"YOU HAVE NOT REACHED THAT LEVEL, WHY DID YOU WRITE THAT EXAM?" UNDERSTANDING THE 'LIVED' EXPERIENCES OF GIFTED LEARNERS IN GHANAIAN SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

Globally, gifted learners have a significant number of unmet needs relating to their personal, social and academic concerns in the school system. Persons with unusual ability and potential for extraordinary expertise in any field of human performance have necessitated the call to study in a field of "gifted education". Even though there is a paucity of literature on the gifted learner in the Ghanaian educational system, more disturbing is the fate of school pupils who perceived themselves as capable of educational attainments and needed acceleration yet, are frustrated by lack of educational provisions and policies to cater for their needs. With this background and available literature on the increasingly segregated and unequal educational system, we asked the question, "How challenging is it for the gifted student in Basic schools in Ghana to achieve their dreams of acceleration?" We used qualitative phenomenological interpretive design to engage seven young gifted learners who wrote their BECE examinations without completing JHS. Individual interviews were conducted to garner data. It was found that students who wrote the BECE before completing JHS performed exceptionally well. It was also found that participants had self-confidence and their parents serve as protective factors. We conclude that exceptionally gifted learners are capable of performing significantly higher before their BECE completion. We recommend a system of special screening for acceleration and permission to students with high abilities to write BECE and that the Ghana education service and the government should make policies to enhance gifted

learners' learning opportunities in our educational systems so as to contribute to national development.

Keywords: gifted learners, qualitative phenomenology**,** Basic Education Certificate Examinations, Ghana Education Service

INTRODUCTION

Globally, gifted learners have a significant number of unmet needs in relating to their personal, social and academic concerns in the school system. Young gifted learners (YGL) in Ghana are faced with multiple challenges that includes emotional and social needs, intra and interpersonal skills, self-image, and career options among others. These challenges are both environmental and innate. According to Gagné, (2004) and Silverman (2010), giftedness denotes the capacities of people to have and to use natural and spontaneously expressed abilities (called outstanding aptitudes or gifts), in at least one ability domain, to such a level that places the individual among the top 10 per cent or less of age peers. Various authors outline different traits of a gifted student.

The recognition as a gifted person is determined by the needs and values of the prevailing culture viz a viz areas of performance of the individual. There has always been concerns and debates on the issue of how certain human abilities, personalities and environmental conditions contribute to what we call giftedness. Persons with unusual ability and potential for extraordinary expertise in any and all fields of human performance has necessitated the call to study in a field of psychology and education known as "gifted education". In a very broad sense, the study of gifted education focuses on two major questions: What makes giftedness? How can we develop giftedness in young people and adults? The record of human accomplishments and the progress of civilization can, in diverse ways be courted through the actions of history's most gifted and talented contributors to the art, sciences, and all other areas of human performance (Renzulli, 2005). As early as 2200 B.C., the Chinese had developed a comprehensive and detailed system of competitive assessment to select outstanding persons for government positions (DuBois, 1970), and

throughout the centuries, almost every culture had been interested in persons who have made notable and outstanding contributions to their national and global development.

According to UNICEF, Ghana has been a regional leader in delivering **Education for All**, which made it to reach the education Millennium Development Goals well ahead of the 2015 deadline https://www.unicef.org/ghana/education.html. However, in Ghana, efforts for gifted education have not yet caught the attention of the education authorities (Deku, 2013). Deku lamented about the absence of institutional programmes for the identification of gifted and talented children. In the face of these difficulties, the decision to offer any service for gifted individuals lies solely with the school teachers and at best, parents.

For example, for students to be nominated into the Science and Mathematics Clinics and Spelling Bee Camps, it is dependent solely on teacher nomination strategies. Deku bemoans the lack of studies on the exploration of teachers' level of nomination skills in the identification of gifted and talented children. Recently, Allotey, Watters and King, (2020) found that teachers had little or no knowledge about giftedness and the appropriate gifted education strategies. Their study revealed that teachers and educational stakeholders misconstrued differentiation and acceleration strategies and disregarded their use in developing the gifted learner.

Available literature on Ghana's preparedness to promote gifted education is paucity. Most countries around the world have been and still are working assiduously on harnessing the dense potentials hidden in gifted children for national development, yet, Ghana remains one of the African nations that pay limited attention to gifted learners' needs. Several Global West and Global South economies derive their driving force from the potential of gifted individuals as the backbone of their economic boom. In the recent past, Ghana was a rapidly developing West African country which aimed at building a prosperous and thriving economy reliant on technology and innovation. It was hoped that identifying and developing talents early in the school system would play a significant role in achieving

this goal. In spite of this assumption, there still exists limited research on the status of gifted education and talent development in Ghanaian school curriculum (Allotey, Walters & King, 2020).

Experiences of gifted learners in Ghanaian schools

It is important that all economies create and improve opportunities for the gifted, particularly in developing African nations where wealth creation and sustainability has mainly relied on natural resources and less on intellectual achievements. There has been little research on how to address the needs of gifted students in Ghana. As classroom instructional practices depend to a considerable extent on the beliefs and knowledge that teachers hold, an understanding of these beliefs in Ghanaian culture is necessary if the needs of gifted learners are to be addressed (Allotey, 2019).

In the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education (1994), it is clearly stated that every child has a fundamental right to education. This notwithstanding, Eric (2004) revealed that the effective management of learners who are gifted and talented has continued to be a challenge because the gifted are not catered for adequately by the national curriculum for basic schools in Ghana. Gifted and talented learners sit in classrooms bored and frustrated; they are left out and are not benefiting from an equal educational opportunity as their peers; and their full potential is not considered (Eric, 2004). Gifted children are turned into underachievers as a result of specific handicaps: a dull, merger curriculum; inappropriate teaching strategies that are incompatible with their learning styles (Arika, 2009), and a threatening environment that seeks only to stifle their giftedness.

In terms of policy, Okyere, Amedahe and Edjah (2002) pointed out that though some policies have been made concerning the education of special needs children, no special facilities or services exist for the gifted. In a recent study, Allotey, Watters and King, (2020) recommend the need for formal policy development on gifted education, and the implementation of teacher education programmes that address teachers' beliefs and knowledge about the gifted and gifted education strategies. It was, therefore, welcoming when in August 2022 (Ghanaian Times, 2022), the

Minister of Education hinted at the government planned to build a school for gifted and talented children to enable them to become part of the country's education ecosystem. The policy formulations seem geared towards establishing facilities to accommodate talented learners to develop their skills. These stakeholder engagements for the promotion of gifted education seem devoid of policies that will promote gifted learners in mainstream education.

Even though there is a paucity of literature on the gifted learner in the Ghanaian educational system, more disturbing is the fate of school pupils who perceived themselves as capable of educational attainments and needed acceleration yet, are frustrated by lack of educational provisions and policies to cater for their needs. With this background and available literature on the individual and societal outcomes of our increasingly segregated and unequal educational system, we asked the question, "How challenging is it for the gifted student in Basic schools in Ghana to achieve their dreams of acceleration?"

Just as development is varied, gifted and talented learners have varied developmental patterns known as "asynchronous development" (Columbus Group, 1991). Asynchronous development implies that learners experience cognitive, social, emotional, and academic life contemporaneously comparative to their peers. Such differences, therefore, create unique and critical social, emotional, and educational needs for these learners (Silverman, 1993). Once individuality and uniqueness play pivotal roles in the educational attainments of learners, it is imperative that gifted and talented students would need educational and environmental accommodations that would respond to their variegated needs such as curriculum compacting, educational acceleration, self-instructional programs, learning packets or learning contracts, and advanced materials (Rogers, 2002; Ruf, 2005).

While all children are vulnerable to the rigid academic calendar, it is more challenging to gifted and talented children who may experience it differently due to certain characteristics such as possessing advanced knowledge or understanding of learning materials, experiencing heightened sensitivity to their own feelings and those of their peers and

teachers due to their advanced knowledge, reactivity, high sense of perfectionism (Coleman, 1996; Roeper,1982; Silverman, 1983) and fear of delays. As asserted by Hollingworth (1942) and Whitmore (1980), gifted children experience difficulty dealing with their greater sensitivity and coping with discrepancies in intellectual, emotional, and social development. On the other hand, it is also possible that gifted students can cope with accelerated schooling and progressive curriculum due to some of their strong characteristics such as advanced cognitive abilities, problem-solving skills, and creativity.

The literature links gifted learners' vulnerability and special learning needs in terms of lack of curriculum acceleration that leads to boredom, dropping out of school, frustration, loss of self-esteem, laziness and underachievement, among others. In spite of these, the Ghanaian educational system provides little or no opportunities for this population to accelerate in education. Joseph Renzulli in "The Empire Strikes Back: Redefining the Role of Gifted Education in the 21st Century," sought to draw attention to an educational crisis and argues that methods adopted in teaching in recent times account for students' boredom and public dissatisfaction. He suggested that engagement-oriented pedagogy that moves away from rigidly prescribed curricula that have the minimized "sheer joy of discovery" (Renzulli, 1978, p. 1), should be employed. This is particularly relevant for gifted and talented learners, who thrive in environments that provide challenges that meet their individual needs, potentials, and interests. And I dare say this is where the experiences of gifted learners in Ghanaian schools find relevance and space.

In May 2021, Stephen Atta Owusu of Modern Ghana News chronicled several Ghanaian whiz kids that rot away due to lack of educational vision, and politician's shortsightedness. He mentioned a seven-year-old child who answered 200 questions correctly; an eight-year-old who preached successfully and comprehensively for an hour; and a 20-year-old who designed a COVID bucket. He concluded that Ghana is losing a lot of its gifted and talented children to the Western world which values and nurtures them young.

Gifted learners and Ghana's education system

In Ghana, gifted learners who believe in their abilities are forbidden to write their Basic Education Certificate Examination until they complete the whole full spectrum of basic school years. According to Peacefmonline.com (23rd October 2017), the Ghana Education Service (GES) directed all heads of basic schools: *"No Form One or Two student in any Junior High School (JHS) should be registered as a candidate to write Ghana's Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE)."* The directive went further to state that,

> *"Registration of candidates for the BECE for school candidates is strictly for students in JHS Form Three only…"* and that *"Any headteacher found to have gone contrary to the directives will be severely sanctioned by management"* (Peacefmonline.com, 23rd October 2017).

Similar warnings and threats are often issued by politicians and the GES.

In 2017, Northwestern University School of Education and Social Policy in the United States of America reported that accelerated students performed significantly better than non-accelerated same-age peers, and comparable to non-accelerated older students. The report recommends that schools should use both ability grouping and acceleration to help academically talented students and that education should "avoid trying to teach students what they already know". This research indicates that there are many ways that higher-achieving learners could be helped in the school system. Gifted and talented learners could benefit from ability grouping which places students of similar skills and abilities in the same classes. Acceleration, most commonly known as grade skipping, subject acceleration, or early admission into school or college that seeks to give students the chance to access opportunities earlier or progress more rapidly should be promoted. This is a call to help assist gifted and talented learners to move on from their age-group learners to ability-group learners to maximise their capabilities and contribute to development. In order to explore the challenges faced by gifted and talented learners in the Ghanaian educational system relating to their experiences of writing the

BECE, and how this has affected them, this study looks at Gagné's (1992) theory on giftedness with emphasis on building on a child's natural abilities.

Theory

We draw from Gagné's (1992) theory on giftedness which proposed building on a child's natural abilities in which a part of the learner's developmental process involves being exposed to a number of catalysts. These include the child's life which can shape the emergence and development of their innate abilities. He added that with the intervention of intrapersonal and environmental catalysts, in this case, teachers, peers and learning materials, gifted students may enhance and enrich their natural aptitudes and systematically attain high academic performance. Gagné's (1992) model acknowledges the fact that chance has effects on natural abilities and drives and that, not all students have sufficient access or the ability to partake in facilitation stratagems. Additionally, some gifted children may need lesser degrees or different forms of intervention from intrapersonal and environmental drives or push to be able to fully achieve their potential, or attain 'talented' status. In fact, the theory acknowledges that the presence of developmental processes and catalysts can promote high achievement in gifted students. With the appreciation of giftedness as a part of the learner's developmental process, we implore it here to understand the "lived" experiences of gifted learners and their challenges and coping strategies as they progress through the mainstream educational system. We use giftedness here in its broadest sense to include learners with superior academic performance, independent learning abilities, leadership skills and achievement-orientedness.

Methodology

The qualitative phenomenological interpretive design was used to engage seven young gifted learners as the main participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) who wrote their BECE examinations without completing JHS and were in three Grade A (GES Classification) Ghanaian Senior High Schools during data collection for this study. These young gifted learners were studied in their natural environment: home and school. The main objective was to find out the purpose of their decision to write the

"illegitimate" examination before they were due to do so. We also sought to find out how in their own assessment they considered themselves gifted. These are measured with their performance at the BECE and how they are doing currently in their SHS programs.

Purposive and criterion sampling techniques were used to select participants from 3 different schools. First, the participants must not have completed JHS form three before participating in the BECE. Two, the student's results must not be more than aggregate 6 which is considered the highest best performing grade in the BECE. The **homogeneous sampling technique** was purposively used to select three SHSs for their unique characteristics: (a) one private international school (girls), (b) two public schools: a Catholic school (boys) and a Catholic school (girls). Two schools are girls' schools and one boys' school. was employed to recruit student participants made up of five females and two males between the ages of 14-15 with five in SHS 1, and two in SHS 2. We also involved three heads and three teachers for triangulation. The methods of data collection included: interviews, observations, recommendations and document analysis. Due to the very intimate and less explored nature of the research participants, this sampling helped in gathering in-depth data leading to valuable research outcomes.

The Ghanaian Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) which is the first external examination conducted by the West African Examination Council (WAEC), assesses students in seven core subject areas with French being an option for schools to offer. The electives are basically one of the Basic Designs and technology (BDT). Students are expected to make grades 1 to 7 in each course order to be considered admission to a senior high school. Table 1 below presents the subjects, both core and electives and the external examination grading system in Ghanaian basic schools.

Table 1: Presentation of Subjects assessed at the BECE and Grading System

Core subjects	Elective subjects	BECE Grading System		
		Grade	**Percentage**	**Interpretation**
1. Integrated Science 2. Mathematics 3. English 4. Social studies 5. Religious and Moral Education 6. Information, Communication and Technology 7. Ghanaian Language 8. French (optional)	Basic Designs and Technology 1. Pre-Technical Drawing 2. Home Economics 3. Visual Arts	90-100 80- 89 70- 79 60- 69 55- 59 50- 54 40- 49 35-39 0-34	A (1) B+ (2) B (3) C+ (4) C (5) D+ (6) D (7) E (8) F (9)	Highest Higher High High average Average Low average Low Lower Lowest
Total 07/08	**Total 01**			

From the Table 1 above, it shows that all learners at the basic level are to pursue eight courses with French being an option. The Basic Designs and Technology as a course in itself is not an elective. However, learners are expected to choose only one domain to read at this level. It is thus, difficult to categorically classify BDT as an elective subject. However, for want of a better designation, we shat refer to any of its three domains as an elective subject in this study.

Data Collection Procedure

We conducted individual interviews with all participants and studied the basic school progressive terminal records of each student. We witnessed curricular and co-curricular activities such as students' participation in class, school competition programs, worship services, sports, and other routines. Selected teachers for this study had varied years of teaching experience ranging from five to thirty years. All participants were interviewed for an average of one hour. Heads and teachers of selected

schools were first contacted for their permission and perception of gifted students and their preparedness to engage in the study. With this, initial announcements were made at school gatherings for self-recruitment and nominations. Initially, nine students were self-recruited into the study. All students were asked to provide evidence of their BECE results. Following their BECE results, their SHS teachers were asked to provide students' progress terminal reports and recommendation. Two students were withdrawn from the study as their teacher recommendations and progress terminal reports were not indicative of their giftedness. The final seven students with strong consistent scores within 85-100% across all school subjects and high teacher recommendation were selected for individual interviews at places meant to provide them with a conducive atmosphere to disclose their experiences and challenges of being gifted in the school system and how in their opinion, educational policies and programs could be geared to benefiting them.

Due to the vulnerability of participants, and the very nature of the 'unlawfulness' of their writing the external exams before completing basic school, emphasis was placed on safeguarding their identities and data. Since all participants were minors, informed consent was obtained from their parents/carers, and assent was obtained from them prior to inclusion in the study. Informed consent was sought from participating heads and teachers following an explanation of the research study, clarification and assurance that participation was free, voluntary and anonymous. Interview data were recorded based on the permission of participants.

Open coding sets the stage for data analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). We read through texts and student progress terminal records, and listened to audio recordings severally, looking out for data that speak to unique experiences, challenges, and coping strategies of giftedness. We then engaged in axial and relational coding processes of re-coding, regrouping, and realigning which resulted in the discovery of the successes and challenges in terms of the effects of giftedness on their psychological and social lives in the school system, and their coping strategies. Themes were developed in these areas of the study. Students' biodata and BECE subjects are presented in tables 1 and 2 respectively.

Data Analysis and Presentation of Findings

We first present biodata followed by vignettes on each of the seven student participants in Tables 2 and 3. These were followed by thematic analysis of data.

Table 2. Biodata of Participants

Name	Current Age	Gender	Age at BECE	Form at Writing BECE	Best Six Aggregate	Lowest Grade (BECE)	Current Form (SHS)
Araba	15	F	13	1	6	1	2
Djifex	14	F	12	2	6	1	2
Anto	13	F	12	1	6	1	1
Zeezee	16	M	14	2	6	1	2
QueenC	16	F	14	2	6	2	2
Kofi	15	M	14	2	6	2	1
Bless	17	F	15	2	6	1	2

Table 2 shows that the youngest participant at the time of data collection was 13 years whereas the oldest was 17 years. The earliest age at which they wrote the BECE was 12 years. Five out of the seven participants wrote their BECE in Form 2 whereas two also wrote in Form 1. Regardless of the stage at which these students wrote their BECE, there is no difference in their best six aggregates though two had grade 2 in one subject, five students scored 1 in all 8 subjects. This is an indication that regardless of the age and form of a gifted learner, they will do well.

Table 3 below presents individual profile on students. This includes their favorite subjects in SHS, their hobbies, awards, and future aspirations**.**

Table 3. Vignette of Individual Students in the Sample.

Name	Profile
Araba	Araba is a young woman who is especially interested in Mathematics, Physics, and Chemistry. She describes herself as a self-taught woman. She enjoys learning through books and YouTube. She likes sports and takes part in volley ball. She loves singing, dancing and is a member of the school's Cadet corp. She is a member of the National Science and Mathematics Quiz (NSMQ) Team of her school. She won the Best Cadet and Best Volley Ball Player in her school. Her parents took her to a remote school where she wrote the BECE when she was 13 years. She hopes to be a Pharmacologist.
Djifex	Djifex is a very young woman who is especially interested in Mathematics, Biology and Chemistry Djifex is a self-motivated female highly interested in music, and stage performance. She enjoys playing classic guitar, and the accordion. Her parents took her to a remote school where she wrote the BECE when she was 12 years. She was the 2nd Runner-Up (National Spelling Bee Competition) when she was in Basic 6, she was a member of the NSMQ Team in her SHS, a Young Yale African Scholar, and she has won many international writing competitions. Currently she is an international Debater and adjudicator, she enjoys essay writing, public speaking, leadership, teaching, mentoring and she has a blog with over 1000 followers. She is very self-demanding and perfectionist with her academic results. She hopes to be a Neuroscientist
Anto	Anto is a Senior High School student who has an intense passion for writing. She writes both novels and short stories. She is currently 13 years and in Form 1. She wrote her BECE when she was in JHS 1. She also enjoys reading, entrepreneurship, leadership and finance. She is a member of the school's NSMQ Team and wants to become an architect, but also would like to explore as a Financial Analyst.
QueenC	QueenC is a female teenager. She has many and multiple interests in diverse fields, but more focused on science, particularly in Mathematics, Physics, and Chemistry. She enjoys modelling, acting, singing, reading, and public speaking. She was the Best Debater (SHS), Best Dancer (SHS) and hopes to be a Medical Practitioner with specialty in genetics and research in molecular genetics. She wrote her BECE in Form 2 when she was 14 years. She believed she could have written BECE even when she was in JHS 1 and could have made same grades or better.

Name	Profile
Zeezee	Zeezee is a young man who loves reading, especially science fiction books and comics. He also loves sports and painting. He enjoys science, with a particular interest in mathematics, physics and accounting. He is part of the Mathematics Academy in his high school. When he was 14 years in JHS 2 he wrote his BECE. He wants to pursue something related to Financial Entrepreneurship.
Kofi	Kofi is very interested in Mathematics, Physics, and Chemistry. He has a very intense scientific spirit, which he has demonstrated from a very young age. Medicine is his passion, and since he was a child, he loved to study anatomy and physiology. He sees himself as a very competitive person and likes videogames. He loves sports, dancing, music composition, cooking, and writing. He was the Winner- 100 meters (JHS), 2nd Runner Up Regional Spelling Bee. At the age of 13 years, he wrote the BECE and currently pursuing science in the SHS and in Form 2. He desires to be a Nano Scientist or a Lawyer.
Bless	Bless is a young lady who is very passionate towards reading, writing poems, drawing, knitting, and sewing. She defines herself as 'hyperactive' but at the same time very perfectionist. She loves listening to music during recess and observing her classmates interact. She is a Science student in Form 2 reading Mathematics, Physics, and Biology. She loves gardening, entrepreneurial teaching, grooming, and would like to be a Forensic Financial Analyst

Analysis and Discussion

Themes that emerged from the data were: academic experiences, challenges/threats in the school context, and coping with giftedness.

Academic experiences as a gifted learner

The narrative data indicate that learners who took the risk of writing the national external examination, Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) before the completion of their school schedule were individuals with strong personal, social and academic skills. They were students with resiliency, focus, and high expectations.

Why I wrote the exams

In understanding their experiences regarding taking part in the final national examination for basic school, participants narrated their reasons for engaging in the exams. All participant were of the view that it was time wasting for them to not write the exams while they knew they could. Bless reported,

> *I was and still am brilliant, why should I continue to be in class when I could easily write that same exams that I would be writing in another one year? Does it make sense? Don't you think I could have moved on by that time? In fact, there is no mistake about my writing the exams in form 2. My teachers and my parents knew I could do it so I did. You know, one of my teachers had always encouraged me to try it even when I was in form 1. And my parents believed in me and supported me all through. And here I am.*

It was clear that belief in self and capacity to perform pushed participants to write their exams. Though schools and the education system were not supportive, parents especially, served as a pillar for their children and pushed them to live tier dream. They question the status quo for preventing them of moving on.

For example, though the educational system in Ghana somehow illegalizes and deters students from taking part in the BECE, these students believe they could do well and they did. Their results were remarkably exceptional where only two out of the seven students in the study had grade 2 in one subject as their lowest grade. Besides their BECE grade, their current school records also reveal that they were above average. It was observed that in their first and second academic years, they recorded 85% and above in each of their class exercises and examination records. During our study, two of the participants had taken part in the National Spelling Bee Competition during their primary and JHS levels, three were currently competing and representing their schools in the National Science and Mathematics Quiz.

We witnessed students' class participation where they actively engaged their teachers in discussions on subject matters. We also saw the enthusiasm and zeal with which they assisted their other less-performing students to catch up on difficult topics. All these demonstrated to us the uniqueness of gifted learners who have much in them and need to be assisted to do more than the school or the educational system provides for them.

Challenges/threats in the school context

Regarding their challenges in the school context, narratives reveal challenges in the areas of poor curricula, lack of educational policies to meet their needs and threats from educational authorities that make it almost impossible for them to achieve their goals in life. The following statement is a reflection of the common feelings and experiences of gifted students:

> *My challenge was that because the government kept saying that it was unlawful for students to write the exam when they were not in form three, our teachers especially the heads, kept warning us and telling us that anyone caught doing so would be severely punished. When I wrote and left them, my head called some of my friends threatening them to produce me or she will deal with them. My younger sister in the primary school was not spared from these threats. I think this is too bad, to say the least (**Djifex).***

In addition, to threats, is the usual boredom they experience due to unsatisfactory programs and activities. Gifted learners also experience loneliness and mostly verbal abuse from both teachers and peers who nick-named them as "*Too Known, Queen Elizabeth, Mother, Madam, Papa Ranzy"* among others. Normal as these references may sound, they carry negative connotations and were meant to denigrate gifted learners and discourage them from focusing and pursuing their goals. Learners' inability to fit in normal educational programs that do not provide them

with satisfactory pedagogical skills leaves them frustrated and bored (Eric, 2004).

Coping with giftedness.

As part of their coping mechanism, learners who perceive themselves as gifted draw on some personal and social supports to manage their challenges. Gifted learners revealed that their homes were very supportive and created the needed environment that promoted achievement in the midst of challenges. Indeed, the homes of these individual learners were the bane of their successes so far. Without parental support, none of these gifted learners would have been able to write the BECE. The belief of parents in their children propelled them to 'sneak' so to speak, their children out and register them for the examination against all odds. Parental understanding, identification and promotion of giftedness in thus crucial. Additionally, participants' own resilience and perseverance also resulted in their ability to write and excel. Coupled with this was their high sense of expectation and focus to move fast and achieve something for themselves. This finding supports Gagné (2004) and Silverman (2010) that the presence of spontaneous natural abilities to perform and excel where participants' own natural abilities coupled with environmental support of parents made it possible for the students to excel. We found these in participants who threw caution to the wind and risked their lives to write the BECE before their basic school completion and did excel.

CONCLUSION

Though parents are willing to support their gifted children to move on academically and achieve, they are mostly constrained by threats from educational authorities. Preliminary findings indicate that belief in oneself contributed significantly to adaptive outcomes for the gifted young people in this study, and that though the policies in the education sector is unfriendly to gifted learners, they self-efficacy supported them to write and excel. This finding contributes to the complexities surrounding the interactions and transactions that occur between individuals and their environments that are recognized in human development literature. As outlined earlier, literature suggests that giftedness is more likely to contribute to a positive sense of self (Schoon, Parsons, & Sacker, 2004),

while strict school policies will hinder and serve as negative effect on the gifted learners (Fletcher & Dwyer, 2008; Ministry of Social Development, 2010). Although participants did outline some of the negative impacts of educational policies, most of these young people indicated that the outcome of their resilience and self-efficacy circumstances in combination with their high abilities had led to a strong sense of identity, the desire to change their personal circumstances, and the aspiration to dare the consequences of the educational policies. To hide their potentialities was one huge frustration for them. Our quest is to bring out the educational deficiencies in the provisions for the gifted in the Ghanaian education system. In this era of equality and inclusive education, the absence of educational interventions and programs for gifted learners may not only segregate and hamper their individual development but, will in the long term, affect national development. We are courting the attention of educational policy makers and especially government appointees to get to understand the dire needs of this minority group a. though in the minority group, adequate provisions for their educational outcomes will go a long way to promote national development.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on our findings, the following recommendations were made: a) A system of special screening for acceleration and permission to students with high abilities to write BECE. b) That politicians and GES will refrain from instilling fear in many gifted children who can write and excel. c) That the Ghana Education Service and the government should make policies that will enhance gifted learners' opportunities to make the best out of our educational systems so as to contribute to national development. d) Government should set up special schools for gifted and talented learners to learning in a safe and challenging environment suitable to their development.

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