

GIFTEDNESS: A CONTINUING WORLDWIDE CHALLENGE

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Gifted and talented children in Nigeria

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Even though the Nigerian society is aware of the presence of gifted and talented children in its midst, attempts to recognize and educate such children are a new development in the country. Perhaps one of the reasons for the delay in the recognition of this group of children is the newness of special education and counselling in Nigeria. Whereas in other countries special educators and counsellors have existed for many years and have been the advocates of children whose needs are not well met in the school system, such specialists are just emerging in our country. Apart from the policy statement in the Nigerian National Policy on Education in 1977 (Federal Ministry of Education), which emphasized special educational arrangements for the handicapped and the exceptionally gifted, a Special Education Programme for the Gifted Nigerian Child SEPGINIC was launched by the Federal Ministry of Education in 1983. The participation of Nigerian educators in World Conferences on Gifted and Talented Children has been instrumental in the launching of the Nigerian Council for Gifted and Talented Children.

A significant event in the recognition of the Nigerian gifted child is the Nigerian National Policy on Education (Federal Ministry of Education, 1977) which states:

There are also the specially gifted children who are intellectually precious and find themselves insufficiently challenged by the programme of the normal school and who may take to stubbornness and apathy, in resistance to it. Government has already directed that all children including the gifted as well as those with physical, mental and learning difficulties must be provided for under the educational system... Therefore... special education must be made for the handicapped and the exceptionally gifted.

In 1982, "Operation Catch the Genius" was launched by the Nigerian Government. A committee was also set up to work out a programme for the early detection of the exceptionally gifted child.

Generally, however there is a paucity of material on the Nigerian gifted child. Ajao (1984) argued that every country should admire, glorify and reward her intellects. Adesokan (1983) stressed the involvement of Nigerian parents in provision for the gifted child. Yoloye (1983) observed that the identification of the gifted child is a feasible project, as the mechanisms for carrying out such identification are already available, but considerable work remains to be done specifically in the developing and/or norming of test instruments for the purpose. Un-

doubtedly other educators in Nigeria have shown interest in the gifted child, but lack of documentation seem to be a problem in the area of gifted children.

The present paper reports on a survey of Nigerian teachers, in which the following issues were investigated:

- 1) the concept of giftedness among educators;
- 2) identification of the gifted child;
- 3) how the gifted child is to be educated and is being educated in the Nigerian school system;
- 4) how the gifted child relates to others and the attitude of significant others to the gifted child.

Method

Subjects: The subjects in this study were 296 elementary school teachers enrolled in the Associateship Programme at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria, during the 1983/84 academic session. There were 166 female and 130 male teachers. The subjects had a mean of 18.1 years of teaching experience. Only the responses of subjects who felt that some students/children can be classified as gifted were utilized in the analysis of data.

Instruments: The subjects responded to the Gifted (Very Bright) Child Questionnaire. The questionnaire was developed after a thorough review of literature on the gifted child.

Data analysis: As the subjects did not respond to all the items as instructed, the responses to each item were analysed separately for all the subjects in percentages. The most common responses to some items were also summarized.

Results and discussion

The responses of subjects as to who is gifted varied. However, the most common statements on the definition of the gifted child included:

- a) possession of special talents;
- b) quickness in responding to questions;
- c) usually asks intelligent questions;
- d) fast learner;
- e) an overachiever;
- f) has ability to recall easily;
- g) displays allround development;
- h) performs above the level of teaching in the regular class.

Recognition of the gifted child: The indicators that gave respondents the immediate impression that a child is gifted included the fact that such a child

- a) achieves a high level of high performance in examinations;
- b) scores highest in the subjects offered;
- c) reads ahead of the class;
- d) shows brilliant performance even if from poor background;
- e) assimilates more than peers in the class;
- f) follows instructions without difficulty;
- g) uses imagination to complete any difficult task;
- h) assists the teacher in teaching other students;
- i) shows curiosity and assertiveness;
- j) discusses intelligently nonacademic issues;
- k) represents class or school in quizzes and competitions;
- l) is always alert;
- m) is eager to know reasons for things;
- n) has the ability to think abstractly and deductively.

Other traits that led respondents to conclude that a pupil/child is gifted included:

- a) carries out assignments without assistance;
- b) keeps him or herself busy;
- c) displays fluency in speech;
- d) discusses point of view intelligently;
- e) shows inquisitiveness;
- f) does extra work in class;
- g) explores the environment;
- h) demonstrates ability to reason beyond age;
- i) is independent and original in thoughts and ideas.

The respondents seem to have identified those traits which practitioners in other countries have also observed, such as Abraham (1976). From the responses enumerated, it seems that the method of identification of the gifted child is usually nomination through subjective evaluation. Emphasis was on behavioural characteristics of pupils which serve as indicators of giftedness. Behavioural identification is perhaps utilized due to lack of knowledge in the use of intelligence and standardized measures of achievement which offer other methods of identification.

Educating the gifted child: After identification of gifted children, the classroom teacher needs information on how to cater for their educational needs.

In response to the question of how the gifted should be educated, 69.9 % of the subjects advocated special classrooms for them. Some of the reasons for encouraging special classroom activity for the gifted included:

- a) preventing retrogression in the children;
- b) motivating the children to keep their ability high;

- c) encouraging children to progress at their own rate;
- d) avoiding inattentiveness through boredom.

Even though few subjects were opposed to special classroom activity for the gifted child, those who were gave more reasons for this opposition by comparison with the subjects who favoured special classroom activities. Some of the major reasons included:

- a) the gifted children in a class are usually too few in number to be considered separately;
- b) if separated, gifted children cannot share their knowledge with others;
- c) isolation stifles competition with others;
- d) special attention to the gifted child may lead to poor self-concept in other children not enjoying the same privilege;
- e) preferential treatment may lead to conceit in the gifted child.

However, some of these potential problems can be handled by counselling. In addition to separate classes for the gifted, Abraham (1976) enumerated other approaches which include:

- 1) *Nongraded schools*: grade levels, restrictive courses of study and text books are eliminated, and the pupils are afforded the opportunity of moving ahead according to their capabilities and personalities;
- 2) *Special grouping*: according to the interests displayed by children;
- 3) *Team teaching*: to encourage specialization on the part of both teacher and student;
- 4) *Programmed instruction*: the use of instructional technology to assist learning;
- 5) *Acceleration*: making the pupil move along quickly in a regular classroom or by encouraging "skipping".

In response to a question about the availability of school activities to meet the needs of the gifted child, approximately 63.1 % of the subjects were not satisfied with the activities available in the school system. Some of the major factors identified as contributing to inadequacy of provision for the gifted child are:

- a) poor school environment;
- b) financial constraints in the schools, which limit the teaching materials that can be provided;
- c) inadequate library facilities;
- d) poor attitude of teachers to the exceptionally gifted child;
- e) overcrowding in schools;
- f) inability of the classroom teacher to deal with the gifted child.

Relationship of the gifted child to others: Gifted children have to relate to their parents, teachers and peers. Parents of gifted children need to understand them, and also have a role to play in fostering their giftedness. Approximately 51.1 % of the subjects remarked that the usual reaction of parents to the gifted child is that of interest. Approximately 39.8 % observed that parents of the

gifted are usually excited on learning that their children are gifted. According to 9.1 %, parents usually show surprise on learning that their children are gifted. This interest observed in parents can be sustained and utilized in helping gifted children fulfil their potentials.

The general attitude of teachers to the gifted child tend to be favourable. Approximately 28.8 % of the respondents felt that the gifted child will be the favourite of the classroom teacher. Approximately 34.6 % felt that the gifted child will be given additional classroom responsibilities, while approximately 1.9 % of the respondents felt that some teachers would label the gifted child as being "too forward".

Gifted children also have to relate to their peers in the classroom. The way they perceive themselves and the way they are perceived may affect their functioning. Approximately 82.4 % of the respondents observed that the gifted child usually feels confident while approximately 17.6 % noted that the gifted child feels that he or she is the target of observation by other people. Approximately 62.5 % of the respondents felt that the gifted child is envied by peers. Approximately 34.1 % felt that peers respect gifted children for their ability, while approximately 3.4 % felt that they are rejected by their peers.

The implications of these findings suggest the need for counselling the gifted child in the Nigerian school system. Even though the self-concept of the gifted child may be described as positive, the study also shows that the gifted child is usually saddled with additional classroom responsibilities which may be beyond his or her maturity. Gifted children have to relate to peers who may perceive them as being different. The classroom teacher also has to recognize the needs of the gifted child. Effective counselling of gifted children should begin with the understanding of who they are and the roles which home, school, community and the Nigerian Government can play in their lives.

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