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SUPPORTING EDUCATIONAL AND EMOTIONAL NEEDS OF THE GIFTED IN NIGERIAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Adeyanju 'Lade Joel (Ph.D),
Faculty Of Education,
Obafemi Awolowo University,
Ile-Ife, Nigeria.

Abstract: *The gifted child is considered as a special child with 'disability'. He/she is emotional because most of the times the special needs that he/she deserves are often not met. The gifted child sits in class with normal children with very little or no attention given him/her. When found to be fast at learning, progress often gets slow as a result of neglect. Most of the time, such children are considered troublesome whereas they are not, it is the special attention that they need.*

The paper through survey examined 50 parents/teachers perception on special children and those 'label' gifted that they have identified and taught. The study assessed the characteristic behaviour, methods adopted to meet his/her educational needs and type of support provided him or her in the school system. The modified standardized Intelligence Quotient Test was used by teachers to screen the learners classified as gifted while stratified random sampling procedure was used to select participating teachers.

A 20-item questionnaire was used to collect relevant data while descriptive statistics of mean score and standard deviation were use to analyse the data. A mean x SD = 13.20 was found for the disposition of the gifted. Result of data show that 42 (84%) of respondents agreed that the 'gifted' is a special child with no 'disability' 27 (54%) of respondent agreed that the 'gifted' was not normally excluded from organized school programme; 31 (62%) accepted that schools make provision to allow him/her progress at his/her learning pace. Only 2 (4%) of respondents claimed that parents of the 'gifted' come from low socio-economic class of the society.

It was suggested that problems of the gifted be reduced by involving parents in continuous education about their 'gifted' wards. Gifted children require more flexible educational experience; professionals should therefore be involved in their training. Parents' discussion groups will be expedient so that 'gifted' rearing experience could be made more enjoyable. Schools should employ specialist teachers and teachers should use discovery and learning techniques. Teachers should focus on higher order skills. The

media has a role to play, especially by promoting the cause of the people with special needs.

Introduction

The 'gifted' are those few individuals who due to some reasons have distinguished themselves in one area of human endeavour or the other. While the term 'gifted' has different meanings for different users, gifted children are those whose intellectual and creativity task commitment are above average. A fair degree of combination of these concepts: talent, intelligence and creativity are considered very important when giftedness is being discussed. (Renzulli 1978 in Adeyanju 1996).

The origin of the traditional definition of giftedness is based on general intelligence as measured from the administration of such battery of tests that Stanford Binet designed for the Echster intelligence scale for children. The test was revised in 1921 so as to accommodate other concepts.

Talent simply describes the innate or any special aptitude that the individual is endowed with. Intelligence on the other hand describes the ability to learn and understand; it refers to the ability to cope with new situation; news or information. Learners in secondary school need to be intelligent to learn what is expected of them in and out of the classroom in order to progress. However, the gifted child specifically needs to be creative. He needs to form out of nothing, in order to make something new. Since the power to be creative is innate, the child has to be imaginative, original and constructive to become exceptional amongst the peer group. (New English Dictionary and Thesaurus 2000).

In the various definitions of 'gifted', the common and closely related words that are used include 'insightful', 'genius' and 'precocious', these are regarded as very early remarkable development. Tonybee (1964) in Adeyanju (1996) once questioned why America was neglecting the creative minority in the country. While the gifted in any society is always in the minority, it is also on the minority that the society depends for her survival. The gifted provides new and modifiable and acceptable ideas on crucial problems. Gifted persons are observed to show consistency in performance in worthwhile field or endeavour. Persistence and exhibition of surprises is observed during the process of creation and the end products often make the concept 'intended' clearer to the larger world. These set of individuals are taught in the same classroom environment shared by special and the other learners because they benefit from other learners as other learners also benefit from them..

Tilstone, Florin and Rose (1998) see inclusion as that opportunity provided all persons with a disability coming together and participating fully in all socio economic and recreational activities. It is considered that both normal and people with disability can be gifted, hence the need for attempting this study.

In this paper, inclusion refers to total eradication of placement of special children in any special education classes for acquisition of skills, intellectual development and socialization aspects of their lives.

Literature

It is known that the desire to include children with special need that began in 1970 suffered a set back especially in African countries. There are evidence of lack of getting the desired attention of the special children, and the specialized trained teachers that should cater for the diverse special needs of the learners were also not there. (Mc Coy, 1995) The UNESCO Salamanca Meeting of 1994 put forward the needs for the creation of a friendly environment and acceptance of the persons with disability without any form of discrimination. In Nigeria, the National Policy on Education (2004) Section 10, page 49, on the Universal Basic Education Scheme explains further the interest of the federal government to supply all the needed facilities for integration of special classes and units in ordinary and public schools. There are evidence of integration in Schools in Oyo, Osun and Lagos States. Such schools are also available in most other states but the needed infrastructure is often not adequate.

There is however paucity of research on how best to support the emotional needs of the gifted especially in Nigerian secondary schools. The experience of teachers in the established school for talented children at Abuja Academy in Nigeria is not too different because of the current poor funding of education. The gifted are not left out, their needs are also not being adequately met despite their inclusion.

In the opinion of Rice (2004), gifted children have much cognitive energy required for them to perform to level of expectation. They develop attention and learning difficulties because they need to use the reserve of energy in compensating. The result is that they often fall short in day to day consistency and performance. The gifted has the understanding that he/she can achieve more. Without the needed supports the result becomes unproductive. As a result of inability to meet the emotional needs of the gifted, the exhibition of unrest sets in. Unrest often leads to adaptation by raging, initializing, letting out in small bursts; oversensitivity, boredom, inability to control behaviour or organise thought. The lack of meeting the emotional needs of gifted children shows through their anxiety and depression.

The Educational needs of the Gifted Child

Various research findings in the western world have advanced suggestions as to how the gifted education should be met. The Individual with Disabilities Act (IDEA 1990) states that gifted education is special education. Therefore, exceptional students should be placed in the least restricted environment. The document states further that advanced learners should not be taught in regular classroom. Stating further, the gifted children need specially designed learning experiences that fit their educational attainment level. They need differentiated curricular elements content, process, and product where teachers can present different approaches to what students learn, how they learn it and how they demonstrate what they have learned (Ann, 1995). There are other view points that gifted students should 'skip' classes when they are to be promoted. The Nigerian situation would be out of place if this 'model' is adopted. This is because the idea of inclusion will be out of place. Indeed, the interest shown

on the educational needs of the gifted is recorded in her national policy statement. The overall aim of the programme of the gifted in Nigeria includes:

"the identification and appropriately nurturing Nigeria gifted children so as to enable them develop to their full potential for their own benefit and that of Nigeria at large (National Committee Blue Print on Education for the gifted and talented, (1986))"

The Federal Government of Nigeria also recognises the existence of the specially talented persons. NPE (1977 Revised 1981). The Section 8, Paragraph 54 to 56 on page 36, exposes the interest of the Federal Government's provision for the gifted as regards their psycho-education and utility. The role that the gifted could play in the nation's economic and technological development of Nigeria are highlighted in this case. The Section 8:56 also mentions the motivation of the gifted through provision of free education at all levels. In 1983, attempt to implement a programme of the gifted children were made. This testifies to the interest of the Nigerian government on the education of the gifted.

At the secondary school level, gifted children often enter school at a much earlier age, younger than their classmates. The special school in Abuja caters for the gifted, but how the emotional needs of the gifted should be handled still remain a **problem** for teachers in the Nigerian educational system. This is because the policy statement on giftedness (NPE, 1977 Revised 1981) Section 8, pages 36 and 56, recognizes only the needs and existence of the gifted Nigerian children. The Federal government however promised free education for them at all levels. (IDEA, 1990) on special education laws put it that exceptional students should be placed in the least restrictive environment. The standard that the gifted and the specially talented require differ from the regular classroom setting.

Ann (1995) recommends differentiated instruction and methods of accommodating the diverse needs of students generally. Stressing further, the author puts it that the learning environment of the gifted should be such that maximizes their capabilities. By differentiating the curricula elements, content, process and product, as stated earlier, teachers are challenged to use different approaches to teach them.

The guides to be followed in teaching children are many. A few of them revolve around the need to give them a superior teacher, to guide them. The superior teacher should allow them to learn at a faster pace than their age peers. The superior teacher is expected to use discovery learning techniques and inquiry methods. Gifted children should be allowed to learn differently using the non-traditional ways. Teaching of the gifted therefore requires that the teacher helps them focus on higher order thinking skills. Such a special teacher should allow the gifted children to set their own goals and evaluate their own work.

Webb (1993) puts it that the needs of the gifted are similar to those of other children since they experience the same developmental stages especially for the younger

children. The gifted also face the same potential limiting problems. For example, they may come from poverty stricken family, substance abuse or alcoholism. It is never known that the gifted have more socio-emotional needs compared with others. (Webb and Kleine, 1993). This is why special attention should be given to affective performance.

Clark (1992) and Seagoe (1974) speaking on the intellectual and personality attributes that characterize the gifted, put it that these characteristics may be strengthened but they also have potential problems. The gifted are known to be inquisitive, they acquire and retain information quickly, they are motivated from within. The weaknesses in their characteristics include impatience with others and dislikes for basic routine. They will ask embarrassing questions; and show excessive interests, they are strong willed and would resist direction. The creative child often exhibit a lot more of these characteristics when they cannot have it their own way, they suffer emotional problems (Adeyanju, 1996).

Webb and Kleine (1993) states further that a combination of some of these problems may lead to intense frustration and emotional outburst. This happens when there is uneven development. In an art class, a child may have an idea of what he/she wants to draw, paint, construct or create seeing in his/her own "minds eye" but may be hindered by undeveloped motor skills.

Other emotional problems of the gifted that also affect the Nigerian child includes, lack of emotional support, school culture and norms, expectations by others including peer relations depression, absence of attention from family cycle and many other distractions. The reduction of emotional needs of giftedness in Nigeria especially call for the understanding of the nature and behavioural characteristics of the gifted.

Objective

There is also paucity of research on how best parents/teachers and the society will support the several needs of the gifted without influencing him/her especially in the Nigerian setting. The gifted is considered a special child and at the same time with disability. If removed from his/her peer group, more problems may result. The special needs that parents/teachers and the schools gloss over motivates this research. Neglect, lack of attention being denied the gifted and the assumption that the attitude could be checked from a basis for the research. The study is however set to assess the perceptions of parents/teachers on characteristic behaviour of the gifted and the support that are provided for their educational needs.

Research Question

Two research questions guides the study, they are:

1. Do gifted children exhibit similar behavioural characteristics?
2. Are the needs of the gifted being adequately met?

Methodology

From the population of all secondary school teachers in Ile-Ife, Nigeria, 50 randomly selected parents and teachers, 15 male and 35 female, that have identified with the

gifted child was made. The age of the teachers/parents was between 32 and 52. x age being 42 years. 79.3 per cent have post-primary school teaching experience above ten years. The other 20.7 percent have less than eight years teaching experience. Using stratified randomisation, procedure, a sample selection of 20 other school learners of age between 9 years and 15 years, x 12 years old, classified as special students were made for the purpose of observing and having an informal discussion with them. While teachers/parents responded to a twenty-item questionnaire on Supporting Emotional Needs of the Gifted "SENG", the special students were observed and orally interviewed in an informal setting.

Instrumentation

A twenty-item 'Yes, No' type of questionnaire that address issues of characteristic behaviour, educational needs of the gifted (SENG) and how schools system meet their needs was served on teacher/parent. Data collected thereafter were analysed using percentage mean score and standard deviation where necessary.

Validity and Reliability

Face and content validity were made by two expert judges in the subject discipline. Five questions were reworked to ensure their usability. A sample of 10 non - participating teachers were served the instruments for reliability that yielded a coefficient of $r = 0.52$. A standardized test was given to screen 20 other special students that were label gifted by teachers.

Result And Discussion

Table 1: Parents Teacher's Perception on Education Support and Emotional Needs of the Gifted in Secondary School (N = 50)

		YES	NO
1.	Do you ever teach a gifted child in your class?	50 (100.00)	0 (0.00)
2.	Do you see the gifted child as special?	48 (96.00)	02 (4.00)
3.	Is the gifted essentially having a very high intelligence quotient?	46 (92.00)	04 (8.00)
4.	Does he/she demonstrate a wide range of special abilities?	48 (96.00)	02 (4.00)
5.	Does he/she break the rules?	15 (30.00)	35 (70.00)
6.	Is he/she lonely?	45 (90.00)	05 (10.00)
7.	Does he/she improvise materials to meet his goals?		
8.	Are the parents gifted of gifted child from a low socio-economic class?	50 (100.00)	0 (0.00)
	Is he/she handicapped in any way?	02 (4.00)	48 (96.00)
9.	Is he/she considered a special child?	08 (16.00)	42 (84.00)
10.	Does he/she demand special attention from you?	05 (10.00)	45 (90.00)
11.	Does he/she exhibit anxiety?	47 (94.00)	03 (6.00)
12.	Is he/she oversensitive?	50 (100)	0 (0.00)
13.	Does he/she exhibit inability to control behaviour or	42 (84.00)	08 (16.00)
14.	organise thought?	31 (62.00)	19 (38.00)
15.	Does the school system recognise his/her special needs?	50 (100.00)	0 (0.00)

16.	Is such a child excluded from some school organised programme?	27 (54.00)	23 (46.00)
17.	Does the school give specially rated materials for his/her intellectual development?	20 (40.00)	30 (60.00)
18.	Is there a provision made by the school to allow him/her progress at his/her own learning pace?	31 (62.00)	19 (38.00)
19.	Does he/she identify with a particular teacher?	30 (60.00)	20 (40.00)
20.	Does the family meet his/her needs?	45 (90.00)	05 (10.00)

Ex = 700

x = 35

SD = 13.02

Ex = 300

x = 15

SD = 15.84

From the analysed response of teacher/parents, there seems to be similarity in the pattern of their response. 50 (100.00) percent have noticed the gifted child, and also accepted that they exhibited anxiety, and that the schools recognise their special need. Another 50 (100.00) percent agreed that the gifted improvised materials to meet his/her learning goals. 48 (96.00) percent, acknowledged that the gifted is talented and creative; and also demonstrates wide range of special abilities. 47 (94.00) percent believed the gifted demand special attention from parent/teacher. 48 (96.00) percent believed that gifted children are product of high and now low socio-economic parental status. The question as to how schools attempt to meet the needs of the gifted was investigated. The analysed response showed that 30 (60.00) percent accepted that the schools gave specially rated materials for the self intellectual development of the gifted. 27 (54.00) percent claimed that the gifted was excluded from some school organized programmes. 31 (62.00) percent perceived that some provisions are made by the school for the gifted in order to make him/her progress at personal learning pace. It is however interesting to note that 45 (90.00) percent of the respondents claimed that the family was responsible for meeting the needs of the gifted.

Response from the Gifted

When an on the spot assessment of gifted children was made, more than 85% (17 children) were noticed to engage in various personal activities. Reading, constructing with found objects, drawing and involvement in creative play activities characterised their activities. Attempts were made to engage some of them in a discussion informally. Some were indifferent while some others extended the discussion and brought in variety of subject matters outside the school learning. Their interest span was found to be very wide.

The research question on whether gifted children exhibited similar behavioural characteristics was analysed:

45 (90.00) percent respondents accepted them as special children. 42 (84.00) agreed also that they are oversensitive, while 46 (92.00) testified to the gifted as essentially exhibiting very high intelligent quotient. Arising from the positive disposition that respondents have about the gifted child, it was concluded that the gifted exhibited similar behavioural characteristics.

The second research question that asked whether the needs of the gifted are adequately met was analysed. 45 (90.00) percent of the respondents accepted that the family was responsible for meeting the needs. That could be true if parents have the capability. The education of the gifted is special and that sum up to 27 (54.00) percent of respondents claim that they were excluded. 31 (62.00) percent attested that the school make provision for learner to move at his/her own pace. Arising from the positive response to the issue of special needs, the research question 2 was also found tenable.

Conclusion

The educational and emotional needs of the gifted are often not met by the Nigerian schools system. While parents and teachers recognise the needs of these special children more has to be done to give the needed support to them so that their progress will not be delayed. There is evidence that gifted children behaviour is universal. They are inquisitive, fast learners and can become emotional where learning is below their standard and capability. Gifted children demonstrate wide range of special abilities they have very wide intelligent quotient ready for tapping.

Recommendation

A way by which the emotional needs of the gifted is met would be through understanding of the nature of their behaviour. Parents have significant role to play as these children live most part of their formative years at home with them. Parents can form the gifted children parents club to share ideas on their children. Teachers should use diverse instructional methods to teach them. They should be guided as they are exposed to more flexible educational experiences. Arbitrary age grouping should be discouraged and once a gifted child is discovered, he/she should be made to enter school early so as to encourage the development of his/her special abilities. It was recommended that special schools be well-funded, equipped and staffed with professionals that can handle the gifted children.

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