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Analysis of How Active Centers Identify and Cultivate Preschool Children's Talent Based on the Lived Experience of Educators and Officials in Karaj

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Extended Abstract

Aim

The contemporary world demands a holistic approach to foster the balanced development of human personality and the education of children, emphasizing the importance of this issue. In a competitive and increasingly specialized world, success is often associated with achieving higher levels of accomplishment at an earlier age. Individuals can transform their lives by embarking on a journey fueled by the powerful force of individual talent. One of the primary concerns of parents and educators today is guiding children in the right direction to nurture their skills and talents. Matching students' talents with optimal environments is essential for talent development. Research highlights that parents and the home environment are the most influential support systems during the early stages of talent development (Lee, 2021). Parental support remains crucial at every stage of talent growth, especially during the formative years (Paik et al., 2022). Additionally, a vital function of national education systems is to foster and enhance the personality and talents of children, adolescents, and youth. Yohana et al. (2020) affirm that the quality of learning activities, effective guidance and counseling, and a supportive school environment positively influence the development of students' talents and competencies.

The identification and nurturing of individual talents can begin in early childhood, with the preschool period being the optimal time for cultivating potential and laying the foundation for lifelong learning. To support this development, numerous talent centers have been established to facilitate and support children in this path of growth by detecting and cultivating their talents and abilities. This study aims to explore the lived experiences of educators and officials at talent centers in identifying and cultivating preschool children's talents.

Methodology

In line with the purpose of the study, this research is classified as applied research employing a qualitative approach with a descriptive phenomenology method. The research field was the institutions and talent centers in Karaj city during 2012-2018. Participants were selected through a purposive sampling method using a criterion sampling strategy.

To collect data, semi-structured interviews, observations, and document reviews were utilized. The interviews followed a structured protocol designed to ensure the reliability and validity of the data. They were conducted, recorded, and transcribed in three formats: in-person, telephonic, and written. All interviews were carefully reviewed and coded to identify initial and final themes. Data saturation was achieved after the seventh interview; however, additional interviews were conducted with four more participants (eleven in total) to confirm the absence of new information.

Data analysis was performed using Colaizzi's seven-step method, with a line-by-line examination of sentences to identify concepts and themes. To ensure data reliability, Guba and Lincoln's (1994) criteria were applied, including peer debriefing and expert reviews. The researchers employed a three-tier analytical approach for further refinement of the data.

Findings

The analysis revealed three main themes: methods of talent identification, programs for talent development, and recommendations for enhancing talent development. Additionally, five sub-themes emerged: methods of talent finding, analysis of talent, cultivation of talent, investigation of changes in intelligence, and enhancement of the knowledge of educators and parents.

Each sub-theme was linked to significant phrases, resulting in a total of 16 key phrases extracted from the data. These phrases include:

- Letting the child explore with subtle guidance
- Inner tension of the child
- Submerging
- Considering the pace of action
- Qualitative and quantitative evaluation
- Analysis of talent in all domains
- Measuring inclination and interest
- Providing a platform for the experience of talent
- Creating a saturated and innovative environment
- Implementation of intermittent tests
- Children's growth rate
- Presenting programs that enhance knowledge
- Implementing research methods (trial and error)
- Education based on observation
- Education based on participation
- Education based on encouragement

These phrases were systematically categorized under the corresponding main themes.

Conclusion

The findings of this study can be interpreted from two perspectives: methods of talent identification and strategies for talent cultivation. The results indicate that the most crucial aspect of talent identification is allowing children to explore and observe their behavior under subtle supervision and guidance until their talents naturally emerge. Once a talent is identified, timely education, the provision of action-oriented opportunities and environmental resources, and enhancing the knowledge of teachers and parents are among the most effective strategies for cultivating children's talents. Periodic assessments of intelligence through talent-focused tests also play a key role.

In summary, the processes of talent identification, analysis, development, intelligence assessment, and the education of teachers and parents are critical for effectively nurturing children's talents. These talents can be likened to untapped oil wells, with the primary beneficiary being society at large. Finally, based on the findings, various recommendations were provided for different audience —

parents, educators, talent centers, researchers, and officials—which are hoped to be considered for future implementation.

In addressing the first research question regarding methods for discovering children's talents, two sub-themes emerged: methods of talent detection and talent analysis, accompanied by seven significant phrases. The concepts of allowing children freedom with subtle guidance and observing their intrinsic interests align with the findings of Kiewra (2019) and Nekoui (2019), who emphasized that letting children pursue their interests is a pivotal step in talent discovery. Guiding children to identify their strengths and observing where they excel can provide valuable insights into their abilities and talents.

For the second research question on talent development programs, two sub-themes emerged: talent development and investigation of intelligence changes, along with four significant phrases. The findings, including providing platforms for talent exploration and fostering enriched and creative environments, align with Schroth and Slade (2021), who stressed that schools bear a significant responsibility for talent development. Various educational approaches, such as the autonomous learner model and enrichment programs, have been implemented to address the diverse needs of gifted students. Similarly, Yim and Ebbeck (2016) recognized the critical role parents play in strengthening young children's learning by providing stimulating and responsive experiences during their formative years.

For the third research question regarding programs to enhance talent development, one sub-theme, knowledge enhancement of parents and coaches, was identified, along with five key phrases. This finding aligns with Tahmasbpour Shafiei et al. (2022), who noted that coaches and talent scouts play a vital role in identifying individuals with strong indicators during talent searches. Mun et al. (2021) highlighted that parents' roles in nurturing gifted children's talents are essential, yet their interactions with schools and administrators are often underexplored. Frontline educators were found to be critical in bridging school-family relationships. Witte et al. (2015) also identified early experiences, coaching, practice, motivation, and parental involvement as key factors in talent development, emphasizing the importance of parents' active participation in nurturing talents across fields such as chess, music, and sports. Parental involvement is essential in the development of children's talents because the home environment and parental support are essential at every stage of talent development.

Keywords: Phenomenological Method, Preschool Children, Talent Search, Talent Search Centers.

Ethical Considerations

This study prioritized ethical considerations by maintaining participant confidentiality. Findings from interviews were reported without disclosing participants' identities. Participants were assured that their comments and responses would only be used for research purposes and that all provided information and documents would remain confidential. Participation was voluntary, with participants free to withdraw at any time. Additionally, participants were informed that the research results would be made available to them upon request.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest related to this study. The research was conducted independently and was not influenced by external factors such as financial resources, personal or professional relationships, or political affiliations. We maintained integrity throughout the project and adhered to the principles of academic ethics and integrity.

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