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Abstract: Despite making tremendous progress in education since independence to become a leader in literacy in Africa, Zimbabwe lags behind other nations in providing special programming for its gifted children and youths. Not only do gifted and talented students exist in Zimbabwean schools and colleges, giftedness has also been confirmed in research on indigenous cultures. This paper discusses a number of issues characterizing the discourse of gifted education in Zimbabwe. In this discourse, the paper examines indigenous conceptions of giftedness, types of giftedness valued, local beliefs about giftedness, challenges involved in educating gifted students and critical findings in local research on gifted education in Zimbabwe. The paper is informed by a number of studies conducted by this writer and other researchers on gifted education in Zimbabwe. Future directions for gifted education research in Zimbabwe are highlighted.

Subjects: Gifted & Talented; International & Comparative Education; Inclusion and Special Educational Needs

Keywords: bantu; culture; giftedness; gifted education; inclusive education; mbira; resilience; talent

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Constantine Ngara, PhD, is an assistant professor in educational studies at the University of Bahrain Teachers College and a sessional instructor in special education at the University of British Columbia. He has taught from elementary school through high school to community college and university level on three continents, in Africa, Canada and the Middle East. His research focuses on intelligence and giftedness. Constantine has authored and co-authored numerous articles, book chapters and a book on the pedagogy of giftedness that inform this paper. In his main research, he has proposed the Dynamic and Interactive Process Model (DIPM) of Talent Development among children. Currently; the model is receiving a lot of attention in research. Constantine’s studies on gifted education in Zimbabwe were groundbreaking. The paper is a culmination of a series of studies by the author and other researchers who have taken interest in investigating the discourse of gifted and talented education in Zimbabwe.

PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Whereas existing knowledge for understanding giftedness and talent among students is dominated by Western theories and models in contemporary psychology, the author argues that there are different ways to understand giftedness and talent among students. This paper examines gifted education in Zimbabwe as informed by existing studies on gifted and talented education in Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe is a Southern African country landlocked between South Africa in the South, Mozambique in the East, Zambia in the North and Botswana and Namibia in the West. Shona is the culture and language of about 82% of the Zimbabwean population while Ndebele (a dialect of Zulu language) is the culture and language of about 14% of the Zimbabwean population while 5% is White, Asian and others. The paper is informed by the writer’s groundbreaking studies and other studies conducted by recent researchers on gifted education in Zimbabwe. The writer’s initial research was focused on understanding indigenous conceptions of giftedness with a view to contribute to the development of eco-culturally sensitive theories and models for understanding and advancing giftedness and talent among students in schools.
1. Introduction

Although giftedness is acknowledged and valued in Zimbabwean society as in other bantu subcultures of Southern Africa (e.g. Ngara, 2006, 2010; Ngara & Porath, 2004, 2007), as a nation, Zimbabwe has not yet developed its own culturally sensitive operational definition and tools for identifying and educating students presumed to be gifted and talented in local schools. In local languages, bantu simply means “people” but as used in the English dictionary, it defines the people of Central and Southern Africa whose family of languages is closely related and mutually intelligible with a common stem—ntu for “person” (mu-/ntu, n., s.) and “people” (ba-/ntu, n., pl.).

In ideal situations, where culture informs the school curriculum, each nation is mandated to propose its own operational (culturally sensitive) definitions and tools for assessing and educating gifted and talented students in schools (Phillipson, 2007). Meanwhile, talking about proposing culturally sensitive definitions and tools for assessing and advancing giftedness among students in the African context seems to be far-fetched as most African countries (with the exception of South Africa) do not yet provide formal gifted education programmes in their schools (William & Mitchell, 1989). Hence, education systems in Africa rely entirely on definitions, tools and models for understanding giftedness proffered in contemporary psychology books.

As established in Ngara’s (2002) exploratory study, Zimbabwean teachers’ perceptions of giftedness and talent were simply a regurgitation of what teachers read in educational psychology books and were devoid of any single hint of awareness or recognition of the input of indigenous cultural conceptions of giftedness to our understanding of the phenomenon. Neither did the teachers reflect any hints or vision based on their own understanding of giftedness derived from their own personal experiences with gifted and talented students. The question that arises is: Should teachers be treating educational psychology like a magic carpet which takes you wherever you want to go without actively interrogating existing knowledge claims and raising questions about their application? Based on the prevailing understanding that intelligence and giftedness cannot be understood outside their cultural context (e.g. Gardner, 1983, 1999; Sternberg & Grigorenko, 2004), this paper examines gifted education in Zimbabwe and includes some insights from groundbreaking studies on giftedness from an African perspective. The paper is also informed by research from other Zimbabwean scholars who have recently taken an interest in investigating the discourse of gifted education.

This paper adopts Matthews and Foster’s (2005) definition of giftedness as “exceptionally advanced subject-specific ability at a particular point in time such that a student’s learning needs cannot be well met without significant adaptations to the curriculum” (p. 26). Similarly, gifted students are here defined as children and youths who, by virtue of their superior potential or demonstrated consistently outstanding ability to excel in one or more ability domains, would require special modifications of the regular school curriculum to function at their optimum level. Meanwhile, Gagné’s (2004, 2009) Differential Model of Giftedness and Talent’s (DMGT) distinction between giftedness and talent is very informative. According to Gagné, giftedness refers to “innate abilities,” “raw potential” or “outstanding aptitudes” as evident early in childhood while “talent” is the actual “demonstrated outstanding abilities,” “achievement,” “realisation” or “fulfillment” of potential usually in adult life. As envisioned by Gagné, one cannot become talents unless one is gifted. Giftedness is therefore a precursor of talent that is realized through a hard-won experience. It is possible for some individuals to realize their talents during childhood. In the light of this understanding of giftedness and talent, the rest of this paper examines the following subtopics characterizing gifted education in Zimbabwe: primary conceptions of giftedness, valued talents and development, beliefs about giftedness, challenges in providing gifted education and directions for future research. The paper is informed by studies on giftedness conducted by this researcher and other Zimbabwean researchers who are interested in researching the area of gifted education.
1.1. The primary conception of giftedness

As established in Ngara (2006, 2010) and Ngara and Porath's (2004, 2007) studies on conceptions of giftedness from an African perspective, giftedness is viewed among the Shona and Ndebele (the major ethnic groups in Zimbabwe) as a special gift (chipo/isipho) from God. In particular, Shona culture defines giftedness as "an unusual ability blessed in an individual through ancestry which enables him/her to perform with unparalleled expertise even in challenging domains" (Ngara, p. 190). Meanwhile, the key hallmark of giftedness from a Shona culture's point of view is “ability to achieve success against odds and adversity." When a child hails from a very humble background, such as Maud Chifamba, a Zimbabwean whiz kid who grew up an orphan raised at a farming compound by her brothers who were farm labourers and entered the University of Zimbabwe at a record young age (of 14) and graduated at 18 (Ngara, 2017), giftedness cannot be doubted. Indeed, when the underprivileged child's brilliance surpasses that of those from privileged home backgrounds, she is considered highly gifted by Shona cultural standards. The capacity to achieve success against odds and adversity connotes “resilience” which is highly associated with the manifestation of giftedness (Bland, Sowa, & Callahan, 1994). As Chifamba herself argues, it is not her intelligence per se which makes her great but rather that she does not allow her many disadvantages to stand in the way of progress in achieving her ambition (confirming the act of achieving success against odds).

The view that giftedness is a special gift blessed in individuals is widespread in the Bantu region of sub-Saharan Africa as confirmed in Ngara and Porath's (2004, 2007) studies. According to Ngara and Porath's (2004, 2007) studies, the Bantu of Central and Southern Africa espouse a similar spiritual understanding of giftedness as God given. Meanwhile, the Bantu family of languages shares the same term for giftedness derived from a common verb root /-p/- (give), denoting its spiritual foundations. For example, chipo (Shona—Zimbabwe and some provinces of Mozambique), isipho/isiphiwo (Zulu/Ndebele-South Africa/Zimbabwe), kipawa (Swahili-Tanzania, Kenya), mpho (Sotho-Lesotho), ukupelwa (Bemba-Zambia). Hence, Mpofu, Ngara and Gudyanga (as cited in Ngara, 2013b) asserted that, “the Shona view of giftedness has wider comparability and applicability in Sub-Saharan Africa region” (p. 24).

As espoused in the African paradigm, for example in Shona and Ndebele cultures of Zimbabwe, chipo/isipho is an exceptional ability or competence blessed in the individual through their ancestry (Mpofu, Ngara, & Gudyanga, 2007; Ngara, 2010, 2013a). “Blessed through ancestry” is paradigmatic, expressing the spirituality-centred wisdom that special human attributes of giftedness are transmitted through family or bloodlines. While academic giftedness is highly recognized among the Zimbabweans (Ngara, 2002, 2010), it is also widely accepted in both the traditional culture and school learning contexts that giftedness and talent manifest across domains, race, ethnicity, culture, social class, gender or creed.

As established in several studies on Shona culture’s views of giftedness (e.g. Mpofu et al., 2007; Ngara, 2010, 2013a; Ngara & Porath, 2004), giftedness is recognized both as potential (whereby all children are considered to be gifted from birth) and in its actual emergence (whereby it is constrained by certain forces and consequently realized by a only few individuals, as elaborated later in this paper). Meanwhile, a highly motivated student showing strong academic prowess is attributed shavi redzidzo (a spirit for academic achievement). In this connection, the Zimbabwean whiz kid, Maud Chifamba, who early in life fast-tracked her elementary and high school education through self-reliance (self-teaching), is ascribed shavi redzidzo (spirit for academic talent). Having a spirit for accomplishing something is paradigmatic, expressing “the gifted individuals’ emotional intensity, passion and self-exertion in a talent domain...” (Ngara, 2006, p. 57). Having a spirit for (or emotional intensity, restless passion and self-exertion) also expresses a similar phenomenon to that articulated in Dabrowski’s Theory of “Overexcitabilities” described by Piechowski (2002) as the “heart and fire” of giftedness which “rings loud and clear.”

Meanwhile, the spiritual paradigm of giftedness (that giftedness is spiritually blessed in individuals through their ancestry) as endorsed among the bantu people of Central-Southern Africa is roundly
criticized among researchers of gifted education as discriminatory and unprogressive (e.g. Dweck, 2006; Matthews & Folsom, 2009; Matthews & Foster, 2005). In particular, Matthews and Folsom argue that the traditional view of giftedness (with reference to IQ paradigm of giftedness) is a “mystery model” that sets limits on who gets selected into special programming. The spiritual paradigm of giftedness is similar to the “mystery model” as it supposes that individuals are blessed with giftedness though their ancestry which poses problems of genetic causality. As argued by Dweck (2006), the “mystery model” is based on genetic causality which functions like fixed capacity engines—once gifted always gifted—while on the contrary, the “mastery model” stresses the influence of environmental factors. Hence, Dweck (2006) is advocating for a shift of paradigm from traditional view of giftedness—the “mystery model”—to supporting the “mastery model” considered to be open, developmental and progressive, consistent with the dynamic nature of development.

1.2. Valued talents and development

While it is desirable that the education system aims to develop children’s gifts and talents across the knowledge domains, certain talents tend to be valued more than others both in school learning contexts and in the indigenous culture. As revealed in Ngara’s (2002) pioneering studies on gifted education in Zimbabwe and subsequently confirmed in later studies (e.g. Mpofu et al., 2007; Ngara & Porath, 2004), Zimbabwean teachers tend to focus more on the scholastic domain at the expense of nurturing all of the students’ potential talents across domains. In particular, Ngara’s (2002) study revealed that teachers’ perceptions of giftedness among children in primary schools were consistent with both the techniques and methods teachers adopted to identify and instruct students they presumed to be gifted and talented in their schools. Although studies on cultural conceptions of giftedness conducted from an African perspective (e.g. Ngara, 2006, 2010; Ngara & Porath, 2004, 2007) established certain cultural views of giftedness, teachers sampled in Ngara’s (2002) study curiously made no mention of cultural notions of giftedness. From a Shona culture’s perspective, exceptional talent (shavi) is defined as having a spirit for accomplishing something. For example, a highly academically talented student is described as having shavi rechikoro.

While gifts and talents are recognized across domains in Shona, Ndebele and other cultures of Zimbabwe, academic talent is highly valued in modern Zimbabwean society. Hence, teachers sampled in the study strongly reflected an academic view of giftedness whereby teachers relied on classroom tests/examinations to identify students they presumed to be gifted and talented. Consistent with findings in Ngara’s (2002) study among Zimbabwean teachers, a comparative study conducted by Ngara and Al-Mahdi (2016) among Bahraini teachers also reflected that teachers regard the academic domain as the essential dimension of giftedness. In both studies, the hallmarks of giftedness and talent among students were the capacity to consistently excel in classroom tests/examinations and show an outstanding motivation to learn.

As observed by Williams and Mitchell (1989), Zimbabwe, as other African countries (with the exception of South Africa), was not yet offering formal programming for gifted students in its schools. Hence, the task of developing children’s giftedness and talent is left to the mercy of individual teachers to do their best with little or no specialized training and support (Chimhenga, 2016; Dube, 2015; Ngara, 2017). In this context, the commonly adopted options for educating the brightest students in local schools are usually limited to acceleration by grade skipping with a bit of enrichment. Meanwhile, the standard provision for most of the extremely bright students and/or rapid learners is “extra/challenging work” or “assigning them project work” to keep them occupied (Ngara, 2002; Ngara & Al Mahdi, 2016). However, students who distinguish themselves in public examinations are recognized with donor-funded bursaries and awarded entry vacancies at highly competitive Zimbabwean boarding high schools. A few highly competitive students at an advanced (“A”) level are awarded local and or international donor-funded scholarships to study at universities abroad.

Some of the locally valued non-academic talents are in arts including music, basketry, woodcraft and stone sculpturing, most of which are not usually developed in high school and rarely receive donor-funded scholarships. In particular, the Zimbabwean stone sculpturing art which has become...
one of the world-class art genres that now dons the major art galleries of the world (Lannom, 2003) is not formally taught in school. Hence, most renowned artists usually make it in the art domain through their own individual efforts and/or private coaching and sponsorship by interested business partners. In this context, some of the young and upcoming artists have benefited from one of the new generation’s highly acclaimed local stone sculpturing artist, Dominic Benhura, whose motto is giving back to the community that nurtured his talent (Ngara, 2010, 2012). As part of grooming aspiring artists, Benhura offers them working space at his art galleries, supplies them with quarry stones and working tools and also provides them initial training as well as assisting them to find markets for their art. That way, stone sculpturing talent is blossoming due to exposure through friendship and kinship lines. Owing to a limited exposure in art based on the tradition of sponsoring artists within family ties (Mhonda, 2004), this might have encouraged some people to think that talent is passed through family veins.

1.3. Beliefs about gifted individuals

While the Shona/Ndebele cultural assertion that all children are born gifted raises eyebrows especially in the Western paradigm of thinking, the actual emergence of giftedness and talent is constrained by certain conditions and only realized by a few. In local beliefs, giftedness (chipa/isipho) is given to all but lost to some, corroborating the Biblical view that “many were called but few were chosen” (Matthew 22:14). Giftedness is lost to some because of certain factors that mitigate against the individuals themselves or their families/ancestral lineage (Mpofu et al., 2007; Ngara, 2012; Ngara & Porath, 2004, 2007). As much as it is given, giftedness can also be lost to some individuals because of human vices such as pride, selfishness, laziness, wickedness and disrespect of God and elders. In accordance with ubuntu/unhu (Ndebele-Zulu/Shona) philosophy, defined simply as desirable qualities of becoming a person, the notion of giftedness and talent is enshrined in cultural values of character building and personhood. Giftedness has both a spiritual foundation and a community focus. It is therefore not surprising that certain personalities of individuals often considered deviant or anti-social in mainstream society are also believed to mitigate against the emergence and flourishing of individuals’ gifts and talents. The African culture supports those attributes of giftedness that contribute to the development of a respectable personality in children and youths. Hence, in local beliefs, giftedness is granted to individuals for common good. Those vices mitigating against the emergence of giftedness are often satirized in children’s folktales that are dramatized by both human and animal characters. In these folktales, the heroes are usually humble and despised persons (Finnegan, 1976; Fortune, 1980; Ngara, 2009). As cautioned in Ndebele wisdom (Ngara & Porath, 2007), Ukuzithshaya isifuba ngesipho sakho singenyulwa (“If you brag about your giftedness / or talent, it will be taken away”) (p. 204). Both Shona and Ndebele cultures concur on being humble about one’s gifts and talents. It is possible that some exceptionally talented introverted students oriented to school humility may play second fiddle in class, thereby avoiding the limelight unless they are encouraged or pushed by the teacher.

Perhaps the most controversial aspect/view of giftedness widely held by Zimbabwean teachers is the belief that giftedness is more prevalent among students from low economic class families. According to local teachers consulted in Ngara’s (2002, 2010) studies, more gifted and talented students hailed from low economic class families than from affluent families. This runs contrary to giftedness assessed by IQ tests which favours the upper middle classes pitying the poorly assessed students from low-income families (Bonshek, 2002; Mpofu et al., 2007; Sternberg & Arroyo, 2006). Meanwhile, Bonshek (2002) warned against making giftedness a middleclass concept. As established in Ngara (2002) and Mpofu at al.’s (2007) studies, Zimbabwean teachers thought that most brilliant students who showed exceptional motivation to learn hailed from low economic class families where most parents were struggling to raise fees for secondary and tertiary education. The teachers noted that if these students made it to university, they did so through charitable funds and merit awarded scholarships. As controversial as it may seem that teachers ascribed more brilliance to students of lower social income families than those from higher income families, the teachers consulted argued that many students from high-income families tended to be spoiled by over-gratification of their needs, thereby receiving everything on a platter. With spoiled children who show little motivation to excel
school, their true potential might not be realized. To the contrary, motivation to learn is a necessity driven through a desire to escape the web of poverty. In this context, individuals strive to overcome their many disadvantages in the quest for survival and self-discovery. In this process, individuals may realize their gifts and talents. As asserted by Mpofu et al. (2007), “Poverty is the mother of invention and being poor trains a person in qualities of exceptionality such as resilience and perseverance” (p. 245). With reference to the Zimbabwean whiz kid, Maud Chifamba’s, arguments, what makes a difference in her life is that she refuses to allow her many odds and adversities to stand in the way of her progress or ambition. Chifamba commenced formal schooling at an advanced level through charity fee sponsorship.

1.4. Challenges in providing provisions for gifted learners
Although every teacher has a story to tell including some myths about the gifted and talented students they encounter in their schools, what is doubtful is whether Zimbabwe as a nation has the political will to marshal both its manpower and material resources to develop students’ gifts and talents in schools. While the existence of gifted and talented students cannot be doubted, how to identify and educate students presumed to be gifted is quite elusive.

As defined by the Human Sciences and Research Council of South Africa (HSRC), gifted and talented students are “those pupils who, by virtue of their talent or realised superior abilities in one or more personal dimensions are capable of consistent outstanding achievement and are identifiable on the basis of their achievement or their potential for achievement” (Kokot, 1992, p. 49). Although this is a good definition, on its own it does not inform local teachers how to identify and educate students who deserve special programming. Meanwhile, talking about the identification of students’ gifts and talents presupposes that students who are presumed to be gifted will receive an appropriate education. In this context, talking about developing an operational definition and/or culturally sensitive tools and models for identifying and ascertaining giftedness among students in local schools could be far-fetched. However, where there is no clear and specific policy on serving the special needs of the gifted and talented student population, it is uncertain whether students with “hidden talents” or masked talents are at all recognized and served with appropriate educational services.

As noted by Chireshe (2013), in Zimbabwe, where there is no policy thrust on special programming for gifted and talented students, the challenges of identifying and educating gifted students are mostly left to the mercy of regular school teachers to do their best with little or no special training. As confirmed by Williams and Mitchell (1989), most African countries with the exception of South Africa are not yet offering special programming for gifted and talented students. Although these countries’ arguments for not providing special programming for gifted students are ostensibly to utilize available resources towards building egalitarian societies, Williams and Mitchell dismissed that excuse suggesting that their real reasons could be to do with the sub-Saharan African countries’ weak economies.

Like most other African countries, Zimbabwe’s educational focus since independence is on providing primary school education for all. Although Zimbabwe as a nation “has made significant and notable strides in education since 1980, thereby receiving kudos for the highest literacy rate in sub-Saharan Africa, the same could not be said about its provisions for special education” (Chitiyo & Wheeler, 2004, p. 49). Provisions for special education have continued to lag behind in the country’s education system, the major constraint being limited educational funding. In particular, the education of the country’s gifted and talented students is largely a neglected area in the education system.

Meanwhile, special and inclusive education in Zimbabwe has been mostly associated with provisions for student with learning disabilities and handicaps (Chireshe, 2013; Ngara, 2017). Students with learning disabilities and handicaps tend to receive greater sympathy in special education provisions than gifted and talented students who are erroneously assumed to be able to achieve greater educational goals on their own. This partly stems from the myths about giftedness that negate the
plight of twice exceptional students, that is those who have both giftedness and some learning disabil-
ity (Colangelo, Assouline, & Gross, 2004). Further, the cultural definition that views gifted and
talented students as those who are able to achieve exceptionally outstanding results against odds
and adversity (e.g. Ngara, 2006, 2010) in some cases may encourage teachers to overlook the cat-
egory of students whose talent development may be prejudiced by concurrent existence of both
giftedness and learning disabilities in the same student.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Education in Zimbabwe wards off criticism of its failure to provide spe-
cial programming for gifted learners with the arguments that effective teachers individualize in-
struction and do their best to meet the needs of all students in their classrooms, including those with
various kinds of special needs. In reality, teachers’ knowledge of identifying and educating gifted
students is often inadequate and confounded with unfounded myths about giftedness (Bonshek,
2002; Ngara, 2002; Ngara & Al-Mahdi, 2016). Consistent with Colangelo et al.’s (2004) observa-
tion, teachers are usually not given comprehensive training on gifted education at college. This is true in
the Zimbabwean education system.

In most schools, local teachers are often ill equipped to handle students with special needs, espe-
cially the category of gifted students with some form of learning disabilities. As established in previ-
ous studies, teachers’ perceptions of giftedness are often confounded with unproven and unhelpful
myths and stereotypes, particularly the claims that “gifted students always score excellent grades
and they can sail through with little or no effort” (Ngara & Al Mahdi, 2016, p. 25). As noted by some
researchers (e.g. Silverman, 1989), gifted students with learning disabilities are often misunderstood
by teachers who attribute their underachievement to poor self-concept, lack of motivation and
sheer laziness. In this connection, Chimhenga’s (2016) study established that a sizeable number of
gifted students in Zimbabwe have learning disabilities, masking their true potential in school.
Consequently, those children neither qualify for a semblance of gifted education nor recognition for
learning disabilities treatment in special education.

In an exploratory study that sought baseline data on current practices in gifted education in
Masvingo Town (in Southern Zimbabwe), Manyowa and Ncube (2013) revealed that local teachers
were aware of the gifted students’ special needs and were doing their best to educate them. The
study revealed nine forms of educational provision that teachers were using to educate students
they presumed to be gifted and talented in their schools (namely, grade skipping, subject acceleration,
early entry, flexible pacing, special class, independent learning centre, pull out programme, mentorship
and ability grouping). In that study, ability group instruction was the most dominant provision used
by most teachers. Meanwhile, Manyowa and Ncube’s (2013) study curiously omitted the mention of
the identification and education of students who are twice exceptional. It is however gratifying that
the local teachers were doing their best to educate gifted students under difficult circumstances.

According to Chimhenga (2016), the challenges mitigating against any intervention programmes
for gifted students with learning disabilities include lack of clear policy on inclusive education, lack
of specialized training for teachers in gifted education and operating on a tight budget with limited
provision for special and inclusive education (including assistive technology requirements). In this
scenario, the average Zimbabwean teacher who is poorly equipped to identify and develop students’
giftedness and talents in school is like a non-swimmer plunged in the deeper end of the pool. With
limited understanding of giftedness and lack political will to formulate a clear policy on educating
highly able students, only a few exceptionally talented students such as Maud Chifamba get recog-
nized for local or international donor-funded scholarships to make it to university and become emi-
nent achievers

1.5. The most significant contributions to gifted education in Zimbabwe

One of the most significant developments in the history of gifted education in Zimbabwe is perhaps the
raising of awareness of the needs of gifted and talented students through research. Following Ngara’s
early pioneering studies (e.g. Ngara, 2002, 2006, 2010; Ngara & Porath, 2004, 2007) and subsequent
studies by other researchers on gifted education in Zimbabwe (e.g., Chimhenga, 2016; Dube, 2015; Manyowa & Ncube, 2013; Mpofu et al., 2007), the plight of gifted and talented students has been consistently articulated. Lamentably, most of the recent studies on gifted education in Zimbabwe fail to acknowledge earlier studies in the area (e.g., by Ngara, 2002, 2006, 2010, 2009, 2013a; Ngara & Porath, 2004, 2007) and follow up the issues raised. For example, teachers’ perceptions of giftedness among students which Ngara explored, the Mbira Metaphor and the Dynamic Interactive Process Model of talent development (DIPM) which he proposed have not been followed up.

Despite its poor quality, local research has been instrumental in drawing the attention of local authorities towards talking about the special needs of the gifted population. Pressure is mounting on Zimbabwean educational planners to look into educational provisions for gifted and talented students within inclusive education. It is encouraging to note that the Zimbabwe Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture’s Education Medium Term Plan (2011–2015) included intentional statements for ensuring that gifted and talented students from low-income communities were not overlooked. As part of the provisions for the Education Medium Term Plan (2011–2015), students with potential for talent development were to be assisted through donor-funded bursaries and international scholarships to realize their dreams.

Among the recent developments shaping gifted and talented education in Zimbabwe is the setting up of a Presidential Scholarship fund tenable at the University of Fort Hare in South Africa (where Robert Gabriel Mugabe, the first president of Zimbabwe, studied). The Presidential scholarship is intended to sponsor the education of all highly talented but economically disadvantaged students from communal lands to study at Fort Hare University.

However, concern over the education of gifted disadvantaged students is yet to be translated into a specific policy position supportable in the national educational budget. Where policy is lacking, recognition has so far been limited to fee sponsorship with little done to realize educational provisions that potentially develop students' giftedness and talents.

1.6. The most significant research findings in the past 10 years
As of the time Ngara (2002, 2006, 2010) and Ngara and Porath (2004, 2007) conducted groundbreaking studies on gifted education in Zimbabwe, there was no research that shed light on gifted and talented education practices in the country. Moreover, the country had not started to provide formal gifted education programmes. As lamented by most researchers who commented on gifted education in Zimbabwe (e.g., Chimhenga, 2016; Chitiyo & Wheeler, 2004; Dube, 2015; Mafa, 2012), lack of specific Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture policy on gifted and inclusive education was a serious drawback to the development of students’ giftedness in the country. In a country where there is no formal policy on gifted education, research effort should be regarded as a significant milestone in the quest to push the Ministry of Education towards providing the country's gifted children and youths with more formal and appropriate educational services.

Gifted education is still a grey area in research and curriculum development in Zimbabwe (Mpofu et al., 2007). While other nations in the world are ahead in programming for gifted students, gifted education remains a neglected area in Zimbabwe’s education system. At the least, formal gifted programming is non-existent for the average Zimbabwean student whose fate is largely relegated to individual schools’ limited efforts and initiatives. (Ngara, 2013b, p. 173)

Researchers have confirmed that the country has no specific policy stipulating standard procedures for identifying, selecting and educating gifted and talented students. Lack of policy of gifted education is a drawback to the country’s claims to be a leader in education and literacy in sub-Saharan Africa. Even the country’s claims for offering inclusive education as articulated by the Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture’s Education Medium Term Plan (2011–2015) is in fact mere rhetoric or, for a better description, inclusivity by default. In inclusivity by default, students with various types of special needs including the twice exceptional are likely to be languishing in regular
classroom settings with little being done to meet their special learning needs. In this connection, recent researchers on both gifted and inclusive education in Zimbabwe (e.g. Dube, 2015; Mafa, 2012) articulated the concern that teacher candidates are not sufficiently trained at colleges to confidently educate gifted and talented students in students in local schools. Hence, the greatest casualties of inclusivity by default are the gifted students with learning disabilities whose giftedness masks their learning disabilities while their learning disabilities mask their giftedness. Hence, both giftedness and learning disabilities usually go unnoticed and neither receives any appropriate services either for their giftedness or their disabilities (Chimhenga, 2016).

In a recent study, Manyowa and Ncube (2013) explored current practices in gifted education in Masvingo, one of the small towns of Zimbabwe. Their study revealed that teachers were indeed doing their best to educate gifted and talented students within the limits of their training and limited resources. In this context, each school had its own approach; hence, there is no well-coordinated pattern for the education of gifted students in the absence of a formal policy for gifted education in the country.

While recent researchers on gifted education in Zimbabwe focused more on what the Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture was not doing, perhaps the most significant research findings on gifted education in Zimbabwe are those focused on cultural conceptions of giftedness. Cultural views of giftedness were investigated; the studies established a few culturally sensitive theories and models for understanding and encouraging giftedness and talent among students in Zimbabwe. In this context, studies by Ngara (2002, 2006, 2009, 2010), Ngara and Porath (2004, 2007) and Mpofu et al. (2007) which sought to understand conceptions of giftedness from an African perspective have been very informative. In particular, the Dynamic Interactive Process Model of talent development (DIPM) (Ngara, 2010, 2013a) has been receiving a lot of research attention. The DIPM emerged from research that was conducted at two levels, that is at the cultural level, seeking to understand Shona culture of Zimbabwe’s implicit theories of giftedness that inform Zimbabwean artists’ cultural consciousness (Ngara & Porath, 2004), and at individual artist’s level, to understand how the stone sculptors of Zimbabwe perceive the origins and development of talents in their art domain (Ngara, 2010). The initial study was a survey by questionnaire which sampled data on cultural conceptions of giftedness from Zimbabwean academics of Shona language and culture while the second study was a grounded theory study which was informed by 20 top stone sculpturing artists of Zimbabwe with a Shona language and cultural background. The DIPM that emerged from the study explains how the Zimbabwean artists experienced their vision in art and how they propel the field of stone sculpturing art.

The DIPM is based on assumptions that every child has potential for talent development (i.e. Shona culture’s conceptions of giftedness; Mpofu et al., 2007; Ngara, 2006; Ngara & Porath, 2004, 2007). Consistent with Barab and Plucker’s (2002) view of focusing effort on learning contexts that nurture giftedness instead of intelligence testing, the DIPM is a dynamic and inclusion-focused approach to teaching/learning that advocates for providing all students with a stimulating environment that activates or reactivates students’ passion, leading to talent development in a domain (Ngara, 2013b, 2017). The DIPM is understood in conjunction with the Mbira Metaphor (Ngara, 2009). The Mbira Metaphor is an age-old African (Shona) folktale satire dramatized by wild animals that inspires children to be creative. Based on what the DIPM proposes, if both parents and teachers believe in a child’s talent potential and mutually provide rich, stimulating and supportive environments that boost a child’s self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986), the momentum for the child’s talent development process is potentially set. The full details of how the DIPM was proposed, how it works in conjunction with the Mbira Metaphor and its application in inclusive classrooms are elaborated in Ngara (2009, 2010, 2013a, 2017).
1.7. Future research and programme development

Research on gifted education in Zimbabwe is still in its infancy (Mpfu et al., 2007).

Although research on cultural conceptions of giftedness that inform school curriculum has been done, more research is still needed on understanding how cultural conceptions of giftedness could inform the school curriculum across the country’s cultural diversity and boundaries. Though current practice in gifted education and teachers’ perceptions of giftedness and talent among students have been investigated (e.g. Manyowa & Ncube, 2013; Ngara, 2002), these provide only limited snapshots of education in Zimbabwe. More nationwide studies are required to investigate and standardize how teachers identify and develop giftedness and talent among students in schools including the role of schools’ psychological services and all the stakeholders in Zimbabwe’s education system. In particular, there is a special need to investigate how students with both giftedness and learning disabilities are being identified and served (if at all) in gifted and inclusive classrooms.

Based on the highlights from recent research on challenges faced by teachers in managing students with special needs in inclusive classrooms (e.g. Chimhenga, 2016; Dube, 2015; Mafa, 2012; Manyowa & Ncube, 2013; Ngara & Al-Mahdi, 2016), there is a need for future research focused on the gaps in the preparation of pre-service teacher candidates and the professional development of serving teachers in the associate colleges of the University of Zimbabwe. Such research is required to inform teacher education on best practices for educating highly able students with a special focus on serving students with both giftedness and learning disabilities in inclusive classrooms.

Finally, more research is required in the quest to propose culturally sensitive theories and models that inform gifted education from an African perspective. Although Ngara’s DIPM (2010, 2013a) and the Mbira Metaphor (Ngara, 2009) have laid the foundation for theory-focused research, there is a need for further research to actually test how both the DIPM and the Mbira Metaphor function in culturally diverse communities outside Shona/Ndebele cultural boundaries.
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