

**COLLABORATION OF EDUCATION  
FACULTIES IN WEST AFRICA  
(CEFWA)**

**Conference Proceedings**

**for the 4th Annual International Conference  
of the Collaboration of Education Faculties  
in West Africa (CEFWA)**

**Held at**

**Osun State University, Osogbo, Nigeria  
from 8th - 12th September, 2014**

**An official Publication of CEFWA  
Edited by: Prof Alfred A. Adegoke**

## Contents

<b>Analysis of Cost and Financing of Secondary Education in Lagos State, Nigeria</b> <i>FAMADE, OLADIRANAFOLAYAN</i>	1
<b>Evaluation of Katsina State Mathematics Improvement Projects (2003 – 2013): A Process and Outcome Approach</b> <i>K. A. ADENIJI</i>	9
<b>Free Education: A Right Or Privilege For Persons With Special Need</b> <i>RAHEEM KABIRU</i>	18
<b>An Approach at resolving Students’ challenges in the Educational Policy Implementation of the Senior School Chemistry Curriculum</b> <i>IGE, ADEOYE OYETUNDE</i>	23
<b>Innovation, Policy Implementation and Challenges in School Health Programme in Nigeria</b> <i>O.A. MORONKOLA, Ph.D.</i>	30
<b>Mother Tongue As A Second Language Teaching Tool In Nigeria</b> <i>FOLUSOADEDOYINAGOI, SAHEEDADENIYI OGUNNORIN</i>	37
<b>ICT Change and Innovation Management on Education Policy Implementation for School Managers and Administrators in the era of Globalisation: An Appraisal</b> <i>EGBEBI, JOHN OLUYEMI, OYELADE, ANTONIA AYOBAMI</i>	46
<b>Problems Confronting Girl – Child Education As expressed by Teachers, School administrators and Parents in Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Abuja, Nigeria</b> <i>ADEBAYO LAWRENCE OJO</i>	56

<b>Social Studies Teachers' attitude towards Information Technology in selected Local Government Areas of Iseyin in Oyo State, Nigeria</b> <i>ADEYEMI, OLUYREMI O.</i>	68
<b>Psycho-social challenges Among Gifted Underachievers in Ibadan</b> <i>DR. ADELODUN, GBOYEGA ADELOWO</i>	81

# Psycho-social challenges Among Gifted Underachievers in Ibadan

By

**Dr. Adelodun, Gboyega Adelowo**

*Department of Special Education and Rehabilitation*

*Sciences, University of Ibadan*

*e-mail: dradelodun2@gmail.com*

*08164358664*

## Abstract

*One of the biggest problems facing educators is that of student underachievement. Teachers and parents feel confused, frustrated, and disappointed when students fail to realize their potential. Underachievement is not only a problem, but a symptom of problems. To address this, educators must explore factors contributing to underachievement. These factors can be categorized as socio-psychological, family-related, peer-related and school-related. One or all of these factors can hinder student achievement. Teachers, counsellors and families must join in partnerships to best identify and help gifted underachieving students. All the aforementioned points have been well articulated in this study. Another important point that has been captured in this study is the issue of challenges facing the gifted children and some steps one can take to manage them. Those challenges include self-esteem issues, guilt, perfectionism, self-control issues, unrealistic expectations, impatience, friendship, attention and organization issues and burnout. Counselling implications and recommendations were finally stated.*

**Key Words:** Psycho-social, Challenges, Gifted Underachievers

## Introduction

There is little consensus on how best to define underachievement, particularly among gifted students. One problem is traceable to the definition of giftedness; another problem has to do with measurement. For instance, each district has its own definition of giftedness, although most rely almost exclusively on teacher recommendation, and an intelligence or achievement test score (Coleman, Gallagher, and Foser, 2004). A related issue concerns one's definition of underachievement. In general, underachievement is defined as a discrepancy between ability and performance. Yet, few studies have used the same definition of underachievement.

After reviewing more than one hundred (100) publications on underachievement, Ford (2006) noted that this can be measured using any number of

criteria and instruments. School A may use an intelligence and an achievement test, school B may use an achievement test, and grade point average, and school C may use an aptitude test and GPA. In these examples, the schools have adopted a psychometric definition of underachievement, which is problematic because minority students tend not to score well on standardized tests.

Qualitative or subjective factors can also be used to identify underachievement. School D may rely on teacher expectations to determine who is underachieving. Thus if a teacher believes that a particular student is not performing to his potential and that he can do better, such a student would be considered an underachiever. Teachers must consider several questions regarding the nature and extent of students' underachievement: (a) Is underachievement chronic, situational, or temporary (b) Is underachievement subject specific or general? (c) what factors are contributing to underachievement (e.g. poor intrinsic motivation, poor academic self-esteem, negative peer pressures, lack of family involvement, poor student/teacher relationship, low teacher expectations)? The lack of consensus on how best to define and measure underachievement – qualitative or quantitative, amount of discrepancy, nature and extent – all make it difficult to estimate the number of gifted students who are underachieving.

### **Factors Affecting Underachievement**

A number of factors must be examined to understand how and why gifted students underachieve. Socio psychological, family and school factors should all be considered.

#### **1. Sociological Factors and Underachievement:**

Poor self-esteem and low academic and social self-concepts contribute significantly to poor student achievement. Ford, Harris, and Schuerger (2003) maintained that racial identity must also be explored with gifted minority students. Minority students who do not hold positive racial identities may be especially vulnerable to negative peer pressures, they may also equate achievement with “acting white” or “selling out” (Fordham, 2000), which contributes to low effort and, thus, low achievement. Specifically, Lindstrom and Van Sant (2001) reported that many gifted minority students must choose between need for achievement and need for affiliation. These students often succumb to negative social pressures so that need for affiliation outweighs need for achievement.

An external locus of control also hinders gifted students' achievement. Students who attribute their outcomes to external factors, such as discrimination may put forth less effort than those who attribute outcomes to internal factors, such as effort and ability (Ford, 2006; Fordham, 2000). Gifted students who do not believe in the achievement ideology, who believe that glass ceilings and injustices will hinder their achievement, are not likely to work to realize their potential in school.

#### **2. Family Related Factors and Underachievement:**

Few studies have explored the influence of family variables on the achievement of gifted students. Van Tassel Baska (2009) focused on the role of families in the lives of 15 low social economic status (SES) gifted students, eight of whom were Black, and many living in single-parent families. Her findings reveal that low socio economic status Black

families held higher expectations, aspirations, and standards for their children, as well as positive achievement orientations. The Black parents sought to promote self-competence and independence in their children. Parents were described as watchful of their children, hyperaware of children's accomplishments, and actively involved in developing their abilities.

Prom-Jackson, Johnson, and Wallace (2007) conducted a study of graduates of A Better chance, Inc. (ABC), a non profit educational organization that identifies academically gifted low socio economic status students as possible candidates for college preparatory secondary schools. It was concluded that low socio economic status gifted students had parents of all educational levels. Parental educational level was not a good predictor of students' academic performance. The findings on parental beliefs and values suggested that in spite of social hardships and barriers, which often limit achievement and social advancement, this group of parents must have had high expectations of their children in order to have encouraged them to pursue high levels of education and challenging careers.

In a similar study, Clark (2003) examined low socio economic status Black students' achievement and underachievement in their family context. Achieving Black students had parents who (a) were assertive in their parent involvement efforts; (b) kept abreast of their children's school progress; (c) were optimistic and tended to perceive themselves as having effective coping mechanisms and strategies; (d) set high and realistic expectations for their children; (e) held positive achievement orientations and supported tenets of the achievement ideology; (f) set clear, explicit achievement – oriented norms; (g) established clear, specific role boundaries; (h) deliberately engaged in experiences and behaviours designed to promote achievement; and (i) had positive parent-child relations characterized by nurturance support, respect, trust, and open communication. Conversely, underachieving Black students had parents who (a) were less optimistic and expressed feelings of helplessness and hopelessness; (b) were less assertive and involved in their children's education; (c) set unrealistic and unclear expectations for their children; and (d) were less confident in terms of their parenting skills. Ford (2003) also found that gifted Black achievers reported more positive values and expectations among their parents regarding their participation in the gifted programme, doing well, and exerting effort.

### **3. School-Related Factors and Underachievement:**

Numerous factors in schools can influence the achievement of gifted students. For example, in a study of gifted Black achievers and underachievers (Ford, 2005), underachievers reported (a) less positive teacher-student relations, (b) having too little time to understand the material, (c) a less supportive classroom climate, and (d) being unmotivated and disinterested in school. Underachievers also expressed more concern regarding the lack of attention to multicultural education in their classes, which contributed to their lack of interest in school.

Numerous studies indicate that teacher expectations have a powerful impact on student achievement (Good, 2001). Using teachers to define underachievement present some problem if teachers lack objectivity or training in gifted education and multicultural education. Teachers tend to have lower expectations for minority and low income students than for other students (Hale Benson, 2006). Consequently, minority

students may not be identified as either gifted or underachieving. Low teacher expectations for minority students may relate to a lack of teacher training in both multicultural and gifted education. Such unprepared teachers are less likely to refer minority students for gifted education services or to complete checklists favourably. When students do not have access to appropriate education, they have difficulty reaching their potentials. The result may be underachievement due to lack of interest, frustration, and lack of challenge.

Some researchers have noted how students' learning styles may contribute to underachievement. Specifically, research indicates that Black students tend to be field-dependent, visual, and concrete learners (Hale-Benson, 2006), whereas schools teach more often in verbal, abstract, and decontextualized ways. Thus, mismatch between learning styles and teaching styles can result in confusion, frustration, and underachievement for gifted students.

Excessive use of competition can also hinder students' achievement, damaging academic motivation and educational engagement given the more social and less competitive nature of students (e.g. Hale-Benson, 2006). Competition can heighten students' anxieties, lower their achievement motivation, and lower their academic and social self-concepts.

Apart from the aforementioned factors affecting underachievement, there are some other challenges facing gifted children which can lead to underachievement among them. Such challenges would be discussed below, one after the other. Some steps that can be taken to manage them are also stated.

### **Challenges Facing Gifted Children and How You Can Help**

Giftedness comes with a surprising set of problems, ranging from perfectionism and competitiveness to friendship issues. These common challenges and some steps to be taken to manage them are clearly stated below:

#### **Self-Esteem Issues**

Being gifted academically can make a child feel different from her peers and may even lead to the child being bullied and becoming depressed. Studies have shown that the more intellectually gifted a child is, the greater the risk of social difficulties and unhappiness. It is important to keep an eye on your child's self-esteem and work with her teacher and school counsellor if she is really struggling. Negative talk about oneself and frequent mood swings can be signs of self-esteem problem.

**Tip:** Find a sport or hobby that helps your child build self-confidence, feel like a “regular” kid, and connect with her peers through play.

#### **Guilt**

Some gifted children feel pressure to “give back” because they feel so fortunate to have their own intellectual gifts. Helping other people and good causes is great, but if your children begins to feel guilty about his giftedness and overextend himself, talk with him about those feelings. Help him find a healthy balance between taking care of himself and his responsibilities and volunteering to help others.

**Tip:** Encourage your child to focus his “giving” by choosing one volunteer opportunity

or cause per school semester – whatever he is most passionate about.

### **Perfectionism**

Gifted children are often driven to be high-achievers in all areas of their life. Your child may procrastinate on starting homework or school projects or spend a lot of extra time on them because of her desire to get everything just right. Also, your child may be extremely gifted in some subjects but an average achiever in others, which can also fuel her perfectionism all around. Aiming to get everything perfect is time-consuming, tiring, and even bad for one's health. Perfectionism is associated with abdominal pain, eating disorders, and obsessive-compulsive personality disorders.

**Tip:** For a younger child, avoid correcting every little grammar or factual mistake she makes, and remind her to go easy on herself when her perfectionism comes through. For an older child, help her establish some basic goals and guidelines for a successful school project or report before she dives in. For example, review the assignment with her, get a sense of how long and detailed the project should be (how many pages, how many references cited, etc), make an outline or rough draft, and establish about how much time she should invest based on the assignment's impact on her grades. In other words, help your child “Know when to quit” and enjoy the process of learning from a project rather than stressing about getting everything perfect.

### **Control Issues**

Many gifted children like to feel in control. From an early age, one's precocious child may demonstrate extreme independence: “I'll do it myself”. As time goes on, the child's desire to be in control can lead to perceived “bossiness” among his peers as well as a fear of taking risks especially as he gets older and learns more about consequences.

**Tip:** One can nudge his child to try to make fun with new things, such as scary rides at an amusement park. One can also help him to find a healthy outlet for his desire to lead, such as helping to tutor or coach children younger than him.

### **Unrealistic Expectations**

Gifted children tend to be their own toughest critic. Many struggle with testing because of the sky high expectations they feel when they sit down for an examination. After earning mostly A's in school getting a B or C grade can be crushing to one's child and shocking to Mummy and Daddy. One has to help his child keep a healthy perspective on grades. It is impossible to maintain straight A's from kindergarten through graduation. Also, one has to be supportive, if one's child is labeled “gifted” one year but not the next year.

**Tip:** “Gifted” is a term (intended for parents and teachers to help bright students) and not a goal for anybody's child. Instead of using “giftedness” itself as a motivator or standard for one's child's performance in school, one should try to keep the same high-yet-healthy expectations that he had when he just knew that she was a brilliant child.

### **Impatience**

Gifted children can get frustrated and impatient with themselves and others. Your child might get flustered when he does not immediately understand a word in a book or a homework question, or he might be quick to abandon extracurricular activities that he does not excel at right away. Younger children who are not yet aware of their giftedness can get frustrated with their classmates who do not grasp concepts as quickly as they do.

**Tip:** Encourage your child to pause, close his eyes, and take some deep breaths whenever he feels agitated. Remind him to be kind in his thoughts about himself and others during moments of frustration.

### **Friendship Issues**

One of the potentially most difficult aspects of giftedness is having trouble making or keeping friends. Gifted children may appear to be socially mature and well adjusted, but might feel lonely or sad about problems with peers. A child may feel that she has little in common with her classmates or may have trouble initiating play or joining groups. Or, she might make friends easily but later be perceived as “show off” or have different expectations for the friendship than her peers because of her intellectual depth and emotional sensitivity. The most highly gifted children tend to have the most difficulty with friendships. It is important to help children with the greatest social/emotional difficulties as early as possible, with the help of a school counsellor or an outside therapist. Social difficulties can increase with age.

**Tip:** Help your child by arranging play dates with children with similar interests and level of intellect. Ask your child's teacher for help in identifying other gifted children in your child's school (not only in her classroom). Explore opportunities like science clubs and writing workshops where your child might meet brilliant peers.

### **Attention and Organization Issues**

Many gifted children struggle with attention problems and organization skills because they can be abstract thinkers and get bored easily. Education experts have found that it is more common for boys to be disorganized and distracted. Fortunately, there are tips and tools you can use to help your struggling gifted student either boy or girl. Get to know your child's particular pitfalls and talk with his teacher about problems and possible solutions.

**Tip:** Use a written home work chart rather than a mobile or online system to track assignments. Plan short homework breaks about every 30 minutes to give your child's mind a rest.

### **Burnout**

Many gifted students are highly energetic. But they are also at risk for becoming exhausted and depleted. While your child's intellectual gifts may come very naturally, her running to-do list of mastering homework, staying organized and striving for perfection in extracurricular activities can take a toll. Stress and overtiredness can lead to lower quality sleep, illness and trouble in school.

**Tip:** On top of everything your child does, her body is using a lot of energy to physically grow! Make sure that your child is eating well and getting enough sleep for her age.

### **Suggestions for Preventing or Reversing Underachievement among gifted Learners**

Student underachievement is a complex and persistent problem. Reversing underachievement among gifted students requires intensive efforts on the part of teachers and counsellors, as well as a partnership with parents and students. For optimal effects, teachers and counsellors must tailor interventions to students' needs. Interventions for gifted students must consider social, psychological, family, peer, and school factors. Interventions include: (a) ensuring that definitions of underachievement are both qualitative, and that the measures are valid and reliable, (b) enhancing self-perceptions, self-esteem, self-concept (academic and social), and racial identity; (c) improving students' skills in studying, time management, organization and taking tests; (d) involving family members as partners in the educational process; and (e) addressing school-related factors, including providing teachers and counsellors with gifted and multicultural training to meet both the academic and affective needs of gifted students. This training should include strategies for improving student-teacher relations, teacher expectations and the classroom climate. Just as important, school-related interventions must focus on curricular and instructional modifications so that optimal learning and engagement are possible.

To prevent and reverse underachievement, schools will need to provide supportive strategies, intrinsic strategies, and remedial strategies. The strategies include accommodations of students' learning styles, focusing on students' interests, and affirming students as individuals with special needs and concerns.

### **Counselling Implications**

The documented effectiveness of most interventions designed to reverse underachievement in gifted students has been inconsistent and inconclusive (Emerick, 2002). Furthermore, the majority of interventions have attained limited long-term success. Interventions aimed at reversing gifted underachievement fall into two general categories: Counselling and instructional interventions (Butler-Por, 2003).

Counselling interventions concentrate on changing the personal and /or family dynamics that contribute to a student's underachievement. Counselling interventions may include individual, group, and /or family counselling. In most counselling situations, the counsellor's goal is not to force the underachiever to become more successful student, but rather to help the student decide whether success is a desirable goal, and if so, to help reverse counter productive habits and cognitions.

The most well known educational interventions for gifted are either part-time or full-time special classrooms for gifted underachievers. In these classrooms, educators strive to create a favourable environment for student achievement by altering the traditional classroom organization. Usually, a smaller student/teacher ratio usually exists, teachers create less conventional types of teaching and learning activities, teachers give students some choice and freedom in exercising control over their atmosphere, and students are encouraged to utilize different learning strategies.

Emerick (2002) investigated the reasons why some students are able to reverse

their academic underachievement without the assistance of formal interventions. Her qualitative research study examined the patterns of underachievement and subsequent achievement of 10 young adults. Several common factors appeared to play a part in the students' reversal of underachievement. Participants in Emerick's study perceived that out of school interests and activities, parents, development of goals associated with grades, teachers, and changes in "selves" had a positive impact on achievement.

### **Conclusion**

Underachievement in gifted children is difficult to reverse and the longer a child underachieves, the harder it is to reverse. Some experts, however, believe we need to redefine underachievement. Some gifted children, particularly older children, may not excel in school, but achieve a great deal outside of school. For instance, a sixteen-year-old gifted student may be getting average grades in school, but may have organized a community tutoring programme for disadvantaged elementary school children. Clearly, such children do not fit into the profile of a gifted underachiever. They do not, for example, suffer from low self esteem as many underachievers do. In these cases, parents and educators need to ask themselves whether they should continue to try to reverse the underachievement in school or help the children succeed in life using the skills the student has to achieve outside of school.

Martinson (2003) in his own case warned that gifted children placed in regular classrooms may regress to the achievement level of their classmates, may have discipline problems as a result of boredom, and/or may withdraw to their own interests. Both Withmore and Pirozzo (2002) support the emphasis on a nonthreatening classroom environment where these children can engage in an extensive period of self discovery. What seems to be indicated by these data is more special class placement, especially for the gifted underachievers.

### **Recommendations**

In view of all the aforementioned challenges facing Gifted underachievers in this study the following recommendations are imperative.

**The problems are to be examined individually:** Underachievement covers a broad spectrum of situations from a minor school problem with a fairly obvious cause to a more entrenched long-term pattern. Since underachievement is such a varied and complex phenomenon, each case must be examined individually – with no preconceptions. According to Hansford (2001), underachievement is very specific to the individual child; intervention and recommendation of underachievement must be individually developed and implemented.

**Create a Teacher-Parent Collaboration:** Teachers and parents need to work together and pool their information and experience regarding the child. Most interventions in the literature involve parent-teacher collaborations, where they can coordinate their efforts and help the child progress more effectively. This kind of joint exploration yields useful insight into the nature of the child's abilities and the root of the problem.

**Study focused on the child's Gifts:** When examining a child's underachievement, always begin by focusing on strengths; a deficiency approach encourages the child to focus on weaknesses even more than before. At each point, the investigation needs to find the most effective ways to involve the child in the pursuit and exploration of personal talents and interests. This builds the confidence and strength the child needs to manage problem areas.

**Create an individual plan for the child:** The plan designed for the child has to emerge from the nature of individual gifts and the root causes of the underachievement. An underachieving Native American child, for example, who suffers from low skill development due to poverty, inadequate schooling, and how self-esteem needs an individualized programme that will provide mentoring in the development of personal gifts, open-ended projects that allow free exploration and divergent thinking, and also special intervention to strengthen skills.

## REFERENCES

- Butler-Por, N. (2003). *Underachievers in School: Issues and intervention*. Chichester, England: John Wiley and Sons.
- Clark, B.S. (2003). *Growing up Children 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition* Charles. Merrill Publishing Company, Columbus.
- Coleman, E.F.; Gallagher, J.J. & Foster, A.M. (2004). Undated Report on State Policies Related to the Identification of Gifted Students. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Gifted Education Policy Studies Programme.
- Emerick, L.J. (2002). Academic underachievement among the gifted: students' perceptions of factors that reverse the pattern. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 36, 140-146.
- Ford, D.Y. (2003). Black Students' achievement orientation as a function of perceived family achievement orientation and demographic variables. *Journal of Negro Education*, 62 (1), 47-66.
- Ford, D.Y. (2006). *Reversing Underachievement among gifted Black Students: Promising Practices and Programmes*. New York, Teachers College Press.
- Ford, D.Y.; Harris III, J.J. & Schuerger, J.M. (2003). Racial identity development among gifted black students: Counselling issues and concerns. *Journal of Counselling and Development*, 71 (4), 409-417.
- Fordham, S. (2000). Racelessness as a strategy ion Black students' school success: Pragmatic strategy or Pyrrhic victory? *Harvard Educational Review*, 58 (1), 54-84.
- Good, T.L. (2001). Teacher expectations and student perceptions: A decade of research *Educational Leadership*, 38 (5), 415-421.
- Hale-Benson, J. (2006). *Black Children: Their roots, culture, and learning styles* (2nd ed.) Baltimore, M.D: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Hansford, S. (2001). Underachieving gifted children. In J.F. Smutiny (Ed.). *U\*nderserved gifted populations* 309-322. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.

- Lindstrom, R.R. & Van Sant, S. (2001). Special issues in working with gifted minority adolescents. *Journal of Counselling and Development*, 64(9), 582-586.
- Martinson, M.S. (2003). Improving academic achievement: self regulation intervention (CD-ROM). Storrs CT: The National research Center on the Gifted and Talented.
- Prom-Jackson, S. Johnson, S.T. & Wallace, M.B. (2007). Home environment, talented minority youth, and school achievement. *Journal of Negro Education*, 56 (1), 111-121.
- Van Tassel-Baska, J. (2009). The role of the family in the success of disadvantaged gifted learners. *Journal for the Education of the Gifted*. 13 (1), 22-36.
- Withmore, J.R. & Pirozzo, S.T. (2002). Giftedness, conflict, and underachievement, Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.