

2 History and Attitude towards Children with Special Needs

Introduction

The disabled have been neglected over the years. Different groups consider them differently. Attitudes of the society towards provision of services to the exceptional children have been negative. This in turn has affected the attitudes towards the growth of special service for exceptional children. The attitude of the society towards the exceptional children is gradually becoming more positive.

This chapter examines the history and growth of service provision and attitudes towards children with exceptionalities.

History and Attitudes Towards the Growth of Special Services for Exceptional Children

Attitudes towards the handicapped can broadly be divided into three areas, namely:

- a) Rejection or unfavorable;
- b) Ambivalence or mixed feelings; and
- c) Acceptance or favorable.

Individual attitudes, group attitudes and societal attitudes, all fall into these three classifications. The following extracted documents reveal attitudes prior to 1953 but these forms or levels of attitudes may have changed positively over time. We can compare these with what prevails in the Nigerian society in relation to the various ethnic groups.

Maisel (19-53) compiled data from the Yale University Human

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Relations Area files on primitive tribes and cultures of many parts of the world.

In the Azande tribe, infanticide is not practiced. Abnormal children are never killed nor do they seem to lack the love of their parents. A supplementary fifth finger or first toe is surprisingly common amongst these people (Azande) who are usually proud of the addition.

Among the Navajo Indians, the ideals prescribe sadistic humor against those with physical deviations, but in practice, a great deal of enjoyment is derived from commenting verbally or through pantomime on the personal afflictions, infirmities and peculiarities of others.

Uncomplimentary nicknames among the Masai, mis-happens-weak children especially are killed immediately after birth.

Among the Dieri, a tribe of Australian aborigines, infanticide is frequent, applying to the children of unmarried girls and to deformed children.

Among the Chagga, an East African tribe, cripples were felt to satisfy evil spirits, thereby making normality possible in others: Hence, they did not dare to kill cripples (who included children with more or less than five fingers as well as the seriously deformed).

Among the Creek Indians, where 'old age' is revered to excess, the aged were killed only out of humanitarian reasons, such as when they might otherwise fall into the hand of an enemy.

Among the Truk peoples of East Central Carolines, only the healthy and strong are esteemed. The deaf and mute are called names (crazy people). Old people and the disabled are considered to be superfluous.

Among the Wogeo a New Guinea tribe, children with obvious deformities are buried alive at birth, but children crippled in later life are looked after with loving care.

Among the Dahomeans of West Africa, it is a singular fact that the State Constables are selected from deformed persons. Children

born with anomalous physical characteristics are held to be under the guardianship of special supernatural agents. Some of these children are destined to bring good luck and signs from the supernatural that determine the fate of others. They may even be ordered to be abandoned at the river bank.

Among the Ponape of the Eastern Carolines, crippled and insane children were treated like the normal children.

Among the Witato Indians of the North West Amazons, the new born infant is submerged in the nearest stream, or if the child was not strong enough to survive, he/she had better die. If the child becomes deformed later, the medicine man declares that it was caused by some evil spirit and may work ill to the tribe, making it necessary to dispose of the person.

Between the Jukin, a Sudanese kingdom, deformed children are not allowed to live, but are left to perish in the bush or in a cave for it is believed that such children are begotten by an evil spirit.

Among the Balinese, sexual relations with albinos, idiots, and lepers and in general, the sick and the deformed are tabooed.

Among the Palaung, an Eastern clan, it is good luck to have extra fingers and toes, and extremely lucky to be born with a hare-lip.

Between the Sema Nagas, the killing of disabled and similarly deficient persons, such as hunchbacks, deaf mutes, is a taboo.

Among the Moori of New Zealand, deformed persons meet with little sympathy and often receive a castigating nickname.

Social Movements in the 19th Century

Below are social movements, which came up in the later half of the 19th century. These movements can be compared with those other social movements, which are currently being utilized to great advantage for the benefit persons with exceptionality all over the world.

During this period, four social movements, namely: the competing Social Darwanism and Social Gospel Movements came

into existence, the Science of Eugenics, and the Charity or Social Movements developed.

a) *Social Darwinism*

This theory was developed by Herbert Spencer - society was seen progressing toward a higher level of morality as a result of the natural selection of the fittest - those who were capable of adapting to a changing society. He advocated a laissez-faire philosophy of government with state responsibilities limited to police and military functions. His books in 1900 were influential. The idea was "let the poor and the weak perish". Such a philosophy was not for the well being of the disabled.

b) *The Science of Eugenics*

Sir Francis Galton's theory explained that eugenics deal with all influences that improve the inborn qualities of a race. He feared for the future of humanity if "fertility of the unfit" was left unchecked. There was the belief that crime and pauperism had a link with hereditary transmission of mental deficiency. In America, the goal of such a movement was the colonization and sterilization of all undesirable subgroups in the American society - one of these groups was the mentally retarded. The American Breeders Association (1911) had a Committee on the means of reducing the number of mentally retarded persons. Their goal was to do away with defective genetic strains from the race by segregation and sterilization. Laws in many States backed them up.

c) *Social Gospel Movement*

This movement stressed social reform as a significant role of religion. Movers preached against the economic philosophy of the social Darwinists. They do not believe in survival of the fittest doctrine or laissez-faire government, which, to them was based on, unnatural rather than natural foundation. However; most of Protestants supported the concept of

personal misfortune being the result of defects in the individual rather than defects of the society. But we know now that largely the society itself causes disability.

d) *American Charity Organization Movement*

Charity Organizations were established by the last quarter of the 19th century. Their goal was the alleviation of poverty. They therefore attacked the problem but still operated from the premise that poverty had moral roots. Personal service rather than material relief was stressed by these new societies. They felt that giving anyone anything that they could earn through their own labour was rather based on "scientific charity" which requires a comprehensive investigation and treatment, which is meant to help the individual. It was basically felt that the morally superior (well-to-do) should help the morally inferior (the poverty stricken).

It is important to note that a start has been made in the provision of social and vocational services for the disabled. Investigation thus started on how to help the handicapped.

The Current Social Movements

There are five current movements that dealt directly with problems of disability. Advocates of these movements include the disabled and professionals.

a) *Independent Living Movement*

The aim of this movement relates to the provision of services the more severely disabled such as spinal cord injured, cerebral palsy, multiple sclerosis, post-polio cases and physically impaired. In this case, the person does not need to possess vocational potential to qualify for services.

b) *De-institutionalization*

This movement aims at discouraging the existence of institutions, nursing homes, or residential homes, disabled

person are expected to live in the community.

c) Demedicalization

This movement sees disability as no longer an illness. Disabled persons now see themselves as people who can manage their disability independent of medical physicians.

d) Normalization

Here, disabled persons are encouraged to be normal as possible in all areas of endeavour: employment, travel, marriage, conversation, etc., and efforts should be made to break barriers that interfere with their goal. This goal is achieved through mainstreaming/integrating them in society for full participation and educating the child in a least restrictive environment (L.R.E.).

e) Self-determination

This is another side of self-help movement by the disabled that (and after) leads to the formation of associations and projects managed or run by the disabled. It is linked with the idea that clients have the right to participate in taking decisions that affect their vocation.

The Independent Living and How it Started

The movement for independent living began from Nomad tribes to social change in the United States during the 1960s. Disabled persons had roles to play as part of their societies and cultures. The Nomads considered disabled persons as useless because they could not contribute to the wealth of the tribe.

The Christians brought a period of sympathy and pity to the way disabled persons were treated. Some believed disability represented impurity, therefore, persons having disabilities need to be saved. The Renaissance witnessed the initiation of medical care and treatment for persons with disabilities.

In 1880, after the development of alms houses, most states and territories had programmes for disabled persons. Most of these programmes were large institutions where disabled people were sent to spend the rest of their lives. The Frontier Movement inspired a new belief in Americans that social ills could be eradicated by local initiative. For disabled persons, this meant that they needed not be condemned because they could not earn their own living. Community-based services began to emerge, but disabled persons were still segregated from society as a whole.

It was World War I that began the concept of rehabilitation services on a broad basis. The emphasis of these first rehabilitation services was on the disabled Veterans who were returning home to the United States, family and friends. The need for training or re-training created the field Federal Programme for disabled persons- a programme now known nation-wide as vocational rehabilitation. With social change during the 1960s, were other major services for disabled persons seriously considered by any Federal Legislation. Community-Based programmes for disabled people began growing all over the nation in an attempt to deal with new needs, new technologies and new attitudes.

A Brief Historical Development of Special Education in Nigeria.

Historical development of special education in Nigeria is not different from what happened in Europe and other Western countries.

It is however difficult to have available literature or other sources of information on the history and development of special education in Nigeria. Education for "normal" persons went on for centuries before individuals began to think and to embark on the education of the handicapped. In the Western countries for instance, it was not until 1860 when Abbe de l'Eppe opened a School for the Deaf in Paris that people began to realize the importance of educating exceptional children. In 1784, an

associate of Abbe Michael Charles de l'Epee, Valentine Havy, started the first residential school for the visually impaired after witnessing ten visually impaired men being exploited for public entertainment. Before this period, the handicapped persons were merely used as entertainers in palaces and as court jesters. It was after 1800 that institutions, established primarily by individuals began to spring up all over Europe and America.

Here in Nigeria, the Missionaries were the pioneers of education and even when the government became involved in education, Missionaries were still allowed to operate schools and were given grants in-aid to support the schools. The same interest in educating the general populace was transferred to the schools for the handicapped established by the Missionaries and Voluntary agencies. It is, however, very difficult to state the specific dates when special education started in Nigeria and which Agency started it. We do know however that the Missionaries played a major role in the establishment of special schools and in the growth of special education all the country. Presently, there are prominent schools established by the Missionaries and Voluntary organizations. Mba (1981) indicated that one of the earliest attempts at providing formal services to the disabled in Nigeria is, traceable to the Topo Industrial School for the Maladjusted. The Roman Catholic Mission established the school near Badagary in 1876. In 1933, the former Kano Native Authority established the first residential center for special education in the form of a Reformatory School to train juvenile delinquents to acquire vocational skills in order to become good and useful citizens. The skills were provided in the areas of masonry, carpentry, farming and tannery. In 1945, a leprosy settlement was founded at Uzuakoli by the Methodist Church to treat people with leprosy. Since there was a settlement school attached to the Centre, normal children received vocational skills in the school while lepers received treatment at the Centre and they learnt some vocational skills such as crafts; farming and weaving to make them more

independent and useful when they returned home.

Also Abang (1980) reports that the Sudan United Missionaries (SUM) opened the first school for the visually impaired in the country, in Gindiri, in the year 1953. The SUM school in Gindiri was primarily a primary school. The school performs several roles for the blind such as providing full primary education for them as well as preparing them for admission into secondary schools and vocational centers. These schools are aimed at providing vocational skills for the disabled or handicapped while they were receiving treatment at various centers.

In 1956, the Special Education Centre at Oji River was established by Dr (Mrs.) D.E Money, Dr. (Rev) Baden and Daws for the treatment of leprosy. The initial enrolment in this Centre included two blind students in 1958 and deaf students in 1963. The Centre now enrolls physically impaired children and other young children who are given some remedial education and vocational training.

In 1956, a group of philanthropists started what was known as Wesley School for the Deaf at Yaba Methodist School, Lagos. This group of philanthropists constituted what is today known as Society for the Care of the Deaf. This is the first deaf school in Nigeria. The School was well equipped by the Methodist Mission, who in 1962 also assisted it to move to its present site.

In 1958, Dr. and Mrs. R.C, West of the Baptist Mission Ogbomosho Branch established a Centre to provide vocational training for blind adults and to provide education for the visually impaired youths where possible.

In 1960, Reverend Andrew Foster, a black deaf American founded the Ibadan Mission School for the Deaf. Later on, this School was merged with the ones started in 1974 by Chief (Mrs.) Oyesola (M.O.N.) as a Home of the Young Deaf. This very School was later renamed the Ibadan School for the Deaf. The School is famous for its sign language instruction.

In 1962, the Catholic Mission established the Pacelli School for the Blind Children. The School, located in Surulere, Lagos is one of

the best primary schools for the blind in Nigeria.

Today, we discover that apart from the above Centres, child treatment and placement homes or schools have been established in various parts of Nigeria. Some of these are the placement home/school at Kirikiri at Apapa, which was founded by Miss Beth Torrey in 1965 for the mentally retarded/emotionally disturbed children. The Torrey Home for Disabled Children exists in Zaria and Tudun Maliki in Kano. Miss Torrey must be recognized for her love for handicapped children, which expressed itself in the establishment of the Torrey Homes.

In addition, Departments of Special Education in the Nigerian Universities were established. The University of Ibadan, Jos, Lagos and Benin are among the pioneers in producing graduates in Special Education. Others are Federal College of Education (Special) Oyo, Kaduna Polytechnic Special Education programmes. Also, several Departments of Education offer Special Education as one of their undergraduate courses in order to furnish students with skills-in identifying, assessing and offering appropriate teaching to handicapped children.

Principles of Special Education Law

Legislation or law is used in modern society to protect the interests and rights of its citizens. As regards Special Education, it is a means of making sure that persons with disability are provided with services at public expense to offset effects of disability. Such legislations are yet to be enacted in Nigeria. A number of persons with exceptional conditions have successfully completed courses in various training Centres in the Federation and those who succeeded in securing employment perform well in both competitive and non-competitive jobs.

There is need for Federal and State government to enact legislations covering education and rehabilitation of exceptional children, their vocational training and employment among other areas of need in special education and rehabilitation.

Education

State and Federal laws should be made to ensure that all children with disability receive education alongside non-handicapped children in primary, secondary and higher institutions without discrimination. Only those whose conditions are too severe should go to schools for the blind, deaf, physically, mentally handicapped, etc.

Employment

Another law should be made to ensure that all exceptional citizens who receive vocational training in Federal and State Rehabilitation Centres and in Centres elsewhere secure employment as a right. Such a law should consider the following as part of its measures:

1. Making it a duty for employers to employ a fixed percentage or number of handicapped people in their establishments.
2. Reserving certain posts or types of jobs for disabled persons.

There are cases of rejection of handicapped candidates seeking admissions and employment on grounds of their disabilities.

Legislation has really helped the handicapped persons in other countries..If enforced, the handicapped will feel that the State and Federal Governments recognize their capacities as well as help employers understand employment needs of the disabled.

The right of the disabled were adopted early in 1979 by the International Federation of the Handicapped from the Declaration on the Rights of the Disabled as adopted a few years ago (9th December, 1975) by the General Assembly of the United Nations Organisation. These 13 rights have been declared as follows:

1. The term "disabled person" refers to any person unable to ensure for himself or herself wholly or partly the necessities of a normal individual and/or a social life, as a result of a serious deficiency, whether congenital or not, or in his or her capabilities.

2. The disabled person must enjoy all the rights set forth in this declaration. These rights shall be granted to all handicapped persons without any exception whatsoever and without distinction or discrimination on the basis of race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinions, national or social origin, state of wealth, birth or any other situation applying either to the disabled person himself or to his or her family.
3. The disabled person has the inherent right to respect for his or her human dignity. The handicapped persons whatever the origin and nature of their handicaps and disabilities, have the same fundamental rights as their fellow citizens of the same age, which implies first and foremost the right to enjoy a decent life, as normal and as full as possible.
4. The disabled person has the same civil and political rights as other human beings.
5. The handicapped person is entitled to measures designed to enable him or her to become as independent as possible. The term independent is used in its widest sense. It covers mainly the technical aids, which ensures the independence of the handicapped as well as the locomotion techniques.
6. The disabled person has the right to medical, psychological and functional treatment, including prosthetic and orthetic appliances, as well as to the technical aids of all kinds, to medical and social rehabilitation, aid counselling and other services which will allow him to develop his capabilities and skills to the maximum and will hasten the process of his social integration. The measures intended to prevent blindness must be set up in all areas and offered to all citizens
7. The disabled person has the right to economic and social security and to a decent level of living. He or she has the right, according to his or her capabilities, to ensure and retain employment or to engage in a useful, productive and remunerative occupation and to join Trade Unions. He or she

has the right, whether or not he or she is a worker, to an allowance to compensate for the expenses inherent in his or her disability; this compensation being independent of all questions of age and income.

8. The disabled person is entitled to have his or her special needs taken into consideration at all stages of economic and social planning. Sufficient financial means must be foreseen to this end.
9. The disabled person has the right to live with his or her family or in any other environment within which he himself or herself considers to be adequate and to participate in all social activities aiming at his or her social integration or reintegration or to his or her individual development.
10. The disabled person is entitled to be protected against all exploitation, all regulations and all treatment of a discriminatory, abusive or degrading nature.
11. The disabled person shall be able to avail himself or herself of qualified legal aid when such aid proves indispensable, on one hand, for the protection of his or her person and his property and, on the other hand, for his or her personal development or his or her social integration. Furthermore, to ensure equality for all handicapped persons, the legal procedure shall be a regular one which takes their handicaps fully into account
12. Organizations' of handicapped persons must be consulted in all matters regarding the rights of the handicapped.
13. Disabled person, his or her family and community shall be fully informed by all appropriate means of the rights contained in this declaration.

There is need for the handicapped in Nigeria to have the rights spelt out in the above declaration; this will enable them to develop their abilities to the maximum and to the fullest possible extent. There is a need to have advocacy groups for the handicapped and even teachers and parents of the handicapped to advocate for the

handicapped and voice out problems to the government.

The National Policy on Education published in 1998 by the Federal Government set up various Implementation Committees to ensure efficient educational programmes for the handicapped at Federal, State or Local Government Levels. Only few of the set implementation plans have been achieved. Most of it is yet to be implemented.

In 1981, a bill was enacted in Plateau State. The Bill was to be signed into law by 151 day of September 1981 but it was not. The Bill was to provide free appropriate public education for handicapped children and young persons of Plateau State origin with emphasis on Special Education and related services.

It is therefore important for the government to pass a Special Education law. Laws should exist at Federal, State and Local Governments dealing with the rights of the disabled. The laws should include special features and protective safeguards for all persons with disabilities in Nigeria.

Focus Questions

1. Attitudes of the society towards the disabled is said to be changing. What does this mean in Nigeria.
2. Explain the three ways attitudes of the society towards the disabled are expressed.
3. What is the "science of Eugenics" all about? Explain why such a movement should be condemned.
4. Explain the contribution of three of the current social movements towards today's special education.
5. "The Missionaries laid the foundation of special education in Nigeria". Explain.
6. Explain how legislation can help in the expansion of special education services in Nigeria.
7. Explain any three of the rights of the disabled as adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations.