the homogenous classes, such research is rarely reinforced by the reflection of teachers on their own experience. The gap between the quality practices and the voices of teachers on such practices has become a central issues in gifted education, not only in the Saudi Arabian context but also in the other contexts as reported by considerable research (Azano et al., 2011; Ramos et al., 2023)

In particular, literature regarding the evaluation of gifted programs based on the experience of teachers in Saudi Arabian schools focused merely on the quantitative aspects for collecting the data. Therefore, the current study sheds light on the need for applying the qualitative research methods in studying the teachers' experience in order to obtain deeper understanding of such experience and empower teachers to provide further explanation of their own situation, and this is the most distinguished valuable of qualitative research designed as asserted by may researchers (e.g., Creswell, 2012).

The purpose of this study was to explore teachers' reflection of their own experiences while teaching gifted students in homogenous classes. To achieve that, the study was guided by the following questions:

1. How do teachers describe their professional development for teaching gifted students in homogenous classes?
2. What do teachers think are the most important experience of teaching gifted students in homogenous classes?
3. What do teachers think are the most challenging aspects of teaching gifted students in homogenous classes?

The study begins with a brief overview of gifted education practices in Saudi Arabian schools. Explaining the theoretical framework and literature review will follow. The study goes on to address the research method and data collection procedures. The study concludes with presenting the findings and providing extensive discussion and implications of such findings for future research and practice.

2. Overview of gifted education practices in Saudi Arabian schools

The official educational policy, published by the Ministry of Education (1995), determined the basic goals of education in Saudi Arabia. One of these goals is 'identifying and nurturing gifted individuals, and providing them with various resources and opportunities to develop their talents within the framework of general programs, in addition to special programs' (Ministry of Education, 1995). In general, gifted education practices in Saudi Arabian schools follows the traditional structure of gifted programming, which includes the definition of gifted students, screening and identification procedures, school-based programs (e.g., enrichment and acceleration). As a result of the first national research project for identifying gifted students in Saudi Arabian schools, the Ministry of Education adopted the following definition of gifted students;

The student who has an aptitude or exceptional ability or differentiated performance from his peers in one particular field or more considering by the society, particularly in the field of intellectual talent, creative thinking, academic achievement, and special skills and abilities, and he needs special educational provisions that are not available in the regular school programs. (Alnafie et al., 2000, p. 18).

It can be seen from this definition, considerable effort has been devoted to identifying and selecting gifted students to place them in a separate learning environment. One of the most common

models of gifted education practices in some Saudi schools is the pull-out enrichment programs, in which the gifted students from different classrooms are invited by the teacher of gifted and grouped together in a separate class for a part-time during the school day to take part in enrichment activities (Aljughaiman, 2006).

Another model is grouping the identified gifted students together in a special class (i.e., self-contained classroom program) within the selected mainstream schools. According to the guideline for implementing the special classes for gifted students (Ministry of Education, 2016), each selective school includes one special class for grouping such students in three grades (grade 4 in the elementary school, grade 7 in the middle school, and grade 10 in the high schools). Gifted students are identified and nominated for such the special classes through the definite criteria which include the National Program for Gifted Identification, which involves the Mawhiba Multiple Cognitive Aptitude Test (Mawhiba, 2023). Other criteria include the behavioral characteristic scale, the academic achievement, and the creative product. Throughout the school year 2019-2020, (45, 084) gifted students were identified as gifted and only 32.7% of those students were selected for the special classes due the limited number of seats available for each class in one selected school (Alfaiz et al., 2022).

In addition to the core subjects and curricular across the mainstream schools in Saudi Arabia, gifted students in the special homogenous classes take extra enrichment activities with implementing the curriculum compacting strategy. Gifted students in such classes are instructed by the subject teachers, who teach the core curricula, and also by the specialized teacher in gifted education who provides the general enrichment activities in the areas of thinking skills, scientific research, and the problem solving. The specialized teacher in gifted education assists the subject teachers to develop the extra enrichment activities for their lessons. The subject teachers are nominated for teaching gifted students in the special class after completing the required professional development programs that include the essential knowledge in gifted education (i.e., the theories, thinking skills, teaching strategies, designing the enrichment programs, and technical skills).

3. Theoretical framework

The participatory worldview underpins the conceptual assumptions in this study. The participatory worldview explains the participative manner of knowledge development in which persons are empowered to produce a collective knowledge about the situation they act on (Reason & Bradbury, 2001). This argument is reinforced by the perceptions of many researchers who consistently argued that empowering individuals to work collaboratively toward analyzing their own situation can increase their responsibility and confidence in generating the valuable knowledge and bring the required change for improving their own action (Heron & Reason, 2001; Gaventa & Cornwall, 2008; Park, 2001). Thus, participatory worldview supports the current study with respect to the need to empowering the participants to reflect on their own experience of teaching gifted students in the special classes. Importantly, the participatory worldview informs the reason of applying the qualitative approach throughout the focus group interview as the method of data collection in this study in which participants shared the knowledge about their own situation.

Moreover, the theory of reflective practitioner developed by Schön's work (1983, 1987), shaped the epistemological foundation in this study. He created the two valuable concepts; the reflection-in-action and the reflection-on-action. Reflection-in-action was defined as the 'reflection on one's spontaneous ways of thinking and acting, undertaken in the midst of action to guide further action' (Schön, 1987, p. 22). Whereas the concept of reflection-on-action meant that 'thinking back on what we have done in order to discover how our knowing-in-action may have contributed to an unexpected outcome' (Schön, 1987, p. 26). The reflection process provides the participants in this study with the opportunity to obtain the required knowledge that emanates from their reflection on their own practices and thus become able to find out the valuable aspects and challenges of working with the gifted students in the special classes.

4. Literature review

The impact of teachers' perceptions on their teaching practices has been extensively studied (Aguirre & Speer, 1999; Kennedy, 2004; Lassila et al., 2023). Researchers and educators have recognized

the need for research-based teaching models and evidence of their effectiveness when they are adapted to a school context (Kennedy, 2004; Cheung, 2012). Teachers' perceptions and beliefs have become an important aspect for evaluating the quality of evidence-based models and students' learning (Waters-Adams, 2006). Further, the level of students' achievement can be affected by the beliefs and expectations that teachers hold about students' performance (Kolb & Jussim, 1994). Teachers' perceptions are important not only for assessing the quality of the educational interventions, but also for developing teachers' practices and improving students' learning.

Teachers' perceptions influence how they implement educational models. Their beliefs and perceptions about educational reform are significant indicators of classroom practices (Aguirre & Speer, 1999; Brickhouse, 1990; Richardson, 1996; Stipek et al., 2001). For example, researchers examined the connection between beliefs and practice for 21 elementary mathematics teachers and found that teachers' beliefs about the nature of mathematics influenced their mathematics instruction (Stipek et al., 2001). Teachers' implementation of educational frameworks and curriculum standards reflect their own beliefs, principles, and perceptions about such frameworks and standards (Kennedy, 2004). In particular, researcher found that the different beliefs and perceptions that science teachers had toward the nature of science influenced their ways of teaching science as well as their understanding of its curriculum content (Brickhouse, 1990). Consistent with this result, "[t]he appearance in teachers' practice of apparent influence from their understanding of science cannot be understood without consideration of their wider beliefs about teaching, learning, and the curriculum" (Waters-Adams, 2006, p. 937). Teachers' perceptions of the planned educational interventions can help to understand how they interact with such interventions in their classrooms, and how the intervention affected their teaching and their students' learning.

Knowing teachers' perceptions of the teaching model is important for determining the level to which teachers implement it with fidelity and, ultimately, for assessing the effectiveness of the model for students' learning (Azano et al., 2011). To illustrate, teachers with high expectations of students' performance and strong beliefs about the model and instructions required for implementing the research-based curriculum exhibited high commitment and delivered high quality teaching practices, which consequently increased the level of fidelity of implementation (Azano et al., 2011).

Raising fidelity standards for the evidence-based intervention is important for evaluating the extent to which the intervention was implemented as designed and for providing accurate evidence about the effectiveness of the intervention (Mowbray et al., 2003). Thus, evidence-based practices can be best understood from teachers' thoughts and perceptions of the planned teaching model, and this helps to assess the fidelity level of implementation. Evidence-based teaching models are most successfully implemented when teachers have the opportunity to express their thoughts about the model and raise any ideas, concerns, and challenges they encounter throughout the implementation of the model in their classrooms.

The participation of teachers in evaluating their own classroom practices raised a high demand for their professional development in one hand, and improving the quality of teaching gifted students on the other. Alnafie and Darandari (2011) clearly pointed out that the external authorities of school development and teachers' profession reduced the empowerment of teachers to reflect on their own experience and make the necessary modifications and improvements. Researchers strongly found that the types of professional development programs can influence teachers' competence in implementing the appropriate curricula and instruction for meeting the needs of gifted students (Reis and Westberg, 1994). It can be observed that the challenges of teaching gifted students in the classrooms often traced back to the teachers' prior experience and profession, rather than to the content of curriculum and learning environment.

Many educational experts like (Azano et al., 2011; Lassila et al., 2023; Ramos et al., 2023; Reis & Renzulli, 2010; Roberts & Inman, 2023; VanTassel-Baska, 2013) have argued convincingly that there has been a gap between the theoretical models of gifted education programs and its effective implementation in the classroom environment. It has been found that the teachers, gifted students, and parents in Saudi schools had less participation in evaluating the gifted education practices (Alfaiz et al., 2022). As Pine (2009) recommended, the development of knowledge and classroom practices that relate to students cannot be valid without respecting the voices of teachers who well know the

students and the challenges of classroom environment. What can be learnt from such arguments is that the professional development programs in gifted education did not often involve the process of reflective practitioners for supporting teachers to examine their own practices in the classrooms. Hence, the role of teachers as reflective practitioners can provide the practical evidence of the effectiveness of gifted education models.

Researchers have shown an increase interest in investigating the issues of grouping gifted students whether in homogenous classes or in the heterogenous classes. Homogenous grouping is defined as the placement of students with similarity abilities or interests in a classroom together, whereas heterogenous grouping is defined as the placement of students with different abilities in the classroom together (Vialle & Rogers, 2009). One of the most discussion in gifted education in Saudi Arabia is about the extent in which the homogenous classes are more effective for educating the gifted students. As a result of their comparative study between the two gifted education models, which were the special schools and the special classes within the mainstream schools in Saudi Arabia, Almuaili and Alarfaj (2023) clearly found that the special classes had less quality services because of the critical challenges related to the school administration, the teachers of gifted students, the enrichment activities, the school facilities. In particular, they provided controversial findings related to gifted students who felt disappointed about the traditional teaching strategies and assessment offered in the special classes, and such strategies did not differ from the strategies the students previously received in the regular classroom. Gifted students also encountered some problems regarding their social interaction with the teachers in the special classes (Almuaili and Alarfaj, 2023). It would be difficult to apply the gifted education pedagogy without ensuring the quality of teachers' preparation and school administration in working with gifted students.

Although tremendous research continually support the homogenous grouping for increasing the academic achievement of gifted students and meeting their exceptional needs (e.g., Adams-Byers et al., 2004; Feldhusen & Moon, 1992; Pedersen et al., 2023; Rogers, 1993), an increasing concern has been raised about the role of teachers in evaluating their own experience in working with students in homogenous classes. In Finland, for instance, teachers criticized the special classes for gifted students because of the disadvantages they observed during their experience such as the social and equity issues of gifted programs (Tirri & Kuusisto, 2013). Similarly, both teachers and students were the significant source for evaluating the school-within-a-school gifted programs in the Canadian schools (Matthews & Kitchen, 2007). In the United Kingdom, teachers were empowered to examine the gifted education policy and programs, and as a result they recommended the development of effective learning environment and pedagogy to meet the diverse needs of students (Koshy & Pinheiro-Torres, 2013). It can be seen that the teachers can provide the practical evidence that would help the researchers and policy makers for taking the accurate decision about the best practices in gifted education.

In addition to the social and emotional issues of ability grouping as reported by some researchers (Boaler, 1997; Slavin, 1990; Tirri & Kuusisto, 2013), moving from rigid curriculum and assessment to more innovative pedagogy and creativity of gifted students in homogenous classes is likely to be the major obstacle that teacher encounter in working with such students (Almuaili and Alarfaj, 2023; Anderson & Pavan, 1993; Koshy & Pinheiro-Torres, 2013). Colangelo has convincingly argued that "meeting the cognitive needs of gifted students often meets simultaneously their social-emotional needs" (2002, p.5). It can be understood that the social-emotional development of gifted students is a result of providing an effective educational instruction that meets their academic needs and interests. In other words, inappropriate curriculum and teaching strategies can bring about social, emotional, and behavioral problems for the gifted students, and this critical issue has been frequently addressed by well-known researchers (e.g., Baum et al., 1998; Lovecky, 2023; Neihart et al., 2021; Webb et al., 2005). Consequently, successful implementation of the ability grouping can be determined by the level of teachers' training and preparation, and the adequate differentiated learning strategies.

5. Method and data collection

To answer the research question, the researcher employed the qualitative research approach to gather in-depth insights into teachers' perceptions of homogenous classes for gifted students. Qualitative approach is appropriate for the research problem that needs deeper understanding and

exploration from the participants' perceptions (Creswell, 2012). The nature of knowledge produced in this study was descriptive and necessitated qualitative methods for data.

Participants sample

According to the focus group interview, Creswell (2012) suggested the number of participants in this type of interview which needs between four to six participants. The study intentionally employed the purposive sampling method for nominated the participants from one primary school, which has a homogenous class for the identified gifted students, in the region of Makkah during the school year 2021/2022. The study was undertaken among a sample of 6 male teachers who had over three years of experience in teaching gifted students in homogenous classes from 4th to 6th grades in the subjects of maths, science, social studies, Arabic language, English language, and Islamic studies.

Data sources

Focus group interview throughout the process of informal focus group discussions was adopted as a source for the qualitative data in this study. The focus group interview are suitable for encouraging the interaction among participants to generate a shared knowledge about the questions posed by the researcher (Creswell, 2012; Mills, 2011). The research method meshed well with the theoretical framework as described above. Open-ended questions were employed for the informal focus group discussions. As Creswell (2012) illustrated, researchers in the focus group interview pose few comprehensive questions which help them to construct the participants' responses. The focus group interview included four major questions, which are relevant to the research questions:

1. How do you see your preparation and professional development for teaching gifted students in homogenous classes?
2. What do you think the most valuable experience of teaching gifted students in homogenous classes?
3. What do you think the most challenging aspects of teaching gifted students in homogenous classes?
4. Is there anything else that you want to add before concluding the interview?

To record the data, the group discussion protocol was utilised to record the information gathered from the participants. Participants agreed to record the data through the written records. As Creswell (2012) indicated, the interview protocol is formed by the researcher and includes the instruction and questions of interview and the space for taking notes and making summary. In addition to the basic information of the interview (i.e., date, time, the topic and focused questions), the group discussion protocol included a section to write notes from each participant's perspective. Taking notes during the group discussion depended on the verbatim recording of each participant's opinion. To make adequate recordings, participants were asked to repeat their significant information. The group discussion protocol also included a section for highlighting the summary of the group discussion and a space for the group's feedback of the summary, as necessary. Participants had the opportunity to read the completed protocol and review the written records including the notes and summary.

Data analysis

The thematic analysis of qualitative data shaped the data analysis procedures in this study. Following Creswell's (2012) approach for analysing the qualitative data, the collected data were organised, coded and reduced into a number of themes. Creswell's approach was appropriate for the data analysis in this study because it was effective for data reduction and interpretation. The collected data were organised into five groups related to each question of the group discussion. Having read the the group discussion protocol several times and taking further notes in the margins, the data were coded based on many groups to identify the major themes. Additional or unexpected themes were also considered. After defining the major themes in relation to the important agreement and similarities stemmed from the participants' perspective, the themes were reviewed to reach the final list of themes that accurately reflect the perceptions of participants regarding each research question.

6. Findings and discussion

The findings were written in a descriptive form and included examples of the most relevant quotations of the participant perceptions. Based on the thematic analysis of the collected data, the valuable findings emerged from the group discussions were categorized into five themes regarding the research topic and questions:

1. professional development;
2. valuable experience;
3. challenges; and
4. participants' suggestions.

Table 1 summarises the major themes with related to each question of the focused group interview. The key ideas, which involves the key words extracted from the quotations of participants' perception also presented.

Table 1.

Major themes and key ideas.

Major themes	Questions of focused group interview	Key ideas
Professional development	How do you see your preparation and professional development for teaching gifted students in homogenous classes?	Abroad and different topics. Times for preparation. In-service vs pre-service courses. Theory vs practice.
valuable experience	What do you think the most valuable experience of teaching gifted students in homogenous classes?	Enrichment lessons. Curriculum compacting. Flexibility.
Challenges	What do you think the most challenging aspects of teaching gifted students in homogenous classes?	Regular curriculum (textbook). Regular assessment and learning outcomes Parents. Counselling services and social interaction.
Suggestions	Is there anything else that you want to add before concluding the interview?	Subject-based enrichment. Social and emotional development. Mixed ability grouping.

Professional development

The research findings revealed that all teachers expressed consistent opinions about their professional development programs they received for working in the special classes of gifted students. Teachers' reflection on their professional development programs (i.e., training courses) was sub-grouped into; abroad and different topics, the time of preparation, in-service programs, and the theoretical content.

Teachers' shared opinions about the short time of the training course and had less time for the preparation, though the course included different topics in gifted education. For example, the mathematics teacher stated that "*the training course covered many topics but was short and the topics were compressed*". The teacher of social studies added that: "*the training course needs to be a diploma to support teachers and last at least three months to train teachers effectively in each topic of gifted education*". Similarly, teachers expressed similar views about the in-service training courses which were offered during the implementation of the special classes. The Arabic language teachers noted that "*during my work I faced difficulties to manage the requirements of the training course and the requirements of my work ... it is better to receive the training course before the implementation of the special classes*". The teachers shared the similar concern in which the in-service course provided them with less preparation and they had a limited time to expand their knowledge in working with gifted students.

In addition, the teachers were in common, in which the content of the training course focused more on the theories of gifted education than the practical strategies of teaching gifted students. To illustrate, the science teacher commented that *“some theories are not applicable to my classroom, and it is good to know the theories, but we need to know how to implement them in the classroom ... I want to know how I teach the science subjects for the gifted students”*.

Valuable experience

Teachers expressed different values they found during their work in homogenous classes for gifted students. Both teachers of mathematics and science referred to the additional enrichment lessons and curriculum compacting as the most valuable experience they found. For instance, the science teacher stated: *“I learned new strategy for the curriculum compacting which was useful for me to provide extra enrichment activities for gifted students”*. It might be evident that applying the strategy of curriculum compacting and enrichment lessons for both mathematics and science subjects, as outlined in the guidelines of implementing the special classes, enhanced teachers' attitudes toward the importance of enrichment. Another valuable experience is applying the strategy of curriculum compacting in which the teacher of social studies viewed it as the supportive strategy for teaching gifted students. Furthermore, the teacher of Islamic studies perceived his experience of teaching gifted students as the *“privilege”* for his career. Similarly, all teachers were consistent in viewing the flexibility as the value experience of teaching gifted students. The teacher of social studies reported that *“teaching gifted students gave me flexible options for implementing the collaborative learning among students to work together on extra activities”*.

Challenges

The findings showed that teachers were very consistent in their reflection on their own experience of teaching gifted students in homogenous classes and the challenges they encountered. Similarities among teachers centered on utilization of regular curriculum and regular assessment of students' achievement. Both teachers of mathematics and science expressed additional views as they received extra training courses developed only for the mathematics and science teachers. To illustrate, the mathematics teacher pointed out that *“I had a training course to design enrichment units in maths, and it was beneficial to my experience but at the end I need to assess gifted students based on their scores on the maths' exam which concentrates on the basic lessons of the textbook”*. Also, the science teacher mentioned *“the enrichment units supported me to provide enrichment projects in the science lessons, but it is difficult to assess gifted students' innovations and projects because the assessment is based on their achievement of the textbook exam”*. He also stated that *“the assessment of science for gifted students in the special classes did not differ from their peers in the mainstream classes, because I use the same curriculum and I need to cover all the textbook to prepare students for the exams”*.

Moreover, the teachers of Arabic language, English language, and Islamic studies were in agreement as to the matter of utilizing the regular curriculum and instruction for teaching the gifted students in the special classes. For example, the Arabic language teachers noted that: *“there is no difference between teaching gifted students in the special classes and in the regular classes because I teach the same lessons with the same assessment for all students”*. He added an interesting comment; *“I think gifted students in homogenous classes need enrichment activities not only for mathematics and science subjects but also for other subjects”*. This opinion has been supported by other teachers who clearly agreed that all teachers of homogenous class need to be trained on how they can apply the enrichment strategies for meeting the needs of gifted students in all subjects.

Additionally, there was an increasing concern among teachers regarding the parental involvement in the education of gifted students in homogenous classes. All teachers expressed similar views which indicated the lack of guidelines for parental involvement. The teacher of social studies noted: *“I have less communication with parents regarding their gifted students and there is no specific guidelines for parental involvement in the students' education”*. Also, the teacher of English language referred to an important matter and stated that *“it is difficult to communicate with parents because they believed that their students are gifted and able to learn well in homogenous class”*. The Islamic teacher

supposed that “parents have less participation in developing the guidelines of implementing the special classes for their gifted students”.

The most critical challenge emerged from teachers’ perspectives is the lack of counselling services for supporting the social interaction of gifted students with their peers in other mainstream classes. Teachers were consistent in viewing the social interaction of gifted students as a serious problem. All teachers had an agreement on the expression of “isolation” for describing this problem. To illustrate, the mathematics teacher commented, “I observed that some gifted students are isolated from their peers in other classes in school activities, and I talked with the school counselor about this problem”. The teacher of Islamic studies raised a critical issue and referred to the term “exclusive” as described, “some gifted students feel that they study in exclusive classes, because they have special support even for the classroom facilities which are different from other normal classrooms”.

Suggestions

There are some striking similarities among teachers in their agreement on the suggestions they provided to overcome the challenges of teaching gifted students in homogenous classes. All teachers agreed on the importance of providing enrichment for gifted students in a specific subject within the regular classroom rather than in a separate classroom. For example, the mathematics teacher pointed out, “I learned about enrichment in the training program, and I can offer that for gifted students in the regular classroom with their peers, because we teach the same textbook with the same assessment for all students”. The science teacher added as interesting comment; “It might be better to get training programs on how to provide enrichment units in my subject for gifted students because I know the individual differences among my students and it is not difficult to teach those students with their average peers”.

Furthermore, the teachers were in agreement for their suggestions about the need for examining the impact of grouping gifted students together in a special class on their social and emotional development of gifted students. For instance, the Arabic language teacher suggested that: “I am concern about the social and emotional matters of gifted students, and it is important to provide counselling services for evaluating these matters and parents should have a major role”. In addition, teachers agreed on their suggestion for supporting the mixed-ability grouping for teaching gifted students with their average peers. The teachers reached this agreement because they found that they teach the same textbook and use the same assessment procedures which lead to the same learning outcomes for all students. For example, the Islamic teacher mentioned that “homogenous classes may be beneficial, if we use different assessment procedures because all students in the school should meet the same learning outcomes and therefore mixed-ability classes is good option in our school”. The teacher of mathematics provided an interesting insight; “I know some very excellent students in mathematics, but they don’t receive enrichment lessons in mathematics as I learned in the training programs because such students were not selected for the special class of gifted”. He suggested that “it is possible for me to provide enrichment lessons for excellent students in mixed-ability classes”.

7. Discussion and implication

Although the justification for choosing the small sample size has previously mentioned in this study, caution must be applied, as the findings might not be transferable to other contexts. At first glance the findings of this study seem to lead to conclude that the focus group discussions provided teachers with opportunity to be more critical about their own experience in teaching gifted students in homogenous classes. Teachers also have the opportunity to make a collective knowledge about their own experience. It might be expected that the agreed perspectives among teachers can be attributed to the similar preparation programs and the similar experience of teaching one classroom for gifted students throughout the school year.

In general, the present findings fits into the research picture that has been frequently acknowledged the importance of teachers’ perceptions and beliefs on evaluating the quality of teaching models (e.g., Aguirre & Speer, 1999; Kennedy, 2004; Lassila et al., 2023; Waters-Adams, 2006). Also, the findings are consistent with researchers’ arguments regarding the gap between gifted education pedagogy and its effective implementation in classroom practice (Azano et al., 2011; Ramos et al., 2023; Reis & Renzulli, 2010; Roberts & Inman, 2023; VanTassel-Baska, 2013).

The findings raised a critical concern about the extent of teachers involvement in applying the homogeneous classes in the school and how the gifted students be nominated. It appears that the professional development programs are not sufficient to prepare teachers well to apply the comprehensive practices of teaching gifted students in the homogeneous classes including the modifications related to the curriculum content and assessment. It can be understood from the findings that such professional development programs focused more on the enrichment models for teaching gifted students providing them with additional enrichment lessons in mathematics and science subjects.

It is interesting to see how teachers through the group discussions became more aware about the importance of enrichment for meeting the diverse needs of gifted students in all subjects, not only in mathematics and science. The agreement among teachers regarding the possibility of applying enrichment activities to all advanced students in mainstream classes (i.e., mixed-ability classes) posed a critical concern about the exclusive practice of gifted education in the school. If all teachers trained well on how they provide enrichment for gifted students on all subjects, they are more likely to be able to do that in heterogenous classes, especially with utilising the same curriculum content, assessment, and learning outcomes.

The question that can be raised from this situation is that what are the valuable differences between teaching gifted students in homogenous classes and heterogenous classes based on the teachers' experience, the curriculum content, the assessment procedures, and the students' learning outcomes? In other words, If the teachers are able to provide enrichment activities based on the core curriculum content with utilising the traditional assessment and achieving the same learning outcomes for all students in the school, do we still need to offer the special classes for gifted students within the mainstream schools? The findings of this study are reinforced by those obtained by Almuaili and Alarfaj (2023) who raised the problems of such special classes in which teachers were not well prepared, and the gifted students were disappointed about the traditional practices and assessment. As previously mentioned in the Saudi literature (e.g., Alfaiz et al., 2022; Alnafie & Darandari, 2011), it can be noted that teachers' preparation in gifted education programs is questionable as a result of the lack of teachers' involvement in evaluating their own practices.

The most significant issue emerged from the findings is the increasing concern among teachers with respect to the social interaction of gifted students in homogenous classes. This finding goes along with the findings of other studies that extensively criticized the homogenous grouping for its effect on reducing the social interaction between gifted students and their peers in other mainstream classes (e.g., Boaler, 1997; Slavin, 1990; Tirri & Kuusisto, 2013). Following from the findings, this issue can be worsen as a consequence of the lack of parental involvement in one hand, and the lack of counseling services for supporting the social and emotional development of gifted students on the other.

The overall findings suggest that there is a need for further research to gather extensive data that examine the effect of homogenous classes based on the teachers' reflection. Greater attention needs to be directed for evaluating the policy and guideline for implementing the special classes for gifted students in the Saudi Arabian schools. It might be possible to adopt a holistic approach for teaching gifted students in the homogenous classes including the differentiation of curriculum content, the teaching strategies, assessment procedures, and the learning outcomes.

What requires much more attention is empowering parents' participation in the evaluation process regarding the effect of homogenous grouping on the social and emotional development of gifted students. In this situation, further research is needed for examining the perception of parents about this matter. There is a need for utmost emphasis on providing the specialised counselling services for gifted students and increasing the communication with parents. Grouping gifted students together in a homogenous class does not mean that other students in heterogenous class are not gifted.

References

- Adams-Byers, J., Whitsell, S. S., & Moon, S. M. (2004). Gifted students' perceptions of the academic and social/emotional effects of homogeneous and heterogeneous grouping. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 48(1), 7-20. <https://doi.org/10.1177/001698620404800102>

- Aguirre, J., & Speer, N. M. (1999). Examining the relationship between beliefs and goals in teacher practice. *Journal of mathematical behavior*, 18(3), 327-356.
- Alarfaj, A.A. (2021). Gifted classes: student and parent perceptions of the Saudi Royal Commission for Jubail and Yanbu's Programme. *The Scientific Journal of King Faisal University: Humanities and Management Sciences*, 22, 6–14. DOI: 10.37575/h/edu/1000
- Alfaiz, F. S., Alfaid, A. A., & Aljughaiman, A. M. (2022) Current status of gifted education in Saudi Arabia, *Cogent Education*, 9 (1), DOI: 10.1080/2331186X.2022.2064585 .
- Aljughaiman, A. (2006). *The school enrichment model*. King Abdulaziz and His Companions Foundation for the Gifted.
- Almuaili, F.A., & Alarfaj, A.A. (2023). Comparison of the quality of services provided and the level of achievement between gifted schools and gifted students classes attached to general education schools from their point of view. *The Resalah of Arabian Gulf*, 169 (44), 21-43.
<http://search.mandumah.com/Record/1405689>
- Alnafie, A., Al Gateai, A., Al Dudiban, S., Al Hazmi, M., & Al Saleem. (2000). *The program of identifying and nurturing gifted children*. King AbdulAziz City for Science and Technology.
- AlNafie, A., & Darandari, E. Z. (2011). *Towards implementing a new model for quality and accreditation of schools in Gulf Countries*. Paper presented at the 1st International Conference on Total Quality in K–12 Education, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.
- Anderson, R.H., & Pavan, B.N. (1993). *Nongradedness: Helping it to happen*. Technomic Publishing Company .
- Azano, A., Missett, T. C., Callahan, C. M., Oh, S., Brunner, M., Foster, L. H. (2011). Exploring the relationship between fidelity of implementation and academic achievement in a third-grade gifted curriculum: A mixed-methods study. *Journal of Advanced Academics*, 22(5), 693-719.
- Baum, S. M., Olenchak, F. R., & Owen, S. V. (1998). Gifted students with attention deficits: Fact and/or Fiction? or, can we see the forest for the trees? *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 42(2), 96-104.
- Boaler, J. (1997). When even the winners are losers: evaluating the experiences of 'top set' students. *Curriculum Studies*, 29(2), 165-182.
- Brickhouse, N. W. (1990). Teachers' beliefs about the nature of science and their relationship to classroom practice. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 41(3), 53-62.
- Cheung, R. H. P. (2012). Teaching for creativity: Examining the beliefs of early childhood teachers and their influence on teaching practices. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*, 37(3), 43-52.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/183693911203700307>
- Colangelo, N. (2002). Counselling gifted and talented students. *NRC/GT Newsletter*, Fall, 5-9.
- Creswell, J. W. (2012). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (4th ed.). Pearson
- Feldhusen, J. F., & Moon, S. M. (1992). Grouping gifted Students: Issues and concerns. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 36(2), 63-67. <https://doi.org/10.1177/001698629203600202>
- Gaventa, J., & Cornwall, A. (2008). Power and knowledge. In P. Reason & H. Bradbury (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of action research: Participative inquiry and practice* (2nd ed., pp. 172–189). SAGE Publications.
- Heron, J., & Reason, P. (2001). The practice of cooperative inquiry: Research 'with' rather than 'on' people. In P. Reason & H. Bradbury (Eds.), *Handbook of action research: Participative inquiry and practice* (pp. 179–188). SAGE Publications.
- Kennedy, M. M. (2004). Reform ideals and teachers' practical intentions. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 12(13).
- King Abdul-Aziz and his Companions Foundation for Giftedness and Creativity "Mawhiba" (2023, December 4). *The National Program for Gifted Identification*.
<https://www.mawhiba.org/en/Initiatives/Identification/Pages/Tests.aspx>
- Kolb, K. J., & Jussim, L. (1994). Teacher expectations and underachieving gifted children. *Roeper Review*, 17, 26-30.
- Koshy, V., & Pinheiro-Torres, C. (2013). "Are we being de- gifted, miss?" Primary school gifted and talented coordinators' responses to the gifted and talented education policy in England. *British Educational Research Journal*, 39(6), 953–978.

- Kulik, J.A. and Kulik, C.C. (1992). Meta-analytic findings on grouping programs. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 36 (2), 73-77.
- Lassila, E., Hyry-Beihammer, E. K., Kizkapan, O., Rocena, A., & Sumida, M. (2023). Giftedness in inclusive classrooms: A cross-cultural examination of pre-service teachers' thinking in Finland, Austria, Turkey, the Philippines, and Japan. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 67(4), 306-324. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00169862231183652>
- Lovecky, D. V. (2023). *Different Minds: Gifted children with ADHD, ASD, and other dual exceptionalities* (2nd ed.). Jessica Kingsley.
- Matthews, D., & Kitchen, J. (2007). School-within-a-school gifted programs: Perceptions of students and teachers in public secondary schools. *Gifted Child Quarterly*. 51 (3), 256-271. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0016986207302720>
- Mills, G. E. (2011). *Action research: A guide for the teacher researcher* (4th ed.). Pearson.
- Ministry of Education. (1995). *The educational policy in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia* (4th ed.). Ministry of Education.
- Ministry of Education (2016). *Guideline for implementing the special classes for gifted students*. Ministry of Education.
- Mowbray, C. T., Holter, M. C., Teague, G. B., & Bybee, D. (2003). Fidelity criteria: Development, measurement, and validation. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 24, 315-340.
- Neihart, M., Pfeiffer, S. I., Cross, T. L. (eds.). (2021). *The social and emotional development of gifted children: What do we know?* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Park, P. (2001). Knowledge and participatory research. In P. Reason & H. Bradbury (Eds.), *Handbook of action research: Participative inquiry and practice* (pp. 81–90). London: SAGE Publications.
- Pine, G. J. (2009). *Teacher action research: Building knowledge democracies*. SAGE Publications.
- Pedersen, B., Makel, M. C., Rambo-Hernandez, K. E., Peters, S. J., & Plucker, J. (2023). Most mathematics classrooms contain wide-ranging achievement levels. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 67(3), 220-234. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00169862231166074>
- Ramos, A., Lavrijsen, J., Linnenbrink-Garcia, L., Soenens, B., Vansteenkiste, M., Sypré, S., Boncquet, M., & Verschueren, K. (2023). *Motivational pathways underlying gifted underachievement: Trajectory classes, longitudinal outcomes, and predicting factors. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 67(3), 179-197. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00169862221132279>
- Reason, P., & Bradbury, H. (2001). Introduction: Inquiry and participation in search of a world worthy of human aspiration. In P. Reason & H. Bradbury (Eds.), *Handbook of action research: Participative inquiry and practice* (pp. 1–14). SAGE Publications.
- Reis, S. M., & Westberg, K. L. (1994). The impact of staff development on teachers' ability to modify curriculum for gifted and talented students. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 38(3), 127-135. <https://doi.org/10.1177/001698629403800306>
- Reis, S. M., & Renzulli, J. S. (2010). Is there still a need for gifted education? An examination of current research. *Learning and Individual Differences*, 20(4), 308–317. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lindif.2009.10.012>
- Richardson, V. A. (1996). The role of attitudes and beliefs in learning to teach. In J. Sikula & T. Buttery & E. Guyton (Eds.), *Handbook of Research on Teacher Education* (pp. 102-119). Macmillan.
- Roberts, J. L. & Inman, T. F. (2023). *Strategies for differentiating instruction: Best practices for the classroom*. Taylor & Francis Group.
- Rogers, K.B. (1993). Grouping the gifted and talented: Questions and answers. *Roeper Review*, 16(1), 8-12
- Schön, D. A. (1983). *The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action*. Basic Books.
- Schön, D. A. (1987). *Educating the reflective practitioner*. Jossey-Bass.
- Slavin, R. E. (1990). Achievement effects of ability grouping in secondary schools: A best-evidence synthesis. *Review of Educational Research*, 60(3), 471–499. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1170761>
- Stipek, D., Givvin, K. B., Salmon, J. M., & Macgyvers, V. (2001). Teachers' beliefs and practices related to mathematics instruction. *Teaching and Teacher Education*. 17 (2), 213-226.
- Tirri, K., & Kuusisto, E. (2013). How Finland serves gifted and talented pupils. *Journal for the Education of the Gifted*, 36, 84–96.

- VanTassel-Baska, J. (2013). The world of cross-cultural research: Insights for gifted education. *Journal for the Education of the Gifted*, 36(1), 6–18.
- Vialle, W., & Rogers, K. B. (2009). *Educating the gifted learner*. David Barlow Publishing.
- Waters-Adams, S. (2006). The relationship between understanding of the nature of science and practice: The influence of teachers' beliefs about education, teaching and learning. *International Journal of Science Education*, 28 (8), 919-944.
- Webb, J. T., Amend, E. R., Webb, N. E., Goerss, J., Beljan, P., & Olenchak, F. R. (2005). *Misdiagnosis and dual diagnoses of gifted children and adults: ADHD, Bipolar, OCD, Asperger's, depression, and other disorders*. Great Potential Press.