

# Teachers' Perspectives on Obstacles Facing Gifted Students with Learning Disabilities in Saudi Arabia

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## Summary

The purpose of this study was to identify the obstacles facing gifted students with learning disabilities (GSLDs) from the point of view of their teachers in the Makkah region and to find suggested solutions to overcome these obstacles. The study covered Makkah, Jeddah and Taif and used semi-structured interviews which included open-ended questions. The study findings indicated that there were several educational obstacles including the absence of adapted courses or specialized teachers for GSLDs category and the insufficient time for the students to express their talents. According to the findings, there were also societal obstacles including the society's failure to expect the presence of talents along with disabilities, or its denial or rejection of their talents in addition to ridiculing them. The findings also confirmed the existence of administrative obstacles including the lack of community partnership. There were also family obstacles such as the family's lack of encouragement for the students, and ignorance of the nature of GSLDs. The study came up with a number of solutions and proposals related to awareness, educational institutions, education and competitions for talented people with learning disabilities.

### Keywords:

*Obstacles Facing, Learning Disabilities, Gifted Students*

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## 1. Introduction

Since its inception, the field of special education has called for more attention to students with special needs and consideration of the individual differences among students while striving to present the best educational services for them and elicit their best abilities and capabilities (Al-Shammari and Al-Rabea'an, 2019). Al-Khatib and Al-Hadidi (2012) and Al-Shammari and Al-Rabea'an (2019) mentioned that recent changes in the field of special education have increased interest.

Interest in the special education category has increased, and students categorized with learning disabilities (LDs) and gifted students are considered special education categories; they must be provided with all necessary services (Al-Samiri et al., 2019). In the same

context, services, and programs for gifted students with learning disabilities (GSLDs) are insufficient—they are the least fortunate among all students because they are twice-exceptional, which means they fit into two special education categories (Al-Shammari and Al-Rabea'an, 2019).

Perrs (2015) mentioned that GSLDs are among the most misunderstood and neglected categories by teachers in schools, as they neglect the aspect of talent and focus on their shortcomings, which are LDs. Those students are excluded from the gifted category because of the shortcomings and difficulties they suffer from, so teachers are not focused on them, which makes them suffer from low self-confidence and low motivation to learn (Abdul Maksoud, 2014).

Many teachers are ignorant of the characteristics of GSLDs, which confirms the need for teachers to know the characteristics of GSLDs so that they can distinguish them and present to them the help and provide the educational process according to their needs to avoid them experiencing educational problems that are obstacles to their goals (Gaber, 2012).

In view of the lack of attention to GSLDs, the lack of programs and services presented to them in school, and the teachers' lack of knowledge of the characteristics and problems of GSLDs, the efforts that have been made in the field are considered insufficient, do not meet their needs, and impede their growth, preparations, and adaptation. Therefore, it is our duty to identify the obstacles and problems facing GSLDs to shed light on and control them, to improve services, and to adapt to the environment that helps them invest their energies to the maximum extent possible.

This research seeks to identify the educational, societal, administrative, and family obstacles facing female GSLDs from the point of view of their teachers in Makkah, Saudi Arabia, and to find suggested solutions to overcome those obstacles.

## 2. Literature Review

### Theoretical framework

#### 2.1 GSLDs (Twice-exceptional children)

Special education researchers, educators, and scholars are interested in the issue of GSLDs, as they initially found it difficult to accept the contradiction of these students in simultaneously obtaining average grades and high percentages on intelligence tests. As a result of this contradiction, this category of students remained outside the framework of appropriate educational services. Despite the difficulty in defining this category of students, scholars have been able to define GSLDs as “twice exceptional.” The term “twice-exceptional children” was also coined by some educators for GSLDs, the word exceptional means (the owners) of learning and talent disabilities. Many educational studies use the term “exceptional” for GSLDs (Al-Hroub, 2012; Gaber, 2012).

Al-Shammari and Al-Rabea'an (2019) defined GSLDs as students whose academic level declines significantly in one or more subjects, but they possess mental capabilities and extraordinary talents that distinguish them in the remaining subjects, and they are distinguished in some other fields, such as art, sports, and problem-solving skills, in a way that draws the attention of teachers. Although several researchers have addressed the definition of GSLDs, specialists and researchers still face difficulties in interpreting this category because of the special duality that these students suffer from (Ibrahim, 2012).

#### 2.2 Categories of GSLDs

Three categories of GSLDs were identified (Ibrahim, 2012; Al-Balawi and Al-Momani, 2016; Gaber, 2012; Saad and Khalifa, 2019; Issa and Khalifa, 2007; Chimhenga, 2016) as follows:

**1. The gifted with simple LDs:** These students are noticed and identified through talent criteria due to their high level of intelligence or their different academic achievements from their peers in school.

**2. The gifted with severe LDs:** These students are easily diagnosed as having LDs due to their low academic achievement in various subjects, and because LDs dominate their talent, so their aptitudes and unusual talents are ignored and neglected. Thus, negative effects and obstacles appear that lead to their failure.

**3. GSLDs have not been identified or detected:** These students are not classified as gifted or have LDs, and they are called disguised extraordinary pairs because of the combination of talent and disability they have at the same time. Talent dominates their disabilities, and the disabilities dominate their talent, so they are considered to be of intermediate abilities and attend regular classes. They are seen as having no special needs or problems, so they are not provided with services that are presented to the gifted or services for people with LDs.

#### 2.3 The needs of GSLDs

It is necessary to identify and meet the needs of GSLDs, which are represented by academic, psychological, and emotional needs.

Academic needs are represented as follows:

- Present the scientific subject using a variety of methods appropriate to their learning style
- Provide appropriate, varied opportunities to utilize the skills, attitudes, and information they possess
- Using educational games instead of paper and pen
- Encourage the child to talk about interests and tendencies
- Assign reasonable and specific duties and tasks and a sufficient period of time to complete them
- Develop and practice organizational skills, such as using schedules and time management
- Develop creativity and problem-solving and critical-thinking skills
- Develop computer, machine, and recording device skills
- Evaluation using unconventional appropriate methods (Dababneh and Al-Attiyah, 2015; Al-Dulaimi, 2012).

Psychological and emotional needs are represented as follows:

- Taking advantage of strengths to address weaknesses
- Supporting self-perception, a sense of security, and increasing self-confidence
- Hosting positive models of the gifted with LDs and benefiting from their experiences

- Using group activities to overcome the child's struggles
- Increasing motivation and reducing frustration (Dababneh and Al-Attayah, 2015; Al-Dulaimi, 2012).

#### 2.4 Methods for identifying GSLDs

Identifying GSLDs is vital; not identifying them or delaying evaluation will often lead to negative problems, which in turn lead to disorders that form an obstacle because they do not receive appropriate services (Al-Qamsh, 2012). Early identification is critical to reduce the negative effects and to develop their talent so that it is not extinguished, and to address the difficulties so that they do not escalate (Chimhenga, 2016). Al-Balawi and Al-Momani (2016) mentioned that we should know the general characteristics that help us identify, discover, and diagnose GSLDs, the most prominent of which are the following:

- There is clear evidence of talent.
- There is clear evidence of a discrepancy between ability and achievement.
- There is clear evidence of weakness or deficit

#### 2.5 Obstacles that limit the process of identifying GSLDs

Obstacles that limit the detection of GSLDs are one of the problems facing teachers and parents. Students have the right to obtain suitable educational opportunities (Wormald, 2009). Therefore, it must be taken into account that GSLDs must be identified, containing them and removing the obstacles that they face to work on addressing their difficulties and developing their talents (Jarwan, 2015). The obstacles facing these students were often represented in societal, family, administrative, or self-obstacles, which limited their advancement (Wormald, 2009).

Al-Sumairi and Al-Juhani (2019) mentioned in the results of their study that the obstacles that prevent the detection of GSLDs included:

- The Ministry's focus on SLDs and neglect of the gifted
- Frequent frustration from teachers and peers in class
- GSLDs have patterns of learning difficulties and gifted manifestations
- If GSLDs have talent, the associated learning difficulties overshadow the talent

Due to the wide debate among educators and specialists on the issue of GSLDs, relatively few studies

have dealt with this issue. These studies include the following:

Al-Sumairi and others (2019) conducted a study to identify the characteristics of GSLDs in the primary stage from the teachers' perspectives in light of some variables, namely gender, experience, and qualifications. The questionnaire was used, and the sample consisted of 101 teachers—52 male and 49 female—in the Ha'il region. The results concluded that teachers are aware of the characteristics of GSLDs. The results of specialization and qualification appeared in favor of special education teachers.

Al-Shammari and Al-Rabea'an (2019) identified the level of knowledge of primary school teachers about the characteristics of GSLDs; identified their attitudes toward teaching these students; elucidated the effect of the variables of specialization, academic qualification, the number of years of experience, and training courses on knowledge and trends; and identified primary school teachers' knowledge of the characteristics of GSLDs and their attitudes toward their teaching. The sample consisted of 173 teachers who were randomly selected from the schools of Ha'il and Qassim from the primary stage, and among them were 137 teachers of general education, 10 teachers of the gifted, and 26 teachers of students with disabilities. The questionnaire and the descriptive correlative approach were used in the study, and the results showed that the knowledge of primary school teachers about the characteristics of gifted students was high. There was also the presence of a weak positive statistical significance among teachers' attitudes toward teaching GSLDs and their knowledge of the characteristics of these students, and no statistical differences in teachers' knowledge about the characteristics of the GSLDs.

While Al-Juhani's study (2019) aimed to identify the problems that teachers of LDs face in discovering GSLDs in Yanbu city, the qualitative approach was used, and the sample consisted of eight teachers of LDs, and the tool that was used consisted of 12 open questions. The results of the study showed that teachers of LDs are not sufficiently qualified to discover the category of GSLDs, and that this category of students actually exists, and we can discover and develop them. The results showed that the most important problems teachers face are that teachers who teach LDs are not sufficiently qualified to discover this category, and that the focus was only on the weaknesses of SLDs, and this category was attached to the description of LDs.

Alamer (2017) aimed to discover the experiences of GSLDs (with double exceptions) and identify their challenges, and their views on education and the teaching process that are received. The sample consisted of university students who were able to know the experiences that had developed from their knowledge and their views of teaching and their career choices. The results showed that failure to identify or delay identifying GSLDs or with double exceptions often leads to them facing psychological and social challenges. The results also showed a low self-concept and lack of self-confidence, as support is often delayed, which affects academic achievement.

Wormald (2009) also conducted a study aimed at identifying the obstacles that prevent the detection of GSLDs. This study used a sample consisting of two stages: The first stage is a sample of teachers from the New South Wales administration from Sydney schools from kindergarten stage to year 12, where the school was surveyed using a study of practices and included selected secondary schools and regular elementary schools. The second stage consisted of students who were identified as GSLDs, and reports from the school and interviews with students and their families were used. The results showed that teachers had knowledge of the obstacles that ordinary students face and their contrast with GSLDs, and they showed confusion about their understanding of the obstacles facing GSLDs and their educational needs. The results indicate that the identification of these students occurs through the efforts of parents, they receive very little support from their schools, and the students' experiences are negative about learning in school.

As for the study by Krochak and Ryan (2007), the aim was to identify and clarify the challenges facing GSLDs in America to determine their identity, and an analytical approach was used. The results showed that frustration, sabotage, and depression may lead to the problem of talent that obscures the disability. On the other hand, GSLDs who are delayed or do not get an opportunity to develop their unique talents face potential loss, and the problem that leads to this is that the disability obscures their talent.

### 3. Research methodology and procedure

The researchers used the qualitative approach, which elicits results that have not been reached by quantitative means and seeks to understand a social phenomenon in its

natural state without resorting to statistical data (Al-Abdul Karim, 2020). Also, semi-organized interviews were used to identify the obstacles facing female GSLDs from the point of view of their teachers and to find solutions to them.

The sample of participants depends on the extent of access to information saturation, and accordingly, Creswell (1998) mentioned that there should be at least six interviews in a phenomenological study, so the researchers targeted the research sample by selecting the female teachers who have a bachelor's degree as the lowest scientific degree in special education, and the years of service are not less than one year, so seven female teachers were selected who taught female GSLDs during their educational path, and the researchers were able to reach saturation through this sample, and they were also selected through the snowball sample.

To achieve the objectives of the research and answer its questions, the research tool was represented in semi-organized interviews to find out the obstacles facing female GSLDs from the point of view of their female teachers in the schools of Makkah, Saudi Arabia. The interviews included two sections. The first section included preliminary data for the participants in the study, and the second section dealt with a set of (9) questions with open answers. The interview protocol was revised after a pilot study was conducted with the teachers. Accordingly, semi-organized interviews were conducted, and a discussion protocol was built based on the main research questions and the researchable problem.

### 4. Data analysis

The steps of data analysis passed through three stages, as mentioned by Fakhri (2017). The data were collected from the female teachers by recording the interviews (7), and then a backup was made. The recorded interviews were transcribed, and the transcriptions were reviewed and checked for accuracy before being entered into NVivo. The data were then encoded; 51 subjects were divided into parts, labeled, reviewed, and final symbols were added. Similar codes were grouped, and the collected information was revised and classified, and then final topics were identified (22). The data were interpreted by finding similarities, differences, correlations, and relations among the female teachers' perspectives.

## 5. Research findings and discussion

This section dealt with a presentation and discussion of the research results, which were extracted from the main research question: What are the obstacles facing female GSLDs from the point of view of their teachers?

The results of the study showed that there are some obstacles facing GSLDs, including educational obstacles (problems related to the detection of female GSLDs), problems related to the methods of teaching GSLDs and problems related to a lack of experience with GSLDs), societal obstacles (problems related to society's reactions toward female GSLDs), and administrative obstacles (problems related to services provided to female GSLDs).

The researchers see that the lack of specialized teachers for the category of female GSLDs constitutes an obstacle to the students, because the availability of specialized teachers for this category has great importance in rehabilitating female GSLDs educationally and psychologically, and what is resulted from it of the positive results represented in their knowledge in the right way to teach them and how to use their talents in the right way.

The results of the study indicated the existence of family obstacles represented in the family's lack of awareness of the nature of female GSLDs. The researchers see that the family's lack of awareness of the nature of the GSLDs, and its neglect of the female student and the lack of interest in her, represents an obstacle to them because the lack of awareness and families' lack of interest in them leads to the upbringing of their children with abnormal educational methods, which leads to reducing opportunities of expressing their abilities and readiness.

### **Solutions and suggestions from teachers to overcome the obstacles facing GSLDs.**

The results of the current study indicate that there are several solutions and suggestions to overcome the obstacles facing GSLDs, including solutions and suggestions related to awareness of GSLDs, educational institutions, and gifted tests and competitions.

### **Solutions related to the awareness of GSLDs**

The researchers see the importance of this suggestion and the necessity of adopting it because it will help remove several obstacles, including negative societal reactions toward GSLDs and the denial of their talent, and not accepting them and ridicule them. It will also help society to know this category, their nature and talents; this was emphasized by Gaber (2012) about the need to raise awareness through media awareness about the category of

GSLDs. El-Desouky and Ismail (2019) also mentioned that advertisements should be made through the media to raise awareness of the category of GSLDs.

### **Solutions related to educational institutions**

The teachers indicated the necessity of providing specialized centers in the category of GSLDs. The researchers see that this suggestion is one of the solutions that will help GSLDs strengthen their learning aspects. The specialized centers in this category will help in presenting the best services and needs that must be provided to this category. This was confirmed by Ben Yahya and Ben Saleh (2016) in their study suggestions, as they emphasized the need to open specialized centers for GSLDs.

The researchers see that this suggestion is one of the solutions and suggestions that will be very effective in helping GSLDs. And they see that when qualifying specialized teachers in this category, this will help in removing several obstacles facing GSLDs, and revealing this category and thus identifying it, and it will help in providing the teachers with the most appropriate educational methods to teach them and adapting the educational curricula in an appropriate manner in line with their nature. Gaber (2012) called for the necessity of qualifying teachers specialized in this category and providing them with experiences in diagnosis, discovery, and care.

The female teachers also referred to the need for the Ministry to provide a guide for GSLDs and those with double exceptions. The researchers believe that this suggestion will remove the obstacles facing GSLDs by clarifying the nature of this category in all educational institutions, including teachers and administrations, which will facilitate their acceptance, understanding, and consideration. It will also help provide appropriate services to GSLDs.

### **Solutions related to teaching GSLDs**

Some teachers referred to the suggestion of adapting the curriculum of GSLDs. The researchers see that this suggestion is necessary in the GSLDs' curriculum. If a female student is gifted in a subject, her curriculum is more focused on this subject. In contrast, in the disabilities, her weakness is taken into account in the subject with difficulties, and this will help raise the student's academic achievement and remove the obstacle of not taking into account both talent and disability, which negatively affects their education. Teachers also suggested the necessity of placing the female student in several fields to discover her

talent, as Special 6 referred to “putting the student with LDs in more than one field until her talent is discovered.”

### Solutions related to gifted tests and competitions

Several teachers mentioned solutions and suggestions related to tests and competitions for GSLDs. Tests and competitions are one means of detecting the category of GSLDs.

### 6. Recommendations:

- Host awareness events inside and outside school, including school administration, educational staff, parents, and all segments of society, and on social media to educate about GSLDs
- Form committees prepared by the Ministry of Education interested in discovering the category of GSLDs
- Urge teachers to help GSLDs show their talents and address their weaknesses
- Conduct annual tests for SLDs to identify the gifted
- Implement various activities inside the school that allow students to practice their talent
- Create university specializations to qualify and graduate qualified female teachers to teach GSLDs and those with the double exceptions
- Urge researchers to focus on people with double exceptions in general and GSLDs in particular
- Urge the Ministry of Education to create community partnerships between the Ministries of Public Education and Higher Education and institutes related to GSLDs

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