Chapter 76

Gifted Education in the Arabian Gulf and the Middle Eastern Regions: History, Current Practices, New Directions, and Future Trends

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Abstract The purpose of this chapter is to provide a historical perspective on the origins of excellence in education in addition to an explanation of provisions available to gifted and talented children in the Arabian Gulf region and the Arabic countries in the Middle East. It concerns with an overview of the varying cultures in the region, each with their own experience practices; the development of terminology and conceptions of exceptionality; and current thinking on a number of major issues in the area of identification and the development of giftedness and creativity. This chapter will shed some light on new directions in gifted education. This chapter has encountered many of the major issues to face educators in both the Arabian Gulf and the Middle East, and those addressing gifted education over several decades. The aim is to offer a summary of these ideas, which can be divided into seven categories: gifts or talent as entities, the philosophy of gifted education, identification, programmes, educational technology and the “digital world”, future research, and challenges that lie ahead.

Keywords A’qil (brain) · Al-Hikmah (wisdom) · Arabian Gulf · Arabic education · Computerized provision

Introduction

As we prepare for the new millennium, gifted education (tarbiyat al-mowhabeen) appears to be gaining much popularity in the Arabian Gulf and the Middle Eastern regions. Consequently, prominent issues relating to gifted education have been gaining momentum, interest, and support among ministries of education in these countries and government funds have been increasing. We should continue our effort and search for a new generation of knowledge in the form of ideas (afkâr), theories (natharyât), and practices (tajarob) to improve the educational provisions being made available for the gifted (mowhâb) and talented (motafwiq) learners who share our culture and language.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a historical perspective on the origins of excellence in education, in addition to an explanation of provisions available to gifted and talented children in the Arabian Gulf region including Iran and the Arabic countries in the Middle East. Because we are dealing with issues that have such important consequences for resource allocation and the future of children and the Gulf and Middle Eastern regions, it is important to look critically at both the past as well as the present situation and to decipher the future educational trends. This chapter concerns itself with an overview of the varying cultures in the Gulf and Middle Eastern regions, each with their own experience practices; the development of terminology and conceptions of exceptionality; and current thinking on a number of major issues in the area of identification and the development of giftedness (mowhabitah) and creativity (Ibdaa’). In addition, this chapter will shed some light on new directions in gifted education.

It has been a great learning adventure. I hope readers will enjoy the same rewarding journey.
The Middle East is the birthplace of three great religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam (Scruton, 2002). “... all stem from the same root; all have essentially the same basic beliefs, and are nourished from the same source” (Gülen, 2006a, 231). The Gulf and Middle Eastern regions are composed of 24 nations and five major languages: Arabic, Hebrew, Turkish, Farsi, and Urdu. It is encompassing people with extraordinary histories and cultures. The word “Arab” is applied to Jews, Christians, and Muslims who speak the Arabic language and identify themselves with the Arab way of life. Moreover, 5–10% of Arabs are Christians and have played a disproportionate role in the revival of the Arabic literature (Scruton, 2002).

Ancient Terminology and Conception of Exceptionality

In dealing with this subject, the author has returned to the sources of Islam, the Qur’an and the Hadith, and developed a methodology for dealing with the history of education in Islamic and Arabic countries in the Arabian Gulf and the Middle Eastern regions; ancient terminology; and the conception of exceptionality.

Interactions among culture, language, and gifted education – as mediated by human cognition and social life, and expressed through linguistic features – have been the specific object of investigation in this chapter.

Islam is an Arabic word. It means the act of resignation to God (al-Ilah or allāh). The root word is SLM, pronounced “salam” which means peace (Ahmad, 1980).