

THE PLACE OF GIFTEDNESS IN THE NIGERIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM

KINGDOM U. GOODLUCK AND F. O. NJAMA-ABANG

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ABSTRACT

This paper had made serious effort in defining the concept “giftedness”. It went further to discuss the place of giftedness in Nigerian education system in the light of the recommendation of the national policy on education, disregard for merit in our society, the menace of our quota system syndrome, and tribal sentiments in the country. Consequently, in conclusion among other things the paper suggested that merit should not be compromised with, for any reason. The school system, educators, planners, administrators, counsellors, psychologists and government should play their parts in identifying and developing the gifted persons early enough, as doing this would mean developing the nation technologically and otherwise, for self-reliance and nation building.

KEY WORDS: Giftedness, Nigerian Education System.

INTRODUCTION

Giftedness is a complex concept covering a wide range of abilities, talents and traits. Thus individuals are endowed with different and unique abilities in life. This makes them to perform brilliantly in areas of endeavour – such as academics, creativity, leadership etc; when there is enabling environment for them to explore and ultimately maximize their natural potentials (Ikpaya, 2001). Some individuals as noted by Gibson and Peterson (2003) are exceptionally gifted over their fellows. These have capabilities and when they are ultimately utilized, the benefits goes to the individual, his immediate environment and his society at large. Nigeria has these exceptionally talented people otherwise known as the gifted.

However, it is very unfortunate that though Nigeria has provision for the gifted in its national policy on education (1981), the place of the gifted in our educational system and the society at large has been neglected. Khartric (2004) noted that a society where the gifted is identified, recognized, encouraged and empowered in all aspects of life is bound to be a progressive, stabilized and highly developed one.

Thus this paper focuses on the following headings: definition of giftedness; the place of giftedness in Nigeria education system; and conclusion.

DEFINITION OF GIFTEDNESS

For now, as posited by Adima (1989), it is obvious that the meaning of giftedness is elusive, because it is generally accepted that every person is gifted, in the sense that he excels in certain areas of activity. All the same, some are more gifted than the others in that they are better than a large proportion of persons of the same age and socio-economic conditions in a wide variety of activities. Thus Obanya (1983) and Denga (1986) remarked that giftedness involves the notion of being better than the majority of members of a particular reference group.

Hence special educators see giftedness as embodying:

- i. Exceptional ability: - An exceptionally high level of general intelligence as well as achievement in specific areas of activity.
- ii. High creativity: - Exceptionally high level of demonstrable and potential ability to

Kingdom u. Goodluck, Department of Educational Foundations, Guidance and Counselling,
University of Calabar, Calabar, Nigeria

F. O. Njama-abang, Department of Educational Foundations, Guidance and Counselling,
University of Calabar, Calabar, Nigeria

formulate new ideas, think divergently, application of ideas and thinking to problem solving.

- iii. High task commitment: - Exceptionally high degree of motivation to work on a project and see idea to fruition (Adima, 1989).

Also some thinkers speculate that giftedness is a high intelligence quotient (I.Q) or a high degree of abstract and symbolic learning ability. However, this definition refuses to consider creativity and specific talents as giftedness.

This paper agrees with Kirk (1962) who noted that, with giftedness showing itself in so many different ways, perhaps we can think of it in more general terms for practical purposes as superior ability to deal with facts, ideas, relationships, whether this ability comes from a high intelligence quotient (I.Q) or less well defined creativity. Kirk concluded that we can then refer to those with special aptitudes in more specific fields as talented.

Hence the basic thing about giftedness is that it is definitely individual thing and orientation. The common denominator however, is intellectual superiority.

The Place of Giftedness in Nigeria Education System

Giftedness as noted by Abang (2005), is an endowment from the cosmic or the sublime. Divine nature apportions His "gifts" according to His will, hence the reasons for the difficulties people encounter in understanding the gifted and the word giftedness. The very few who receive excess portions of the gift are meant to perform certain tasks for humanity and the fulfillment of this gifted function is only possible in a society that recognizes him and nurtures him, (Abosi, 1987). Meanwhile it could sound ironical to say that most "gifted" persons do not make meaningful contribution to society. Because in most cases they are misunderstood, emotionally disturbed, frustrated, lonely etc and with this, they may end up as alcoholics, drug addicts, chain smokers, broken hearted and could die prematurely because of frustration and lack of opportunity to serve. This phenomenon is worse in Nigeria because of the recommendation of National Policy on Education; disregard for merit; quota system syndrome; and tribal sentiments – as expatiated below.

The Recommendation of National Policy on Education

In the national policy on education (1981 revised pp. 36, 37), Nigeria government's major objective is, "to provide opportunities for exceptionally gifted children to develop at their own pace in the interest of the nation's economic and technological development". Also that, "the ministries of education will, in consultation with the appropriate bodies, provide special programmes for gifted children, but within the normal educational set up". But these were only paper declarations which were not translated into functional and practical phenomena.

According to Iwundu (1991:76) "the government in 1986, unfolded its plan to search for what it termed as 'gifted children'. The policy was aimed at identifying talented children in the country and nurturing them in the 'unity schools'." The government believed that for the nation to extend the frontiers of knowledge, the high academic potentials of gifted children needed to be identified early and provided with appropriate stimulating environment congenial to their being, fully tapped potentials for the benefits of the country. In April of the same year, 1986, Iwundu continued, the Federal Ministry of Education set up the national planning committee on the gifted. The committee's duty was to design an academic programme for the identification and education of the gifted children.

The measure used to identify the children were said to be the national common entrance examination in 1987 and specially designed intelligent test. Out of the 1.7 million children who passed out of the primary school that year only 258,000 were selected and gained admission into JSS I of the Federal Government Secondary Schools. In 1988, 1,125 took part in a two batch screening exercise in ten centres between April and May; a final number of 130 children were selected as the "gifted children". The non federal government colleges selected were Command Secondary School Ibadan; Barewa College Zaria; and St. Theresa's College Nsukka. The yardstick for selecting these schools was their location in university towns and the need to involve the nation's premier universities in the programme. Other centres were located at Suleja and Shagamu respectively (Iwundu, 1991). However at the end of it all the whole selection was bias as it did not represent the true candidates and venues rather the interests of some opportuned few.

Evaluation of the Project: Despite the tremendous and fascinating ideas of the Nigerian gifted children project as discussed above, not much has been achieved. Iwundu (1991) defined giftedness in respect to high intellectual creative, artistic and leadership capabilities. However, the measures used in the selection did not tap the qualities listed. Scores in an achievement test such as the national common entrance consisting of English, Mathematics and General Knowledge Papers cannot predict success in future career. If it is related in some ways to intellectual capability, it did not relate to creativity or artistic. There were also allegations of examination malpractice. This could affect the validity of successful candidates.

Disregard for Merit

The 6-3-3-4, system of education is supposed to be talent-seeking oriented, but it has been adulterated by the desire to acquire "paper qualification" (Woruka and Kemjika, 1995). By the objectives of the system, children who fail the Junior Secondary Certificate Examination are expected to branch out to vocational courses (Denga, 2009). But in practice, these students either seek admission into other private acclaimed government approved schools, or use dubious means to reroute themselves into the senior secondary school (Adima, 1989). These same children would advance to universities by beating the Senior School Certificate Examination (SSCE) and the University Matriculation Examination (UME) through dubious means as well; only to end up as secret cult faithfuls when they could not cope with the academic work involved, hence they constitute serious nuisance and threat to innocent lives in the environ. Also on academics, most gifted people that are from poor background explore their potential to the fullest. Unfortunately most of our highly gifted academics like Doctors and Professors are not allowed to exhibit their potentials in the government both at the policy making and implementation stages of the country (Woruka and Kemjika, 1995).

Highly gifted people as noted by Adima (1989) that would have contributed greatly to the economic development of this country are wallowing in the pits of rejection, frustration and poverty. This is because their positions have been taken over by the most influential, it is no longer an issue of merit but "man know man" – corruption. It is unfortunate that from independence, 1960, till now, Nigeria's economic

destiny is still controlled by external influences. Our engineers seem to be mere "appendages" to their Western counterparts because the government is not supportive enough; as well as the unfavourable type of curriculum designs used in our education system. One which has not been flexibly designed to identify and encourage the different categories of giftedness the nation is endowed with (Adima, 1989). Obviously, no nation lacks the gifted and talented youths, as opined by Isangedighi (2007), but what each nation does with them varies from nation. Developed nations like America adjusts her educational curriculum from time to time to suit and identify the gifted and how they can achieve proportionately in respect to their potentials (Adima, 1989). Japan after the Second World War overhauled her educational curriculum as to identify and encourage the gifted, talented and the creative, and today Japan is referred to as the Asian Tiger because of her technological advancement. Regrettably, this pragmatic vision is yet to be cast into the Nigerian educational mainstream—where corruption and nepotism is the order of the day and the youths seem to be oriented to "assorted certificates".

Quota System Syndrome

This is basically political, the quota system of Nigeria government or the so called federal character has dealt a serious blow on gifted education in Nigeria. Ugwu (1994) observed that the university matriculation examination is a case in point. A child may score 290 to study Medicine but will not be admitted because another child who belongs to the catchment area scored 240 and should be taken. This system is also used in admission into Federal Government Colleges thereby ignoring the proper placement of most gifted children existing in the country. The quota system menace, called federal representation or character also extends to job selection where several times useful human resources had been refused opportunities to serve who would have possibly delivered the goods, merely because the quota of his zone, State or Local Government Area has been filled possibly through dubious means (Ikpaye, 2001). It has been said that the gifted has leadership qualities, how many of such is being allowed in the political scene of the nation when corruption is the order of the day. It is also the issue of having round pegs in square holes (Ugwu, 1994).

Tribal Sentiments

In this paper much has been said on the ill-treatment and neglect of the gifted individuals who would have been in the better place to revamp this "all round" sick country; and this neglect came as a result of high level corruption and nepotism and in addition to these, had been tribalism (Iwundu, 1991). The ethnic groups of this country are not in harmony, the tone has usually been on how to drag the "national cake" or to be better placed in sensitive positions based on "my brother, my clan's man or my tribal man" and not based on merits. Hence these brothers and tribe's men as novices would only go there to loot, mismanage and ruin sensitive offices that determine the live-wire of the country. To Ugwu (1994), in most cases, when identification test is conducted for the gifted, what is upper most is whether a child is from Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, Edo or Ijaw etc and not his performance. With this type of orientation, the place of the gifted is relegated to the background.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

This paper has critically examined the concept of giftedness in the context of Nigeria educational system. In the notion of this paper, the markers of the Nigerian educational policy are yet to grip with the efficacy of the concern of giftedness. Our schools primary, post-primary and tertiary are examples of handicapping environments for the development of the gifted. The national philosophy of education which choruses the need for schools to cater for the exceptional children (the gifted) is rather sacrificed at the alter of theory (Woruka and Kemjika, 1995).

This paper therefore concludes that where our schools remain places students go for "assorted certificates" and where there is corruption in high places, problem of quota system, disregard for merit and ethnicity, this will continue to constitute handicapping environment for the gifted. Hence, if the potential creativeness and inventiveness of the gifted are regrettably repressed, our future society will continue to suffer from scientific and technological backwardness. Thus the paper suggests an overhaul of Nigerian primary, post-primary and tertiary school curricula to become talent seeking and sources of motivation for the gifted. Our society should change her negative attitude towards the gifted in order to lend breath to our aspiration for scientific, technological and economic self-reliance. Career

Guidance/Counsellors can be of positive help in this regard. Parents, teachers, special educators and psychologists should make effort to identify the gifted children and the government should be ready to invest intensively and extensively in the education of the gifted children.

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