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Understanding Psychological Socio-Emotional Issues Among Gifted and Talented Students: Implication to Counseling Services

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Abstract:

Socio-emotional issues are synonym with gifted and talented children due to the asynchronous or uneven psychological development. To understand socio-emotional issues faced by the gifted learners is important towards their affective development and emotional stability. This study aims to identify the aspects of socio-emotional issues among gifted and talented students. 194 students from PERMATA pintar™ National Gifted Centre, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia are randomly selected to respond to the Socio-Emotional Issues Instrument, comprises of 60 items, using 5-point Likert scale. Descriptive statistics analysis is used to determine the mean score of the studied variable. The result shows that mean of socio-emotional issues is moderate (2.71, sp value: 7.39). From ten components of socio-emotional issues studied, two components were found to have higher mean; namely social justice (4.13) and perfectionism (3.12). Meanwhile, for other components such as anxiety, procrastination, motivation, emotion, self-concept, social pressure, underachievement, and family relationship the mean is at a moderate level. Findings of this study indicates that socio-emotional issue exists among gifted students in Malaysia. It also reflects the need of supportive learning environment by the teachers, schools' counsellors, and community are crucial in helping gifted and talented children to understand and cope with their socio-emotional challenges. School counsellors need the skills and competencies to develop effective interventions in helping gifted students with their asynchronous development.

Keywords: Social-emotional, psychological issues, gifted and talented, gifted education

1. Introduction

Inevitably, the study of gifted and talented students (GTS) gained an increasing attention in the world of educational research. However, most studies on GTS focused more on the aspects of cognitive quality, neglecting the social and emotional needs. Karnes and Bean (1996) and Sternberg (2005) stated that the aspects of GTS quality are often associated with their personal characteristics in leading themselves and others. The latest research trend in GTS started to study their abilities in handling risk and adjusting to problems. Past research has shown that GTS social and emotional adjustment is related to the type of intelligence, education adjustment and personal characteristics. Some local and foreign studies have found that GTS faced various socio-emotional issues that could impede their potential development to the fullest (Lovecky 1992, Rosadah 2003, Abu Yazid and Aliza 2009, Aliza and Hamidah 2009, Scott 2012, Verstenyenen 2013). Study by Rosadah (2003) showed that GTS demonstrates higher leadership potential compared to the average student. However, GTS discovered to also suffer from socio-emotional issues that affects their psychological well-being such as; emotional intensity, perfectionism, high anxiety, highly sensitive, over-excitability, high sensitivity to social justice, self-critic, difficulty to adapt to new situations, less social adaptation and communication skills (Abu Yazid & Noriah 2016, Rosadah 2003). These situation, according to Scott (2012), Abu Yazid & Aliza (2009), and Aliza & Hamidah (2009), is attributable to factors such as; asynchronous development, high expectations from various parties, unchallenging schoolwork that are often tedious, difficulty to adapt during social interactions. The psychological issues faced by GTS contributes to low self-esteem, self-motivation, underachievement, and

concerns that involve socio-emotional components of GTS. Failure to address the socio-emotional issues can affect the existing personal potential ingrained in GTS. Thus, socio-emotional aspects should be identified in order to assist in developing a healthy GTS to a maximum extent consistent with its ingenuity award.

Accordingly, this study will look at the level and profile of socio-emotional issues among GTS at PERMATApintar™ National Gifted Centre University Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM). The level of socio-emotional issue is viewed through ten components, namely; emotional issues, motivational, self-concept issues, anxiety, perfectionism, procrastination, underachiever issues, social issues, social justice, and family relationships issues. This study also collates the variables studied based on demographic factors such as gender and race.

1.2. Objectives of the Study

- To determine the level of socio-emotional issues of the Gifted and Talented Students (GTS) at PERMATApintar™ National Gifted Centre.
- To identify the GTS socio-emotional issues profiles according to the category level.
- To identify the socio-emotional issues profile of GTS at PERMATApintar™ National Gifted Centre Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.
- To identify the significance differences of socio-emotional issues among GTs at PERMATApintar™ National Gifted Centre Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia based on gender,

1.3. Research Questions

- What is the level of socio-emotional issues of the Gifted and Talented Students (GTS) at PERMATApintar™ National Gifted Centre?
- What is the GTS socio-emotional issues profiles according to the category level?
- What is the socio-emotional issues profile of GTS at PERMATApintar™ National Gifted Centre Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia?
- Is there any significant differences of socio-emotional issues among GTs at PERMATApintar™ National Gifted Centre Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia based on gender?

1.4. Hypotheses of Study

- Ho1 There is no significance difference on socio-emotional issues based on gender among GTS at PERMATApintar™ National Gifted Centre Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia

2. Literature Review

2.1. Gifted and Talented Students (GTS)

GTS is individuals who are born with a unique natural ability. The unique capability refers whether to inner capability or innate ability, which can also be associated with genetic kinship (Simonton, 2005). This capability is in various domains. This inner capability can be seen from actions and behaviour of high performance, especially in behaviours involving cognitive skills. This includes the ability to reason, solve problems, and the ability to plan. Good cognitive ability is demonstrated by the speed of learning and efficiency in managing the information learned. Individuals are considered as gifted and talented when they have extraordinary cognitive abilities and know how to put them in good use. In other words, gifted individuals are individuals who have the potential to be outstanding. According to Gagne (2015), a person is considered gifted when they are able to show their potential in a particular field. When this natural intelligence flourish, the individual excels and be known as a talented individual. However, these individuals are found occasionally to be in situations where they do not have the opportunity to exhibit their natural potential. This may be caused by intrapersonal or environmental factors that do not support the needs for the development of learning (Gagne, 1995). Thus, these individuals will not exhibit the characteristics of the gifted and talented if they have not reached personal consciousness (such as physical and psychological awareness that involve elements of motivation, will and personality). The gifted and talented nature of these individuals will only manifest when they possess high intrapersonal awareness and when they are placed in an environment that supports the development for their potential growth through a learning approach that challenges the mind with enrichment, acceleration, and compacting curriculum.

Renzulli (2005) on the other hand views gifted children from the perspective of the Model Three Rings that puts three key features: extraordinary cognitive abilities, highly task commitment and high creativity. The feature of being gifted and talented is not fixed nor permanent nature, but it keeps changing according to the situation and environment that contributes to the development of intelligence to be a talented individual. Gardner (1993) in the Multiple Intelligence theory views the ingenuity of the nine characteristics of intelligence; mathematical logic, verbal linguistic, spatial space, body kinaesthetic, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, naturalist, and existential. Sousa (2003) views the features of gifted children from the psychological aspect, which focuses on the cognitive and the metacognitive, which involves the use of higher-order thinking skills during learning process.

The concept of gifted and talented students according to PERMATA pintar™ National Gifted Centre Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, is viewed from the aspects of attitude and personal characteristics that enrich and support the development of the self's natural ability. Gifted and talented individuals from the perspective of this institution is an individual that possesses; (i) natural or inner capability (IC) from the aspect of cognitive skills including the ability to reason, solve problems, and plan. Good cognitive abilities are demonstrated by the speed and efficiency of learning and the ability of managing the information learned; (ii) the opportunity to be smart (BS), where individuals not only have high cognitive abilities, but can also use them with good ability, through a conducive and supportive environment. The supportive environment involves variety of teaching and learning approaches that are capable of provoking the mind with the enrichment, acceleration, and compacting of the curriculum; (iii) satisfying attitudes and personal characteristics is important in enriching and supporting the growth for the natural self-capabilities (SC) of an individual until reaching the level of a talented. Such features include a pleasing attitude to the society, cautious and thorough before initiating. In addition, the individuals are able to influence other people as they have persuasion skills, competent leadership, influential speech and all of which contributes to the development of this individual self to become gifted and talented (Rosadah, Noriah, Melor 2009). In context with Malaysian education, the construction of GTS personal qualities is consistent with the objectives of the National Education Philosophy, which strives to produce students who are balanced in the aspects of physical, emotional, spiritual, intellectual, and social (MOE 2015). Provision of training, enriching experience and conducive environment are very important in the process of GTS personal formation. GTS holistic outcomes need to be seen through the cognitive level of excellence and quality of personal character. Character quality then translated through the appreciation of the values of a strong identity, which can turn them into responsible citizens, appreciate the value of prosperity, willing to contribute to the society and the country.

2.2. Socio-Emotional Issues among Gifted and Talented Students

Roedell (1986) states GTS experienced certain difficulties while growing up as they differ from other children in terms of talent. They became uncertain on issues of trust in the environment as a result of their ingenuity, for example; unrealistic expectations in their behaviour, the pressure of displaying the best performance, continuous criticism or praise, the pressure to obey the rules, and difficulties in making friends. Silverman (1987) has listed the risks faced by the GTS; refusal to perform repetitive routine tasks, criticism of others who do not conform, the lack of awareness about the impact of their actions on others (lack of empathy), difficulty in accepting criticism, trying to hide their talent in order to adapt with peers, disobedient and showing resistance to the higher authority. Next, a study carried out by Neihart, Reis, Robinson, Moon (2002) have found that GTS experience socio-emotional issues such as frustration, irritability, anxiety, easily bored, social desolation, strong social separation pressure, stress, and the difficulty in making friends, is due to the advanced understanding in the concept of friendship, lack of motivation, low self-concept, social rejection, emotional awareness, difficulties with their peers with same levels of IQ, loneliness, anxiety, phobias, interpersonal problems, fear of failure, perfectionism, setbacks for social acceptance, lack of endurance, increasing desire for perfection among girls, and depression among GTS who are mostly creative.

Aside from the characteristics mentioned above, gifted students' dispositions are also dominated by psychological issues comparatively; perfectionism (Speirs Neumeister, Williams & Cross, 2009; Chan, 2009; Dixon, Lapsley & Hanchon, 2004.), low self-esteem (Vialle, Heaven, & Ciarrochi, 2007), extreme competitiveness (Tomlinson, 2008) and self-consciousness (Sisk, 2008; Cho-Hee Yoon, 2009), anxiety, excessive self-criticism (Cho-Hee Yoon, 2009; Berlin, 2009) and confused identity formation (Zuo, Li & Tao, Liqing, 2001; Graham & Anderson, 2008) that can trigger intra- and interpersonal conflicts within and outside their learning environment. Those psychological socio-emotional issues were the effect of asynchronous development in which their emotional development is unparalleled on "in sync" with their mental age (Pfeiffer & Stocking 2000; Neihart, et.al 2002; Chan 2004). This will contribute to their struggles with academic performance and social adjustment. A significant number of gifted students experience painful, troubling and often debilitating psychological problems arising from this uneven or asynchronous affective and cognitive development (Pfeiffer and Stocking 2000). Gifted students must be aided to overcome these psychological issues in order for them to move to a higher personality structure and a healthy well-being. Therefore, teachers, counsellors, and parents who are concerned should understand the unique implication of social and emotional issues on GTS, passionately emphasize their efforts on providing supportive learning environment and continuously develop effective intervention to help them cope with their asynchronous development.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Design of the Study

This is a quantitative study using survey method to determine the level of socio-emotional issues faced by GTS. Data obtained from the questionnaire consists of the ten components of socio-emotional issues. The instruments are rated on a Likert scale of 5, from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5).

3.2. Sample

Questionnaires were distributed to 194 GTS studying in the secondary gifted education program at PERMATApintar™ national Gifted Centre, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. The samples consist of 41.2% from gifted students aged 5 to 17, 41.2%

aged 14 to 15, and 17.5% students aged 12 to 14 years old. 54.64% were females and 45.36% were male students. In terms of racial composition, 85.05% were Malay, 7.7% Chinese, 2.1% Indian, and 5.2% other races, namely Sikhs and Borneo.

3.3. Instrument

Socio-emotional Issues Instrument consists of ten (10) components that described the socio-emotional issues faced by the gifted students, namely emotional issues, motivational issues, self-concept issues, anxiety, perfectionism, procrastination, underachiever issues, social issues, social justice issues, and the family relationships issues. Each component consists of six items, making a total of sixty (60) items. Response to the item is based on a five-point Likert scale starting with 1-Strongly Disagree, Disagree 2-, 3- Uncertain, 4-Agree, and 5-Strongly Agree. The correlation coefficient reliability of the instrument is α 0.920. The instrument has a high reliability value and therefore was reliable for a stable score from the respondents.

3.4. Method of Data Collection

The data collection was carried out through the instrument distribution in the Self-Development course attended by the gifted students at PERMATApintar™ National Gifted Centre, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.

3.5. Data Analysis

The results were analysed using the SPSS 19.0 software. A descriptive analysis was conducted to determine the socio-emotional issues profile of the gifted and talented students on overall and by gender and race.

4. Findings

4.1. The Level of Socio-Emotional Issues of Gifted and Talented Students (GTS) at PERMATApintar™ National Gifted Centre

The findings showed that the mean score of socio-emotional issues was 2.71 (sp: 6:39). Based on determination scale of the low level (from 1.00 - 2.33), moderate (2.34 - 3.66), and high (3.67 - 5.00), the mean score of socio-emotional issues faced by the GTS were at a moderate level.

Variable	n	Mean	Standard Deviation
Socio-Emotional issues	194	2.71	6.39

Table 1: Mean of Socio-Emotional Issues of Gifted and Talented Students

4.2. Gifted and Talented Students' Socio-Emotional Issues Based on the Category Level

Detailed findings of the socio-emotional issues (Table 2) showed that 9.28% GTS fall under the category of high level (3.67-5.00 min) socio-emotional issues, 67.01% were at category of moderate level (2.34-3.66 min), and 23.71% fall under the category of low level (1:00 to 2:33). On overall, the findings indicate the prevalence of socio-emotional issues among GTS are varies. Most GTS faced an average level of socio-emotional issues followed by low level, and also high level of socio-emotional issues.

Variable	n	Level	Frequency	Percentage	
Socio-emotional Issues	194	Low	1.00 -2.33	46	23.71
		Moderate	2.34 -3.66	130	67.01
		High	3.67 - 5.00	18	09.28

Table 2: Socio-Emotional Issues Level of Gifted and Talented Students at PERMATApintar™ National Gifted Centre Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia?

4.3. The Profiles of Socio-Emotional Issues among GTS at PERMATApintar™ National Gifted Centre Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia

Table 3 showed the analysis of GTS Socio-emotional issues profile. Out of ten components, the data showed social justice issues received the highest mean (4.13), followed by perfectionism (3.12), anxiety (2.79), procrastination (2.78), motivational issues (2.71), emotional issues (2.68), self-concept issues (2.57), social issues (2.14), underachiever issues (2.11), and family relationships issues (2.09).

No.	Socio-Emotional Components	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	Emotional Issues	2.68 (6)	0.769
2	Motivational Issues	2.71 (5)	0.835
3	Self-Concept	2.57 (7)	0.805
4	Anxiety	2.79 (3)	0.897
5	Perfectionism	3.12 (2)	0.704
6	Procrastination	2.78 (4)	0.898
7	Underachieving	2.11(9)	0.724
8	Social Pressure	2.14 (8)	0.849
9	Social Justice	4.13 (1)	0.574
10	Family Relationships	2.09 (10)	0.797

Table 3: Socio-Emotional Issues Profile of GTS at Pusat PERMATApintar™ Negara

4.4. The Socio-Emotional Issues Differences Based On Gender among GTS at PERMATApintar™ National Gifted Centre Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia

Table 4 showed the percentage of female students is more than male students. The total of female students is one hundred and six which shows 54.64%, while the male is eighty-eight in total, represented 45.36 % of the total samples.

	Frequency	Percent
Male	88	45.36
Female	106	54.64
Total	194	100.0

Table 4: Gender

Finding in table 5 showed that Independent t-test was conducted on the data. The p value is 0.67 ($p > 0.05$). Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted. There is no significance difference in socio-emotional issues based on gender among GTs at PERMATApintar™ National Gifted Centre Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.

T-Test Between Gender and Socio-Emotional Issues				
t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	MD	SED
0.43	194	0.67	0.03	0.07

Table 5: Socio-Emotional Issues Based on Gender

5. Discussion and Implication

Overall, the findings showed a prevalence of socio-emotional issues among gifted students at PERMATApintar National Gifted Centre, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. Most of the GTS has average and low socio-emotional issues, however there are GTS who faces a high-level socio-emotional issues. Of the ten socio-emotional issues components, ranking measurements showed that GTS are subjected to high pressures in five socio-emotional issues; namely in social justice, perfectionism, anxiety, procrastination, motivational issues, followed by emotional stress, self-concept, social, pressure of underachieving, and the pressure of family relationships. These findings are consistent with the past studies by Versteynen (2013), Rosadah (2009), Robinson (2006), Abu Yazid and Aliza (2009), and Aliza and Hamidah (2009). The finding has also supported the suggestion by Clark (1992) and Silverman (1994) that aspects of socio-emotions of GTS are noteworthy because of the inconsistency or uneven development between cognitive and other psychological developments, especially on emotional and social development among gifted children. The uneven psychological development can lead to emotional instability among GTS, especially while facing stress in adapting to the environment or adjustments in social relationships. This is due to the hypothesis that the higher the IQ (intellectual quotient) level, the higher risk for them to be exposed to social and emotional adjustment problems (Jihad Lama Turkey and Majed Al-Qaisy 2012). The implications of these findings indicate that GTS's education programs require strong psychological counselling support services with competent expertise to help GTS cope with psychological issues, which is synonymous with the living environment of GTS. This aims to eliminate the psychological issues as an obstacle in the development of GTS potential. Given that psychological well-being is critical in striving towards excellence of GTS, the psychological counselling services should take into account regarding holistic self-development. Past studies do relate the aspect of personal identity with socio-emotional psychological issues among GTS (Bailey 2007, Versteynen 2013, Silverman 1987, Tannenbaum 1983, Neihart, Reis, Robinson, & Moon, 2002, Grossberg, & Cornell, 1988, Neihart 1999, Roedell, 1986). Results of the previous studies have shown that the higher levels of self-esteem, the lower the socio-emotional stress experienced by GTS, conversely the lower the level of self-esteem, the higher the socio-emotional stress that they will face. These findings illustrate the importance of personal development and self-identity courses in gifted educational program. The course could help GTS to manage their socio-emotional issues by understanding their characteristic,

values, and psychological issues. Identity stability is a powerful catalyst for individuals to cope with pressured situation. Implications of these findings point out the need to enhance the education course on the self-identity development for GTSS. The teaching and learning (T&L) methods of this course should be diversified. An effective T&L by enriching the learning experience beyond the classroom to provide meaningful experiential learning can contribute to the development of resilience and emotional stability. The learning process should include reflection exercises. Reflection exercises could help GTSS to understand the meaning behind any stress that they experienced. This will then lead to their insightful thinking towards their identity maturity and developing resilience when facing socio-emotional issues.

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