

## **Intellectually Retarded Education in Nigeria: Past, Present, and Future**

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### **Abstract**

Historically, the persons with intellectual retardation have been neglected in most cultures. In our African culture for instance families were concerned about their image in the society. So, they manage to hide their retarded members in the home environment. Today, the education of the intellectually retarded has recorded significant achievement despite the undeniable successes education of children with intellectual retardation is still being hindered by social prejudices and discriminations. This paper highlights the myriads of obstacles and challenges facing their education. The presenter therefore recommends way to improve the quality of their education for the future.

### **Introduction**

The intellectually retarded who are also referred to as mentally retarded, cognitively disabled and developmental disabled have been major targets of social prejudice and discrimination in western societies. Forced segregation, community sanctioned abuse and dehumanization, status degradation and public mortification, involuntary sterilization, denial of fundamental human rights and even euthanasia occupy prominent roles in the history of education of the mentally retarded in Nigeria. The intellectually retarded have suffered much hard at the hands of their non-disabled counterparts.

In Nigeria like most cultures the intellectually retarded have been neglected in most cultures. In our African culture, families are concerned about their image in the society so they managed to hide their retarded members in the home environment. Otherwise these persons with intellectual retardation roamed their villages and provided fun and amusements for the fun loving member of their society.

### **Education of the Intellectually Retarded**

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the first attempt to educate an individual with mental retardation was recorded. In 1798, three hunters found and captured a twelve-year-old boy in the woods of Aveyron, France. The boy was later called Victor the wild boy of Aveyron. The boy was completely unsocialised and had no language. He was pronounced an incurable idiot. Jean Marc Gaspard Itard, a physician working at an institution for the deaf refused to believe that Victor was educable. Itard began an intensive training with Victor, alongside another Frenchman, Edouard Seguin.

The child with intellectual retardation in Nigeria can be perceived as a baby on the mothers back who does not know from where the mother is coming or where she is going. Children with intellectual retardation do not determine where they should be placed in the

community, neither have they a say as to what the community should think of them. Unfortunately, children with intellectual retardation have been wrongly placed in settings such as psychiatric institutions where they do not belong (Abang, 1981).

They have been called by different names such as idiots, ode (Yoruba) dindirin (Yoruba), onyeiberibe (Ibo) imbecile, fool, animal and so on. The practice of giving derogatory names and labels to persons with intellectual retardation is not only peculiar to Nigeria. There have been periods in Nigeria's history when some tribes believed that persons with intellectual retardation are not humans but animals. Such children were taken away from the society to either the forest or the seashores and destroyed or left to die slowly and miserably.

After 1842, the missionaries brought formal education to Nigeria. The missionaries filtered out the people they saw as intelligent and taught them the act of reading and writing. They set up catechismal classes to stimulate students to read and write. They set up the schools to indoctrinate the people in their own faith. The simple sign of the cross was used to test the students. Those who cannot make the signs were taken as persons with intellectual retardation.

Elizabeth Torrey a missionary and a devote educationist was the first to start the education of the intellectually retarded in Nigeria. She is an American who spent most of her life in Kenya and East Africa. She established a child placement treatment school at Apapa, Lagos in 1965.

#### **Present Trend in the Education of the Intellectually Retarded**

The education of the intellectually retarded in Nigeria ever since 1965 had witnessed tremendous growth. Several schools were established to cater for the needs of the intellectually retarded. The schools established were special schools designed basically for the intellectually retarded at times. Also the intellectually retarded were educated alongside other disabled children. In most cases, units were established in special schools to take care of the educational needs of the intellectually retarded. Oftentimes, they were taught subjects such as English Language, Mathematics, Family Living, Elementary Science, Arts, and other basic, school subjects. Emphases were laid on these core subjects for them rather than practical and vocationally oriented subjects. Most often when they leave school they were left to develop on jobs they found in the world of works, which may not make them to be self-dependent. In most schools for these atypical population, were made to be in school to pass away time as some of them are not in the category meant for school. The educable intellectually retarded are supposed to be in school due to their high intelligence quotient. The trainable were often left in schools instead of taking them to centres where they can learn simple vocations which they can be gainfully employed with.

Factors militating against the education of the intellectually retarded are lack of population statistics, lack of proper diagnosis, inadequate manpower, attitude of the society, lack of fund, non-implementation of legislation and poor attitude of practicing teachers towards the inclusion of the special needs people in regular schools.

### **Future**

The future of the education of the intellectually retarded in Nigeria is likely to see the ray of light if all the obstacles and hindrances to their education are met. Since education is a right of every Nigerian child the intellectually retarded need to be educated in pursuance of the National Policy of Education. In order for the aims and objectives of the education of the intellectually retarded to be met and to ensure a brighter future for them. Firstly, there should be a proper population census of them without delay, which has been done to certain extent.

In the last National Population and Housing census in 2006, there is need for attitudinal change towards them and their education. Personnel's that were specially trained to teach them should be encouraged to teach them instead of looking for job in regular schools and they need to be sensitized to obey this clarion call. Funds should be made available for their education so that all the needed materials and equipment for their education are put in place, as they need practically oriented subjects. Artisans should also be employed in schools to work hand in hand with the special teachers in ensuring quality education for the intellectually retarded in order to develop them vocationally.

With the trend of educational reforms in Nigeria there is hope for the intellectually retarded.

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