

School Counsellors' Knowledge and Training Needs Concerning Gifted Students in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

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Abstract: School counsellors play an important role in the academic and personal/social development of all students, including gifted students. However, school counsellors may not know how best to serve gifted students because there is a lack of empirically, standardized, and structured, tested knowledge of counselling practices. Hence, this study aims to investigate the level of school counsellors' knowledge of gifted students. Also, to identify the needs towards improving their knowledge. Furthermore, the study explores the significant difference between male and female counsellors' knowledge of gifted students. A fully quantitative research design was adopted. 120 school counsellors selected using census sampling from the Saudi Arabi schools responded to the self-design survey questionnaire. SPSS 23.0 was used to conduct the quantitative analyses, included descriptive statistics, inferential analyses, and factor analyses. The findings showed that school counsellors have a low level of knowledge of their gifted students. Hence, this surfaced the need for training programs for school counsellors to improve their knowledge in terms of a) the modern theories of counselling and gifted students, b) up to date counselling practices, c) methods of identifying the gifted students and their characteristics. These findings offer implications for policymakers, instructors and researchers, especially those interested in the field of improving the academic and social life of gifted students. Future studies are needed to provide a further understanding of the phenomena and validate the literature results.

Keywords: Gifted students, school counsellors, knowledge, gender differences, needs.

Introduction

Despite the school or organization context, and despite the standards for identifying gifted traits, most trained counsellors, especially those counsellors serving at the school setting, would certainly deal with gifted students (S. Wood, 2010). Furthermore, according to American School Counselor Association (ASCA, 2003) regulations, trained school counsellors are responsible for meeting the progress of all students, even those with high cognitive intelligence. Advocacy is certainly an important part of school counselling (Field & Baker, 2004). As mentioned by Peterson (2006), school counsellors are required to behave as "change agents, leaders, and advocates" to be regarded as important assets for the educational practice (p. 196). Counsellors, due to the fact that they have varied responsibilities in schools, making them possessed the distinct opportunity to blend around a wide range of students' scholastic, economic, and psychological struggles as well as to recognize gifted students from marginalised communities, especially based on different ethnics and socioeconomic factors (Peterson & Morris, 2010). School counsellors provide students of all levels with educational and psychological support. The qualities specific to gifted students demand the school counsellors' concern, and this provides school counsellors with an opportunity to provide guidance, support and counselling to them, through cooperation and discussion, by helping to foster leadership and advocacy (Elijah, 2011). The school counsellors' assistance to the gifted students has two main features in common: they perceive the qualities and requirements of gifted individuals, and they are well-equipped to work with students on all sides of the intelligence spectrum. Additional variables include the sentiment shared by school counsellors in their competence to function as an advocate, as well as their knowledge of advocacy skills. To date, studies have investigated the perceptions and participation of school counsellors involving gifted students (Nancy N Carlson, Holcomb-McCoy, & Miller, 2017) and the practice of school counsellors around gifted students (Wood, 2009), yet school counsellors' expectations in Saudi Arabia have still not been widely acknowledged.

Knowledge

As shown in the National Excellence Report of the U.S. Department of Education, a silent catastrophe continues for the academic achievement of gifted and gifted (GT) children (Davis, Rimm, & Siegle, 2011). This report cites a wide disparity in the academic performance involving US students and their counterparts elsewhere, their lack of enthusiasm in learning, and inadequate training for mainstream school teachers to cater to the demands of those gifted students, the absence of resources and funding for gifted education research, and to address the issues faced among financially underprivileged gifted students and minorities (Carlson, 2004). (Carlson, 2004). While recognizing the greater population of gifted and gifted students who aren't being identified and supported, Davis et al. (2011) felt that "tens of thousands of gifted and gifted children and youths were languishing in their classrooms—their talents unacknowledged, their desires unaddressed" (p.1). In order for our nation to prosper in the 21st century, NAGC has urged for a "renewed commitment to excellence" (Cross, 2014) (p. 2). Supporting the educational and psychological requirements of gifted students was brought to attention by Robertson, Pfeiffer, and Taylor (2011), who used the term "one of our country's greatest valuable assets". Giftedness is now defined as children who (a) have strong academic aptitude in cognitive domains, such as academics, or creativity and leadership, and (b) evolving in their requirements as they are growing. For this reason, it is necessary to offer specialised assistance or initiatives ahead of those usually offered by the standard school programme in order to fully enable the students to reach their potential in these domains (No Child Left Behind Act, 2002). To address the requirements of non-mainstream students, differentiated teaching is required in a diverse classroom setting (Peterson, 2006). Likewise, children who have exceptional skills together with peculiar challenges may struggle to accept their strengths and accomplishments (Goldsmith, 2011; Peterson & Morris, 2010; Wood, 2010, Alakrash, 2021) due to their desire to blend in with their peers (Davis et al., 2011, Razak & Alakrash, 2020).

The gifted children are absolutely not identical. Given the clear difficulties that emerge due to the reason that they were brought up in a racist community and promote a good racial identity in a racist society, many children of colour do not show their giftedness abilities in forms that are equal to their nonminority counterparts (Henfield, Moore, & Wood, 2008). Newcomers to the gifted children of colour often additionally face difficulties related to bilingualism and socioeconomic provocations associated with being a member of the disadvantaged community (Wood et al., 2010). This conclusion was reached from the existing research, in which there was no research that explicitly investigated the connection between counsellors' awareness of gifted students and their degree of engagement with these children. When there is more collected information about these students, assistance programs involving DT children would be better enhanced (Colangelo, 2002; Davis & Rimm, 1998). Counsellors also need to know about the particular physiological and behavioural requirements of this group, as well as the efficacy of different intervention approaches (S. M. Wood, 2012). Going back to as early as 1982, Walker observed that, in order to better understand and meet the requirements of gifted students, "there would also necessitate for the presence of an up-to-date awareness of what they are studying and how their perception is developing" (p. 369).

Counselling Needs/ Issues

Gifted students' individual and interpersonal attributes call for some kind of counselling that is not generally accessible. Research indicates that a lack of focus on the correlation of giftedness with various aspects of social and psychological growth, including advantages and obligations, and the requirement for differentiated counselling approaches in the school environment may provide challenges among school counsellors (Mayes & Hines, 2014). Also, due to the complexity of emotional issues of gifted children, school counsellors could have views and prejudices that make it difficult for them to form genuine connections, which results in the inability of the counsellors to successfully engage with the gifted students (S. M. Wood & Peterson, 2017). According to Collison et al. (1998),

school counsellors' confidence in their capacity to be advocates is obvious in their views and manner. The first thing is that school counsellors have a high level of self-efficacy, which enables them to realistically evaluate their skills and limits. Having a positive self-image promotes school counsellors to advocate on behalf of students and learn new skills for ongoing advocacy outreach (Seward & Gaesser, 2018). Advocacy methods used by the school counsellor must be effective since they are able to utilise numerous advocacy strategies to target a specific source of focus (Henfield, Owens, & Moore III, 2008). It is beneficial to both counsellors and teachers since they may work together to better enhance advocacy strategies (Gentry, 2006).

It is possible that teachers, especially school counsellors, might be unable to associate the terms disabilities, hazard, or need with the concept of giftedness (Leggett, Shea, & Leggett, 2011). Although important scientific and health evidence both facilitate and reject the claim that counselling initiatives for gifted students and youth should be modified to cater for their strengths and interests, the American School Counselor Association recommends all students have access to assertive, potential environmental and social assistance and integrated services related to personal conflicts, which ASCA says applies to gifted students as well (2005). The extent to which highly competent students' problems are concealed and difficult to establish in the context of advocating for programs (Boulden, Stone, & Ali Raisa, 2021). The underlying issues in behavioural difficulties could be more likely to be related to sensitivity, severity, developmental asynchrony (Jean S Peterson, 2015), and perhaps mentality than impairment, illness, or "poor attitude." When it comes to mental health experts, including school counsellors, it is not uncommon for them to be unaware of these possible links to giftedness (Greene, 2006). When individuals misunderstand another person's behaviour, it may result in emotional anguish (McEachern & Bornot, 2001, Alakrash et al. 2021). The emotional anguish may contribute to feelings of tension, despair, and anxiety. Some gifted students might self-medicate with narcotics, particularly those who are at risk of abusing drugs. To summarise, school counsellors ought to understand that gifted students who are not part of the majority group by measured standards or teacher recommendations may not be found. Counsellors should be on the lookout for skills that arise out of assistance interaction or from taking a look at a student's school data and records continuously. Despite having concentrated on academic success instead of giving attention to well-being, joy, and fulfilment when it comes to gifted education, many advances have been made in the last decade in specialised counselling of gifted students. Counselling gifted students include not only modifications of conventional methods but also a proactive, school-based evaluative curriculum that supports students' growth. Counselling may concentrate on developing particular goals, mainly involving working toward an integrated gifted persona. Training for school counsellors regarding gifted students has generally been minimal if not entirely missing and has just gained popularity around half a century back. School counsellors require in-depth knowledge of gifted education, and there are currently no studies that investigate how effective school counsellors are when it comes to educating gifted students. Gifted education institutions expanded research and innovation on school counselling in response to the increasing need for further training programmes.

Research Questions

1. What is the level of School counsellors' level of knowledge concerning gifted students?
2. What are the needs of school counsellors in advocating giftedness?
3. Is there a significant difference between male and female school counsellors in knowledge concerning gifted students?

The hypothesis of the Study

1. There is no significant difference between male and female school counsellors in the knowledge of gifted students

Methodology

A fully quantitative research design is adopted for this exploratory study. A sampling frame for this study is constructed from the school counsellors in the Asir region in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. A census sampling technique was used to generate the samples for data collection. A total of 125 school counsellors constituted the sample of the study. The survey was administered online using Google Forms. However, 100 school counsellors responded to the survey. In designing the survey, several instruments verified by prior researchers were exploited. The questionnaire contained: demographic information and knowledge of school counsellors of gifted students. A five-point Likert scale was used in the instrument of this study because the finer 5-point scale enables participants to sort out items in a manner closer to the structural pattern of the scale, resulting in higher reliability and validity (Chang, 1994).

Survey

The instrument used in this research was designed by the researcher for the sole purpose of measuring school counsellors' awareness of Gifted students. Based on thorough literature analysis, it was determined that student characteristics and learning environments were significant in shaping school counsellors' understanding of gifted students. As far as I could tell, the relevant literature appeared to concentrate on these topics are: (a) gifted education knowledge in general; (b) concepts of giftedness; (c) justification for creating special counselling services for gifted students; (d) gifted students' qualities and concerns; (e) intervention methods for gifted students in counselling; (f) identifying gifted students, emphasizing reasonable methods that assist in breaking down obstacles for ethnic and racial minorities underrepresented in gifted programs; and (g) gifted students' particular understanding of academic, social-emotional, and occupational problems. The instruments were shown to be both reliable and effective by two independent specialists. 15 master's-level counselling interns completed the training to pilot the instrument.

Data Analyses

Instrument variables were reduced into dimensions using Principal Factor Analysis (PFA). In contrast to Principal Components Analysis, PFA works to eliminate arbitrary sampling errors, removing any significant mistake so as not to obscure the dimensional reduction. 26 knowledge items had separate dimension reductions performed in SPSS version 21. Since the answers are in the relevant ranges and can all be applied, the PFA can be done even if the communalities are minimal or if just a few things are put into one dimension (Bandalos & Boehm-Kaufman, 2009). In order to interpret whether the data were appropriate for PFA, both the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy above .93 and Bartlett's test of sphericity were significant at .001. When the factor loading of an item in the pattern matrix is more than 0.3, it is common to practise keeping the item in a dimension. Computational studies were performed to determine the mean score and standard deviation. Although the conventional usage of t-tests for inferential purposes uses inferential analysis, inferential analysis of t-tests was used to determine the significant disparities involving male and female counsellors.

Findings and Discussion

1. Demographic Information

A survey of the school counsellors found that 62.5% of respondents were male, while 37.5% were female. 45% of respondents were 30-40 years old, while 15% range between 20-29. More than a third of the respondents (36.3%) serve at primary schools, while over a third (39.9%) serve at secondary schools, a third (14.0%) serve at high schools, and about a third (9.8%) serve at the integrated secondary high schools. Approximately 39.3% of survey respondents had undergone no instruction in gifted programming when it came to professional qualities. A gifted program was not offered by the majority of respondents' schools (61%). Nearly half of the participants said that their school does not have a gifted expert (55.8%). Most respondents were working in primary, middle, and high schools (36.3%), as well as high schools (39.9%). Others were working in the middle and junior high or high school combination (14.0%). Over 90% of the respondents reported that they were employed in public

schools. Most of the respondents had been practising school counselling for almost 3 years and worked with other counsellors at their school. When you look at the 50% of the respondents who have bachelor degrees in higher education, 27% have bachelor degrees in art and science, while 22% have teacher's institute certificates, half (50%) of the respondents have degrees in teaching. A substantial number of responders received no gifted training.

2. Knowledge and Counselling Needs

This part presents the findings of school counsellors' knowledge of gifted students. The findings are presented in the following table. The total mean score of M 2.29 shows that school counsellors have a low level of knowledge of gifted students. This implies that school counsellors lack the knowledge of the definitions of gifted/gifted students M 3.55, the range of individual differences among gifted students M 3.55, the impact of others' expectations on the choices of gifted students M 3.55, Developmental counseling approaches when counseling gifted students M 3.13, the impact of a heightened sensitivity on the emotional development of gifted students M 3.13, differentiated personality characteristics of gifted students M 3.05, the impact of perfectionism on the career choices of gifted students M 3.05, programs and learning strategies designed for gifted students M 3.05, possible underlying causes for underachievement of gifted students M 2.13, the historical context of counseling gifted students M 2.07 Effective intervention strategies for personal issues of gifted students, 2.13, Myths about gifted students M 2.05, research concerning the counseling needs of gifted students M 2.05, the process for identifying gifted students in your district M 2.07, the theories and theoretical framework of gifted students M 2.05, remedial counseling approaches when counseling gifted students M 2.05, the unique academic counseling needs of gifted students M 3.05, the impact of perfectionism on academic choices of gifted students M 2.55, Strategies of communication with teachers and parents to plan for gifted M 2.07, communication styles with gifted students M 2.05, the impact of perfectionism on the self-esteem of gifted students M 2.05, the Behaviours of gifted students in a heterogeneous classroom 2.07, the "negative" feelings experienced by many gifted students M 2.05, the unique psychological and social needs of gifted students M 2.05.

Table 1. School counsellors' knowledge of gifted students

No	Item	M	SD
1	The most widely used definitions of gifted.	3.55	1.015
2	The historical context of counselling gifted students.	2.07	.717
3	The differentiated personality characteristics of gifted students.	3.05	.389
4	Effective intervention strategies for personal issues of gifted students.	2.13	.563
5	Myths about gifted students.	2.05	.489
6	Research concerning the counselling needs of gifted students.	2.05	.504
7	The range of individual differences among gifted students.	3.55	1.011
8	The process for identifying gifted students in your district.	2.07	.417
9	The theories and theoretical framework of gifted students	2.05	.389
10	Developmental counseling approaches when counseling gifted students	3.13	.463
11	Remedial counselling approaches when counselling gifted students.	2.05	.389
12	The unique academic counselling needs of gifted students.	3.05	.504
13	The impact of perfectionism on academic choices of gifted students	2.55	1.011
14	Strategies of communication with teachers and parents to plan for gifted	2.07	.417
15	Communication styles with gifted students	2.05	.389

16	Possible underlying causes for underachievement of gifted students.	2.13	.663
17	Programs and learning strategies designed for gifted students	3.05	.589
18	The impact of perfectionism on the self-esteem of gifted students.	2.05	.604
19	The impact of others' expectations on the choices of gifted students.	3.55	1.01
20	The behaviours of gifted students in a heterogeneous classroom.	2.07	.517
21	The "negative" feelings experienced by many gifted students.	2.05	.389
22	The impact of a heightened sensitivity on the emotional development of gifted students.	3.13	.663
23	The unique psychological and social needs of gifted students.	2.05	.389
24	The impact of perfectionism on the career choices of gifted students.	3.05	.489
Total		2.29	

The low level of knowledge highlights the needs of school counsellors towards gifted students' success in their academic and social life. Programs of gifted theories and concepts are of the immense need for training counsellors. Also, the strategies and methods of identifying gifted students at early school stages are required for school counsellors. After that, counsellors should be trained on the modern counselling approaches of gifted students to meet the unique needs of gifted students.

Significance Difference of Knowledge

This section presents the findings of the hypothesis of knowledge of gifted students among male and female school counsellors. To test the hypothesis, the dependent t-test was used. The results are presented in Table 2. As the table shows, the independent t-test results show that the significance value is ".14". This means that there is no significant difference between male and female school counsellors in the knowledge of gifted students based on the criteria of ($P < 0.05$). If the P-value is higher than 0.05, this indicates no significant differences between the sample (male/ female), it can be concluded that the null hypotheses are supported, and the alternative hypotheses are rejected.

Table 2. Results of independent t-test analyses

Variable	Respondents	N	Mean difference	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		Std. Error Difference	T	Sig.
				F	Sig.			
Knowledge	Male	75	.28	.15	.70	.13	2.2	.14
	Female	45						

Significant levels: *** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$

Counselling Needs

Counsellors at schools are in the early stages of discovering the peculiar requirements of children who are gifted. School counsellors may have a hard time advocating for gifted students mainly due to the reason in lack of knowledge, which could reduce their own self-efficacy about this job. The following chart illustrates the trainings needs of school counsellors.

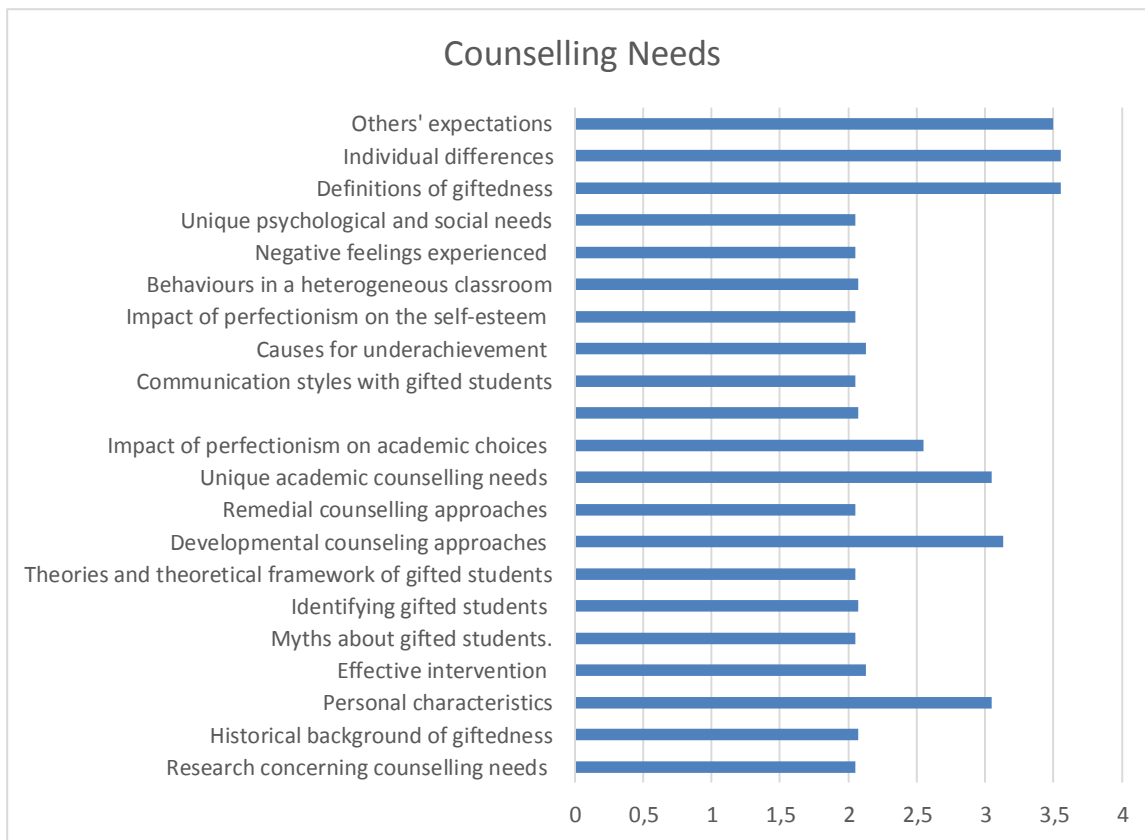


Figure 1. Training needs of School counsellors

The school counsellor will be in close touch with gifted students, while other counsellors and therapists are likely to be in private practice or serving in public outreach organisations. Giftedness thrives mostly in school settings to one extent or perhaps, the opposite. The school counsellor training programme almost never demands that school counsellors join a training that includes education for gifted students as a prerequisite for completion. Counsellors may be considered anchored in the counselling profession, but they are not on the same wavelength when it comes to ideas of giftedness. In the broadest terms, there are two options for dealing with problems involving counselling sessions in schools: remedial or developmental. Crisis intervention and issue resolution are the focal elements in remedial counselling. Here, the counsellor functions as a therapist and is presented to solve issues. The main purpose of developmental counselling is to create an educational setting that nurtures cognitive and emotional improvement among gifted children. The most difficult and gratifying tasks for a counsellor could be identified when it comes to engaging with gifted students and their families. Gifted children have a wide range of capacities, both cognitive and behavioural. The social-emotional challenges that may be faced by gifted students are not vastly unusual, but rather they have certain similarities. School counsellors' main task is to assist students in figuring out who they are, determining what they want, and realising their maximum potential. Students that are gifted need guidance and support, which counsellors may offer. It shows that educators have been able to make a real impact when they utilise their abilities and knowledge with gifted and gifted students at their schools.

While the facility or district was unable to allocate financially, organization, or other funds which would advantage the gifted student, participants were willing to acknowledge that these powerhouse resources simply could not offer help the required allocation all the time. There were, though, a number of services at the school that presented a barrier, including time limitations, poor student counsellor proportions, conflicts, or limited funding, which limited the ability of school counsellors to deal with gifted students. There were certain conflicts of belief and philosophy, as well as expectations of Philosophical Readings XIII.4 (2021), pp. 1969-1978. 1975
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students and teachers for different levels of services for gifted students, all of which impacted the process of working with students. While no one specifically attributed the dispute to a lack of knowledge or understanding, the conflict may have originated from a lack of awareness or insight of gifted students and their particular requirements by other school administrators. According to participants, several of the distinctive characteristics that gifted students brought up in the counselling session were seemingly not always addressed. Proper training that deals with the concern of gifted traits and progress in their preparatory program should have been offered to counsellors. The study also confirmed previous findings that revealed school counsellors were not adequately prepared to address the needs of high-ability or gifted students (Peterson & Wachter Morris, 2005). School counsellors and other educational staffs have misconceptions about gifted students because they were unaware of, or undertrained, the characteristics of this group (Carlson, 2004; Dockery, 2005; Earle, 1998).

School counsellors are not presented as well equipped to deal successfully with gifted students as they might be. This lack of preparation and training affects school counsellors' knowledge and understanding of gifted characteristics, behavioural, and requirements, as well as the advancement of skills required to identify gifted children and administer initiatives, programs, and assistance. A lack of training could also influence the way school counsellors would reach out for collaborative partners, the relationships they establish, and if and how they teach and train personnel in their institutions. The results show that early training in gifted education and psychology is required. Training may begin with master's preparations, such as classroom training in gifted education and psychology, and also at least one class in K–12 gifted education, and this may involve internships or practical that includes work with K–12 gifted students. This study's result that almost 40% of participants were shown to have not undergone gifted training is logical with previous research findings, which indicate that graduate school counselling programs did not usually concern themselves with giftedness (Peterson & Morris, 2010; Wood et al., 2010).

This study concludes that knowledge and strategies are needed to help those, especially counsellors, to deal with this group. Reports of the study also increase awareness of the fact that counsellors today not only are more aware of giftedness, but they are aware of issues related to delivering it as well. School counselling may help foster the development of gifted students' potential. Research has not yielded a lot of information on how school counsellors deal with gifted students, but it is assumed that their assistance is a successful approach. Participants noted problems with identifying and services, cooperation, academic challenge and complexity, as well as the professional concerns and limitations. School counsellors' encounters with gifted qualities and attributes, views and ideologies about gifted students, including training and information about gifted students, learning pedagogy, and psychology, are all interwoven with their interactions and counselling initiatives with this group of students. There is strong evidence to prove claims that the difficulties gifted students are facing are caused by their giftedness and cognitive skills (Robinson, 2002). It was discovered that gifted students could get the greatest possible counselling only if the counsellors could deal with a diverse range of counselling skills, interventions, tasks, resources, and connections. In order to support school counsellors and help their gifted students, these practitioners would need to be sufficiently educated on gifted education earlier and, if possible, more often. They would need to recognize their gifted students better in order to work efficiently with a school engagement that could be unfriendly when it comes to gifted education. They would also need to create meaningful collaborative partnerships, as well as learn to educate other school counsellors about their gifted students. Finally, according to the information and abilities required, school counsellors are able to cultivate and care for kids in their hands, who are growing, developing, and building their own identity.

Conclusion

This study examined school counsellors' knowledge of gifted students and their counselling needs. Also, the study explored the significant difference between male and female knowledge of gifted students. Using a fully quantitative research design, the data were collected from 120 school counsellors from the Asir region in Saudi Arabia. The descriptive and inferential analyses showed that school counsellors have a low level of knowledge regarding gifted students. Also, there is no significant difference between male and female counsellors in the knowledge of gifted students. The counselling needs to be identified: training in the modern theories of counselling and gifted students, b) up to date counselling practices, c) methods of identifying the gifted students and their personal characteristics. There are a few limitations to this study. First, although participating school counsellors represented a range of services to K–12 gifted students, only 120 school counsellors participated in the study. The responses from a currently practising middle school or junior high school counsellor may have added depth and richness to the study. Researcher-conducted observations of the school counsellors working with their gifted students and parents would also have been valuable. Because this study rested on a small-range scale, findings should not be generalized beyond the participants and other school counsellors in similar contexts and with similar professional backgrounds and training. School counsellors with similar characteristics may hold similar beliefs and perceptions or may have had similar experiences to those participating in this study. These findings offer implications for both policymakers and researchers, especially those interested in improving the learning process of gifted students.

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