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Counselling Of Parents and Teachers of Gifted Children as a Sociological Tool for Sustainable Development in Modern Nigeria

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Abstract: In this paper, counselling of the parents and teachers of gifted children is viewed as an essential condition for social, political, economic, technological and sustainable development of a country. Hence, the need to make it relevant to performing these laudable roles. It is common for some parents and teachers to come across one or more outstanding or exceptionally brilliant children in their home or classroom. If concerned parents and teachers are rightly counseled, these children are capable of high performance in various ways requiring exhibition of skills. Although they are gifted children or children with special needs, they are cognitively superior to the majority of members of a particular group and they are very superior to other children of the same age. The study employed inter-disciplinary method in the gathering of information. Findings revealed that some parents and teachers often encounter problems in handling these set of children at home and in the classroom because of their peculiarities or precociousness. The paper recommended training and retraining of professionals to meet the yearnings of gifted children and at the same time effective furnishing of parents and teachers with adequate information not to ignore or be irritated by their high ability rate. Thus, counselling can serve as crucial therapies capable of restoring hope and confidence in parents and teachers of gifted children for sustainable development in modern Nigeria.

Keywords: Counselling, Parents and teachers, Gifted children, Sustainable development, Nigeria.

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INTRODUCTION

Raising a child with a disabling condition, chronic health, learning difficulty, or a child that simply requires more attention than the others can be a serious and very frustrating challenge to the family and concerned teachers. This explains the reason why many parents of gifted children often suffer and experience untold embarrassment, ridicule, reproach and misrepresentation from neighbours and other members of the community just because of their children's predicament. These parents tend to develop feelings of being overwhelmed, of anger, guilt and constantly beset with rhetorical questions - 'why me?' Besides, some of the children with severe special needs tend to drain enormous amounts of time, energy, and money from the family coffers. In fact, marital problems are reported to be present to a greater degree because of lack of time for pertinent issues at home and frequent problem of parents disagreeing on what needs to be done for the gifted children (Heller, 2012).

Olukotun (2001) observes that some contemporary African ethnic societies perceived the family of gifted children as outcast who are receiving a divine punishment for the sins they committed. Some parents have even given up hope, concluding that the presence of disability would definitely preclude their wards from being able to excel in life without knowing that disability does not necessarily imply failure or

mediocrity. Nwazuoke (1998) opines that parents and teachers are very significant in the life of children with special needs. If parents develop very negative attitude and uncharitable attitude towards the challenges of their children, then the children are doomed. Many of these parents are not well informed about the specific nature of their children's challenges and tends to worry about their future. This is where the importance of effective counselling becomes imperative. Parents of gifted children need information and appropriate counselling concerning their wards/children disabilities. Counselling provides information about resources and treatments available, as well as coping strategies that may be beneficial to families with gifted children. Thus, it is imperative for parents and families of gifted children to seek for counselling so as to ensure effective management of their exceptional children (Ali, 2012). According to Odudele (2014), counselling is a re-orientation and re-education of the individual, public and society for proper daily living objectively to solve difficult life challenges.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

Counselling

Literally, according to Oyewumi (2012), counselling connotes consultation, discussion, deliberation, exchange of ideas, advice or process of decision-making. In the perception of Ibikunle (2009), counselling has been used to denote a wide range of

procedures including advice-giving, encouragement, information giving, test interpretation and psychoanalysis. In the view of Andrew (2002), counselling refers to the practice or profession of applying psychological theories and communication skills to clients' personal problems, concerns or aspirations. It is a type of talking therapy that allows a person to talk about their problems and feelings in a confidential and dependable environment. In the words of McLeod (2003), counselling is a process which begins when a person (the client) approaches a professionally trained person (the counsellor) for help with a problem of everyday living. In simple terms, Byrne (2013) posits that counselling involves one person (the counsellor) helping another person (the client) to work through some difficult or painful emotional, behavioural or relationship problem or difficulty.

Hahn and Maclean in Ibikunle (2009) sees counselling as the process which takes place in a one-to-one relationship between individual troubled by a problem with which he cannot cope alone and a professional worker whose training and experience have qualified him to help others reach solution to various types of personal difficulties. Elaborating on the meaning of counselling, Lacombe (2013) submits that counselling helps with problems in living through an interaction with a trained professional. Besides:

- It offers a way to gain perspective on ones behaviour, emotions and relationships.
- It provides a means to express ones feelings and identify patterns of thinking.
- It alleviates anxiety, depression and anger in their many forms.
- It helps develop communication skills for dealing with conflict and frustration.
- It is a means for addressing pain, working through loss and adding meaning to life. And, it may or may not include any of the following methods: advice giving, instruction, skill development, process consultation and/or opinion.

Essentially, counselling can often involve talking about difficult or painful feelings. The major aim is to help the counsellee deal with and overcome issues that are causing pain or making him feel uncomfortable. It can provide a safe and regular space for him to talk and explore difficult feelings. A counsellor is trained to listen with empathy. He can handle any negative thought and feeling. It is important to always share ones worries and fears with someone who would acknowledge such feelings and is able to help to arrive at a positive solution. Hence, it is imperative to always consult experienced and professionally qualified counsellor. Thus, for counselling to be effective, the counsellee needs to build a trusting and safe relationship with the counsellor.

Gifted Children

According to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2012), gifted children refers to any of various difficulties (such as a physical, emotional, behavioural, or learning disability or impairment) that causes an individual to require additional or specialized services or accommodations (such as in education or recreation). It is an umbrella term for a wide array of diagnoses, from those that resolve quickly to those that will be a challenge for life and those that are relatively mild to those that are profound. It covers developmental delays, medical conditions, psychiatric conditions, and congenital conditions that require accommodations so children can reach their potentials (Mauro, 2020). In other word, the term relates to those children who may have challenges which are more severe than the typical child, and could possibly last a lifetime. These children will need extra support, and additional services.

Besides, gifted children can be described as those children that require special attention and specific necessities that other children do not (Kagan, 2020). In clinical term, gifted children refer to individuals who require assistance for disabilities that may be medical, mental, or psychological (Wikipedia, 2020). They are those children who have a disability or a combination of disabilities that makes learning or other activities difficult. Some of these children have challenges having to do with a syndrome, terminal illness, profound cognitive impairment, learning disabilities, food allergies, developmental delays, panic attacks or even serious psychiatric problems. Precisely, gifted children include those children with intellectual disabilities, which causes them to develop more slowly than other children; speech and language disorder, such as a problem expressing themselves or understanding others; physical disability, such as vision problem, cerebral palsy, or other conditions; learning disabilities, which distort messages from their senses as well as emotional disturbances, such as antisocial, behavioural and maladjusted challenges.

Experiences of Parents and Teachers' Attitudes towards Gifted Children

It has been observed for decades by many researchers that parents having gifted children, whether mental, physical, or both, suffer a lot of mental torture and indescribable pain. Parents often receive the news of arrival of such children with a range of emotions (e.g., shock, grief, anger) that are somewhat similar to those experienced upon learning about the death of a loved one (Kandel & Merrick, 2003). To many parents, it is the beginning of a life of never ending trauma, anxiety, depression, isolation, guilt, anger, frustration, sleep deprivation/sleep issues, unhealthy eating habits, denial, dread, grief, overwhelming hopelessness, helplessness and ongoing stress (Wyatt, 2016). Put succinctly, the families of special needs children experience trauma, grief, guilt, aggression, rejection, stress, and strain, and even inclination towards murder

and suicide (Cantwell-Barti, 2009; Kaur, 2010). Thus, Eniola (1992) identifies the following as the common experiences of parents of gifted children in modern Nigeria:

- *Shock and disbelief*: parents of gifted children find themselves at the crossroad of life when they first discovered that their children are having one physical challenge or the other.
- *Loneliness*: due to the child's predicament, many parents often erroneously feel they cannot share their feelings with other people. This is a wrong notion.
- *Disillusionment*: some parents feel that it is not fair or it is injustice of the highest order for them to have children with disability.
- *Isolation*: parents of gifted children often thought that they are the only persons to bear the burden of their children's problem and so they find it difficult to share their feelings with friends around them.
- *Poor professional advice*: on many occasion, parents often resort to false professionals who would ill-advise them without seeking professional counselling.
- *Acceptance*: parents often feel ashamed to accept their children as being disabled.
- *Finance*: some parents are financially handicapped and therefore they do run into serious crisis when their children are required to undergo medical check-up, surgical operation or other clinical treatments.

On the other hand, teachers obviously varies in their attitudes towards gifted children. Some teachers ignore exceptionally good children and teach them as if they were average ones. Others recognize them, but confess they can do nothing to help them because of other overriding demands in the classroom such as the disciplinary problems which such students pose both to the teachers and slow learners. Still, other classroom teachers seem to be concerned with the slow learners and thus concentrate all their efforts in their teaching and learning on such slow learners. Besides, the attitude of the teacher towards the education of the gifted children is very paramount to the future of these children and the sustainable development of this country, Nigeria. Teachers will be able to help them if they are sensitive to their needs and willing to make changes in them where necessary, in order to give them what they need as gifted children.

Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (2000) defines a gifted as a child who is extremely intelligent. A gifted child is the one who has a natural ability to do one or more things extremely well. Pandya (2017) indicates that a gifted child when compared with peers of same chronological age may display such traits as high intellectual ability, ability to create, invent, investigate and conceptualize ideas, learn easily and readily, displays and great intellectual curiosity and

inquisitiveness, explore wide ranging and special interest of often at great depths, use vocabulary which is superior in quantity and quality, learn to read early (often well before school age), display intellectual and physical restlessness, functions at higher cognitive levels (as described by Jean Piaget), constructs and handles higher levels of abstractions, shows initiative and originality, versatility and virtuosity, seeks out challenge, create and invents beyond the parameter of knowledge on the field, questions arbitrary decisions, show alertness and quick response to new ideas etc. He stressed further the teachers are expected to know whom the gifted children are in the classroom and in what areas they are gifted.

According to them, an observant teacher should know this within the first six to eight weeks of school especially in the teaching and learning process. He can use intelligence test, observational procedures and other screening devices to help him discover them, and the teacher's attitude to them must be positive. The positive attitude which teachers are expected to exhibit to encourage gifted children in the classroom is flexibility. The teacher should be flexible with the gifted children by providing a flexible physical environment for his pupils. He should permit the gifted children to engage in more difficult tasks, so long as they are quiet, while he helps the other children. There should be flexibility in the sitting arrangement, with movable desks and chairs to allow for flexibility in seating the pupils. A flexible classroom arrangement is one condition which may enhance effective teaching and learning of gifted children.

In most cases, these children require lifetime (parental and teacher) guidance and support while dealing with everyday issues such as housing, employment, social involvement, and finances. Also, their challenges often range from mild, moderate, severe to profound. In addition, some may be curable with medical or psycho therapeutically interventions while others may be incurable and has to be managed and endured for life. The reality of having to manage gifted children and the ignorance of appropriate approach make effective counselling imperative on regular basis. This would definitely facilitate proper guidance, information and management of these children's condition. Apart from this, religious intervention becomes inevitable especially when the situations and conditions of the children defile all medical and therapeutically interventions and all hope appearing to be elusive.

Towards Counselling Parents and Teachers of Gifted Children

Effective counselling, that is, timely and appropriate counselling is crucial to bringing about a renewed hope and confidence in the parents and teachers of persons with disability. It is such a counselling that would allay the fear, worry and anxiety

of parents and teachers at the same time reassure them of positive future for their children and pupils. Eniola (1992) adds that the message has to be with empathy. Thus, effective counselling is aimed at achieving the following:

- Pointing the parents and teachers to where professional services can be obtained;
- Informing the parents about the educational opportunities and provisions available for their children;
- Re-orientating the parents and especially teachers on the need to have a positive change of attitude towards their gifted children;
- Guide the parents and teachers to where vocational rehabilitation or training is available;
- Reassuring the parents and teachers that investment in their children with disability is not a waste as there is possibility of being gainfully employed after their education;
- Enlightening the parents and teachers about the evil of abandoning or neglecting the gifted children without schooling;
- Identifying possible causes of disability and highlighting possible preventive measures to be taken so as to checkmate the reoccurrence of past incidence;
- Referring parents and teachers to the appropriate professionals capable of providing essential services to the gifted children.

It is pertinent to state that counsellors need to be constructive in dealing with parents and teachers of gifted children. Even when their observation is not encouraging enough, they still have the responsibility to be tactical and use subtle language that would be easily understood, because these parents and teachers need to be told the truth no matter how bitter it might sound. Fortner (2015) maintains that the counsellor who intends to work with parents and teachers of gifted children should himself be armed with a lot of information about the nature of the specific disability and the kind of medical or psychological intervention desirable for the children. Also, the kind and variety of technology available for managing the disability and its associate problems and the rehabilitation processes that should be initiated for gifted children are of paramount importance to the parents and teachers.

Counselling as Effective Sociological tool for Sustainable Development in Modern Nigeria

The issue of sustainable development in Nigeria is apt for a case study for some reasons. Nigeria is endowed with great physical and human resource. The question of sustainable development dominates scholarly conferences, seminars, symposia, debates, and even street-walkers' chat, etc. The concept of sustainable development is the effort at improving the socio-economic and ecological status and at exploiting and processing the environment for the purpose of

improving the quality of human life in such a way that the needs of the future generations are not jeopardized. Sustainable development according to Odudele (2018) is defined as living within the carrying capacities of the supportive ecosystem without compromising the need of the future generations. To Adeyemo (2015), it can be seen as a system of governance and cohabitation where any government strive to develop areas within the territorial integrity of the country so that citizens of that country can live comfortable lives and maintain the available infrastructures and resources to meet the need of today without compromising the infrastructural and social needs of tomorrow's generation (Ayanrinde, 2015). According to Dare (2017), he describes sustainable national development as a process and ideologies where national governments implement and develop policies and programmes that is long lasting and continuous, which is beneficial to the present generation while still being useful to the generation yet unborn.

Sustainable national development causes all forms of long lasting development, human resources, and material, social, infrastructural, industrial and structural development including security of lives and properties and improvement in existing social, economic, human and other social facilities (Harmona, 2006). Sustainable development does not stop at provision and accessibility of physical infrastructure in a particular moment, but is a continuous process. Counselling makes a huge contribution towards sustainable development of a nation. Through its preaching and teaching, it fights the vices that antagonize development: self, ethnic and regional sentiment, corruption, exploitation, dishonesty, imprudence, bribery, deceit, sycophancy, terrorism etc. and advocates non-violence and love. Counselling develops human beings themselves who in turn develop and maintain national structures. Through assemblies, seminars, workshops, meetings, communique, circulars, etc. counsellors have been in a position to show how counselling has always been a part of the forces for development. Where the government remains transient on developmental setbacks, the religious bodies remain intransigent. In other words, sustainable development must be aimed at the fulfilment of man's vocation, which ultimately leads to God.

Sustainable development seeks to meet the need and aspiration of the present without compromising the ability to meet those of the future. It is a process in which the exploitation of resources, the direction of investment, the orientation of technological development and institutional change are in harmony and enhance both current and the future potentials to meet human needs and aspiration. The starting point of effective counselling that will later influence right attitudes in and towards gifted children for sustainable development is the adequate supply of competent and qualified teachers or counsellors in schools with

effective supervision. Their number, quality, devotion, interest, enthusiasm and effectiveness will make profound impact on the production of patriotic citizen especially among the gifted children. To justify the competency in supplying of qualified teachers or counsellors that will sensitize parents and teachers about the importance of counselling for the development of the society. Experts in counselling should therefore utilize their potentials and engage in gainful character by taking teaching task serious and keeping their personality such as honesty, modesty, faithfulness, self-control, kindness, devotion, respect, punctuality and patriotism towards the gifted children for sustainable development in modern Nigeria.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

To develop is one thing and to sustain is another thing entirely. Development without sustainability is no development, be it national, international or global. The most tasking challenge of any nation today, is the challenge of sustainability. How can we maintain or sustain the already developed or established segments of our society? Counselling deals with the development of human person and is the ever current machinery for sustainable development. Consequently, Nigerians in general should avoid actions or deeds that are detrimental to the general well-being of the gifted children in our society. In other words, for effective sustainable development in Nigeria, there should be that sense of spiritual consciousness that credible sustainability of any development is informed by effective counselling of parents and teachers towards the gifted children in the contemporary Nigerian society. Hence, efforts should be intensified in working on such factors that could be of great help to these gifted children. The negative and unjust attitudes of parents, teachers and other people to the gifted children are injurious to the society and hinders sustainable development. No country therefore can grow, develop and prosper technologically, scientifically, economically and socially without peaceful cooperation and co-existence. It is on this basis that we advocate for objective moral attitude of people especially parents and teachers towards gifted children in Nigerian secondary schools. If this is done truly, then sustainable development can be achieved in modern Nigeria.

On the other hand, it is imperative for parents of gifted children to desist from perceiving themselves as being odd in the society, but start developing a positive concept about themselves and their children. This would enable them to fully accept their children as they are in spite of their evident challenges and be prepared to confront the challenges squarely by seeking for the right counsel and consulting appropriate professionals for help and necessary interventions. Parents should not hesitate to seek for counselling on regular basis on how best to properly manage and

handle gifted children. The cost of treating and managing gifted children is enormous such that parents might be unable to bear the burden alone. Government, non-governmental organization and philanthropists at all levels should be prepared to alleviate the burden of parents by making funds and other needful materials available to them. Investment in education and training of gifted children is not a waste. Hence, parents need to be encouraged never to spare any effort in giving the best education to their children irrespective of their perceived challenges. Therefore, government should complement the efforts of parents by showing better and serious interest and committing more resources to the education and training of these children. As much as provision of quality education is good, provision of job for these creams of trained and certificated gifted persons is highly essential and of paramount importance.

In conclusion, there is great awareness that effective counselling is a precondition for social, political and economic development. It is equally realized that mere expansion in student enrolment is not a solution to the perennial problems confronting the developing countries of the world. Nigeria places tremendous hope on education as a panacea for its economic, social and technological problems' and despite the huge amount of money expended yearly on the educational sectors, there seems not to have been much to show for it. Thus, to overcome various problems and challenges of the gifted children, Nigerian teachers have to be given a new orientation that enables them to incorporate the development of creativity into their teaching strategies through counselling. Until this is done, the Nigerian educational system may not be able to liberate the country from her social, political and economic predicament. Hence, counselling serves as antidote in obtaining committed and diligent gifted children for sustainable development in modern Nigeria. That is, living for legacy, touching other peoples' lives necessary for the sustainable development in contemporary Nigeria.

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