

## Education of the Gifted/Talented Students in Nigeria: A Justification

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### Abstract

Gifted and talented individuals are cognitively prepared and ready for advanced learning. Educating this peculiar individuals has a lot of benefits for the individuals, the society and the country at larger. This paper focused on the justification for gifted/talented education. It x-rayed the need for nurturing environment for gifted/talented learners with a view to bringing out the best from the individuals and the society. It also delved into the advantages of educating gifted/talented learners in our country. It was concluded that any attention given to the education of gifted and talented student in Nigeria is an investment that will definitely be rewarding and beneficial to the country in the nearest future. As a result, it was recommended that governments, non-governmental organizations and philanthropists should be actively involved in this task.

**Keywords:** Education, gifted, talented, justification

### INTRODUCTION

To many people, there is no need for education of the gifted/talented students. While some people think that all persons are gifted and or talented, others argue that there is nothing like gifted/talented persons and that all students can do well if provided with enabling environment. Another argument against the practice of educating gifted/talented person is that since individuals are gifted and talented, there is no need of wasting time, and scarce resources on giving them specialized education and that instead, such monies should be spent on individuals with disabilities and impairment.

Gifted and talented students have been the focus of research by scientists, educators, and researchers in special education, educational psychology, and general education for over a century. Although there appears to be consensus regarding the notion that there are students who are gifted, students who are talented, and students who are both gifted and talented, the same type of unity does not exist regarding the definition of gifted and talented students and how to address the needs of these students

According to Marland's (1972) report to the United States Office of Education (USOE), gifted/talented children are those identified by professionally qualified persons, who by virtue of outstanding abilities are capable of high performance. These are children who require differentiated educational programmes and/or services beyond those normally provided by the regular programmes in order to realize their contribution to self and society. Children capable of high performance include those with demonstrated achievement and/or potential ability in any of the following areas singly or in combination:

- General intellectual ability;
- Specific academic aptitude;
- Creative and productive thinking;
- Leadership ability;
- Visual and performing arts and
- Psychomotor ability.

The Javits Gifted and Talented Education Act (1988) describes gifted children as demonstrating high levels of accomplishment, or the potential for such accomplishment, compared to their peers. These accomplishments may be in intellectual, creative, autistics, or leadership fields. The Act went on to say that giftedness is not dependent on culture or economic status, and that those who display giftedness require additional services reflecting their individual needs.

Clark (2002) defines giftedness as "only a label that society gives to those who have actualized their ability to an unusually high degree or give evidence that such achievement is imminent." Gifted children need outside instruction and development opportunity to expand their minds and become most useful to themselves and society. McLeod and Cropley (1989) describe the specific advantages of placing gifted children in adequate programmes.

From the definitions, it is clear that gifted/talented individuals are endowed with special aptitude,

capabilities, ability and traits which markedly distinguish them from others. Attributes such as superior intelligence as manifested via quick and productive reasoning, mental alertness, logical reasoning, logical presentation, exceptional depth of thoughts, originality and learning quickly through abstraction are all cognitive characteristics which demonstrates the uniqueness of gifted/talented persons.

Another Gagne (1995) model of giftedness, which he terms “The Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent”. Gagne’s observation is distinct in that it clearly distinguishes between giftedness and talent. Giftedness is defined by Gagne (2003), as the possession and use of untrained and spontaneously expressed natural abilities, in at least one ability domain, to a degree that places an individual in at least the top 10 percent of age peers. Gagne (2003) identifies domains representing giftedness: intellectual, creative, socio-affective and sensorimotor. Gagne (2003) sees talent as the superior mastery of systematically developed abilities or skills and knowledge in at least one field of human activity to a degree that places an individual at least among the top 10 percent of age peers who are active in that field. These skills include: academics, arts, business, leisure, social action, sports and technology. Catalysts (either positive or negative) for their development include milieu, people, provisions and events.

Nigeria as a nation can be said to be developing, and apparently developing at a slower pace than one would have imagined. This is due to many factors such a leadership problem, lack of expertise and inability to proffer solution to myriads of problem besetting her. The Chinese have devoted attention to their gifted/talented persons many centuries ago, when they identified, screened and selected their gifted/talented individuals by quantitative examinations.

It is therefore imperative to understand why the education of the gifted is necessary for a developing nation like Nigeria. One will not be surprised at the giant strides being made by China in medicine, science and technology, invention and innovation. The United States of America had long ago tapped into the potential of their gifted/talented persons with the establishment and funding of the Gifted Academy, provision of appropriate legislation to promote gifted educating in all their provinces and provision of financial backing for gifted programmes in schools.

### **THE NEED FOR GIFTED EDUCATION AS SEEN IN THE EARLY CENTURIES**

The history of gifted and talented education can be traced to Plato, who proposed the idea of selecting children of high potential and grooming them for leadership roles. In A.D. 800, Charlemagne realized that there were poor children of promising potential who could be educated as leaders. In the 15th century, a Turkish sultan searched his empire for the most intelligent boys. Comenius, in the 17th century, wrote about individuals from poor homes that had an unusual ability for learning. During the 18th century, Thomas Jefferson advocated the radical view of providing a university education for the most intelligent, at public expense.

Before the 20th century, the concept of giftedness was equated with the genius or the child prodigy of extraordinary talents and achievement. Children who demonstrated great power of memory or possessed mature writing skills, child prodigies who received advanced college degrees at a young age, and children who could speak several languages were displayed and asked to perform adult tasks.

Education of gifted/talented individuals is necessary owing to the following reasons:

- Equity
- Advancement of ability
- Discoveries, invention, innovation and creativity
- Political issues

### **PRINCIPLE OF EQUITY**

As against the misconception that gifted/talented persons has the capability to succeed without differentiated or specialized attention, the contributions by Maria Montessori, J. P. Guilford, Lev Vygotsky, and Jean Piaget helped to prove that the education of these unique individuals is indeed necessary. Montessori noted that intelligence could be developed and was not fixed. In his model, Guilford expanded the parameters of intelligence, described intelligence as educable, and concluded that there are 120 different aspects of intelligence. Vygotsky’s research conclusions addressed intelligence and educational remediation, early stimulation and language development. Piaget researched the interaction between genetics and the environment as he developed the stages of cognitive development. Continuing efforts by Jerome Bruner and Benjamin Bloom led to further support for an expanded view of intelligence. Jerome Bruner developed a theory of instruction designed to release the capacity of the mind. Bloom reexamined research data to uncover that children’s early years are optimum for learning and expanding intelligence.

We live in a society that is based on democratic principle. As a result, respect for human right and person should be a core value of any democracy. Gifted / talented student are parts and parcel of the democratic society. Denying them access to education that march their ability is a tantamount to injustice and in equity. Furthermore, this amount of inequality, which according to Thomas Jefferson, is inequality. In Nigeria,

individuals with disabilities such the visually impaired persons receive education that is tailored forwards their special needs. The principle of equity which is the core democratic value should be upheld. The gifted deserves special treatment corresponding to that received by the handicapped. Gifted/ talented students should be given the opportunity to receive education as a matter of equity.

### **Advancement of Ability**

The Nation Policy on Education (NPE, 1981) of the Federal Republic of Nigeria stated that gifted/talented children find the regular school insufficient and inadequate in terms of stimulation and providing them with academic challenges. Giftedness/talent represents potential which will wane and later rot away if it not discovered and nurtured. Efforts must therefore not be spared towards meeting the special need of academically and cognitively superior individuals in our schools. Schwartz (1994) has dedicated a whole book to presenting evidence that investing time, energy and resources in the suitable educational opportunities for the gifted is not undemocratic. She maintained that the small initial commitment yield exceptional future leaders. According to her, everyone will benefit from the rich return on such an investment.

### **DISCOVERIES, INVENTION, INNOVATION AND CREATIVITY**

Gifted/talented minds have the potential and capability to make discoveries, inventions and put Nigeria on the list countries of the world with great inventions and innovations. Through their creative ability, gifted and talented students when nurtured can bring ideas that will assist in proffer solutions to some nagging societal problems. Refusal or failure to educate and nurture gifted/talented children is like robbing our society of immense benefits derivable from such a venture.

### **POLITICAL ISSUE**

Like in China of 2200 BC, gifted/talented students can be harnessed to become future leaders. As it is often pointed out in discuss among political analysts, Nigeria, a land flowing with milk and honey, is yet to get the best crop of leaders that can move the country to the Promised Land. The country will definitely benefit later from educating the gifted and talented students as these individuals can be adequately prepared for the task of taking the society to the promise land in the nearest future.

### **CONCLUSION**

Education of the gifted and talented students within our society requires that differentiated curriculum and learning experience in terms of content, process, product and learning environment be observed. It is within this framework that the society can actually tap into the potential of these special set of people.

Denying the gifted and talented students the opportunity for the dedication that best suits their needs is like ‘shooting oneself in the leg.’ This is because the nation is missing out the opportunities that can be made available to the society by the gifted/talented individuals. This paper is therefore a clarion call on government at all levels, school owners, private organizations, non-governmental organization concerned with education and philanthropists to begin to think in this direction. This is the only way we can leave good legacy for our society and our country.

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