

Optimization Strategy for Maximizing Academic Potential of Gifted Underachievers with Low Self-Esteem Through Parenting After the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract: This study explores the needs of gifted underachievers, classified by Betts and Neihart (2010), and seeks effective parenting strategies to support their academic potential. Using a narrative literature review, databases such as SAGE, Google Scholar, and ResearchGate were searched with keywords related to gifted underachievers, self-esteem, and parenting strategies, yielding eight relevant articles. Findings suggest that self-esteem is essential for academic success (Batool, 2019), with authoritative, compassionate parenting positively linked to increased self-esteem (Hesari & Hejazi, 2011). However, pandemic-related challenges have strained parent-child relationships (Bülow et al., 2021), highlighting the need for strategies to strengthen these bonds and support self-esteem. This study offers insights for parents and counselors to enhance the academic and emotional development of gifted underachievers.

1 INTRODUCTION

Every person has an ability to learn and develop, but not all of them show a better development. In school, a student's focus is to develop academically to be considered successful by their surroundings. Not a lot of them take academy success as a standard to their self-worth and vice versa, self-worth affects their self-confidence in getting good grades at school (D'Mello, Monteiro, & Pinto, 2018). It is called self-esteem or view of yourself to see if you are worth or good enough (Santrock, 2010). Self-esteem is also useful to decrease academy, procrastination, and improve performance at school (Batool, 2019).

Subsequently, judging from people's opinion, children who have always been successful academically and show good academic performance are frequently called gifted children. Conceptually, gifted children do have a high IQ, which is more than 130 (Gottfried, Gottfried, & Guerin, as cited in Silverman, 2013) so they could have a strong comprehension. Other than that, according to Renzulli's (2005) concept of the three rings model, gifted children could be identified

when they fulfilled three criteria, which are general skill and specific skill above average, high creativity, and high task commitment which affects their academic result. However, not all gifted children have good grades at school. A lot of them have low grades even lower than standard. It is called gifted underachiever (Whitmore, as cited in Davis, Rimm, & Siegle, 2011). This is very detrimental to gifted individuals because, with their potential, they can achieve success, both academic and non-academic, but because of the effects of underachievement, such as having low self-esteem, self-regulation, and self-efficacy (Neihart, et al., 2002), individuals cannot even be sure of themselves that they are actually capable.

Evidently, in research by Synder, et al. (as cited in Steenbergen-Hu, Olszewski-Kubilius, & Calvert, 2020), self-esteem and gifted underachiever student's academics also have a significant relationship. Therefore, to maximize the academic potential that gifted children already have, it is necessary to find an effective strategy. Arranging an effective strategy needs several

considerations through the affected factors to gifted children's self-worth, one of which is parenting style (Batool, 2019). According to the American Psychological Association (APA), parenting style or parenting pattern is defined as how parents take care of their children, in emotional dimensions such as warm or cold and high or low control. A lot of empirical research shows there is a linear relationship between parenting style with children's attribution, behavior, and motivation (Batool, 2019). The relationship between parenting style, improving academic achievements, and self-esteem has been proved by Pychyl, Coplan, & Reid (as cited in Batool, 2019) that parenting style indeed affects children's academic achievement, but it is an indirect relation mediated by self-esteem. So, self-esteem improvement has to be done first with the help of proper parenting to make the gifted underachiever's academic potential be optimized to reach proper academic performance. Thus, this literature review aims to look at the needs of gifted underachievers in each type (Betts & Neihart, 2010) and find the right strategies to meet their needs through parenting so that the gifted underachiever's academic potential can be optimized and show good results at school.

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic gave changes to the family, such as low socio-economic conditions (Weeland, Keijsers, & Branje, 2021) and worsened the relationship between parents and children (Bilow, Keijsers, Boele, van Roekel, & Denissen, 2021) and the after effect still exist after the pandemic. Therefore, this article also considered family conditions after the pandemic so the strategy could bring a better impact on the family and gifted underachiever children in maximizing their academic potential.

2 METHOD

The method used to compose a narrative literature review is an electronic database. Journal searching methods used Google Scholar, SAGE pub, and ResearchGate excluded non-open access articles and were only available in abstract form. The research article criteria referred to in this literature review is related to the picture of the pandemic impact on parenting, gifted underachiever needs, protective and risk factors, and also proper parenting strategy to fulfill gifted underachiever needs. Keywords used to look for the articles are "needs of gifted underachiever", "self-esteem and

gifted underachiever", "gifted underachiever interventions and parenting styles", "parenting styles on increasing self-esteem", and "parenting after the pandemic". The writer searched for articles without filtering. The writer used 8 journals that fit the research criteria. Journals used for the literature review were obtained from various sources which are the International Journal of Humanities Social Sciences and Education, Australian Journal of Psychology, Developmental Psychology, Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences, Gifted Child Quarterly, and Reclaiming Children and Youth.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Gifted Underachiever Concept

Gagné (2010) explained the reason underachievement happened. When the supporting factors on children such as intrapersonal and surroundings disappear, are weak, ineffective, and/or do not meet the need of gifted children for a long time, the giftedness would not develop into talents and underachievement happens.

Before identifying gifted underachievers, it is necessary to identify giftedness first (ACT Government, 2021). The earliest identification is from the parents or nannies. They would match children's behavior with the criteria in the checklist. The example of parents or the nannies checklist to identify gifted children is a checklist by St. Edmund College that was adopted from a book titled *Gifted Young Children: A Guide for Teachers and Parents* by Louis Porter (1999) and checklist published by Mensa as an organization for high IQ people.

Gifted underachievers are everywhere and in various types, not only limited to the low economic environment, bad students at school, and/or *twice-exceptional* (ACT Government, 2021; Betts & Neihart, 2010). Therefore, we need to identify equally in order to provide appropriate interventions according to their needs to make gifted underachievers' potential optimized with hoping the performance would be proper as the potential.

The understanding about feelings, behavior, and needs of the gifted underachievement summarized by Betts and Neihart (2010) in *Profiles of the Gifted & Talented*. Five out of six

types summarized by Neihart and Betts are types that describe gifted underachiever children.

- a. **Type 1 Underachiever: The Successful**
This type gifted tends to have high motivation, but this motivation is inclined to extrinsic because it is only to have validation from others rather than have good achievements to develop their skills. They also tend to be in a safe zone, always expecting their work to be right and perfect in the eyes of people so they really want to get a detailed and clear instruction. It makes them unable to achieve the result that matches their real potential.
- b. **Type 2 Underachiever: The Creative**
This type of gifted is considered to be a varmint by the teachers because they hardly follow the school rules. They incline to frustration because the school systems did not support their creativity. They could be arrogant, rude, easily bored, and frequently question and oppose school policies. Here we could see that their self-control is very low so they need help to train their self-control to be more flexible. They also need support for their creativity and to develop their interpersonal skills.
- c. **Type 3 Underachiever: The Underground**
In this type, students face the dilemma between being good in academics or being accepted by their friend circle. If a child chose the first option, they are scared that they would not be accepted or shunned by their friends. But if they chose the second option, they would feel guilty for trifling away their potential. The feelings they develop are insecurity, anxiety, and guilt so they need someone to help them to accept and understand themselves and also give consideration and support to trust the freedom in choosing their life.
- d. **Type 4 Underachiever: The At-Risk**
This type is frequently identified as the real gifted underachiever. Their body may be present in the class, but intellectually and emotionally, they are divided from the lecture. They are mad at themselves and others because they do not feel the system fulfilled their needs. They think they do not have capabilities so they avoid and refuse to participate in events. They will develop pressure feelings, mad, and defensive feelings also would have low self-esteem and academic performance. Children with this type need intervention with minimal punishment, help to

build short-term targets, individual study activities, and open and private activation.

- e. **Type 5 Underachiever: The Twice-Multi Exceptional**
In this type, an individual gifted has another disability, such as an emotion, physical, and study disability. For example, a gifted student with a studying disability such as dyslexia or gifted with bipolar. Most of the teachers only focus on their disability and forget about their gifted side and it triggers frustration expressed in disruptive behavior. It also causes underachievement because their giftedness did not guide them properly.

Five types of underachievers are expected to form the sixth type, which is autonomous learner because, in this type, children could find out how to study effectively, and success academically, but do not depend on the concept and self-esteem to academics so they would not falter when it fails because children with this type are open to failure and learn from their mistake also work cooperatively with teachers. From the side of behavior, an individual with this type shows independent behavior, is self-directed and has self-confidence to tell their needs to the teachers, parents, and friends. The sixth type or the autonomous learner has a strong self-esteem and concept so they could see that they are worthy even if they fail. This is the most difficult thing for the gifted underachiever (Betts & Neihart, 2010).

3.2 Optimization Strategy

From the first discussion, following Renzulli, Baum, Hebert, & McCleskey's (1999) discussion, factors that contribute to the underachievement from the various types are (1) Emotional problems, including dysfunctional family, depression, perfectionism, and need for attention; (2) Social problems, such as the effect of same-age groups, accepted values, and lack of internal control and social capabilities; (3) Inappropriate curriculum. A lot of gifted children have no motivation for doing ordinary school because it lacks challenges and is not in accordance with their needs; and (4) Poor self-regulation. Here we could see that school, friends, or family environment are the risk factors and also protective for gifted underachiever children. As discussed by Nagle (1998) that gifted underachievers get pressured by their environment, especially by their parents. Parents tend to be ashamed if their children have bad

grades at school and are busy blaming their children and it affects the poor self-esteem of children. They even get scorned at school, also at home, where they should feel comfortable, appreciated, and loved. Therefore, parenting improvement becomes very important in improving children's self-esteem.

Unfortunately, the pandemic condition worsened the relationship between parents and children. It is pictured through the research by Bülow, et al, (2021) which reported that a relatively warm family, even experienced a stronger decrease in warmth ($r(177) = -.23$ $p = .002$), than a family that tend to have conflicts, the higher the frequency of conflict ($r(177) = .79$ $p < .001$). It is related to the higher parent's behavior control over their children, one of them is meeting other people. It is reasonable because the outside environment is still vulnerable and the virus has not completely gone. But the children perceive it as freedom restraints. Consequently, this condition has to be considered and used in improving parenting style.

According to Batool (2019), a loving and supportive parenting style such as authoritative parenting could improve children's self-esteem, by appreciating every decision of the children, supporting children's future dreams, empathizing with children's difficulties, and supporting them in solving them, solving conflicts with good and equivalent communication, give space to the children to tell their opinion, praising their success, understand and ask the children to discuss what they like or do not like, also give constructive feedback. It is supported by Hesari and Hejazi's (2011) research that showed authoritative parenting models have a direct, positive, and meaningful relationship to self-esteem ($B = 0.84$, $T = 16.52$).

In gifted underachiever children cases, based on the article written by Ali and Rafi (2016) considering the situation after the pandemic above, authoritative parenting implemented into optimization strategy as follows:

- a. Ask children to discuss excitedly what they like, what they do not like, their hope, and their opinion about various things, such as school, dreams, and parenting patterns. Through this kind of activity, the children will believe that they are important, have a place to be heard, and believe that they have the right to choose what they want to be in the future.
- b. From the method above, make a realization of children's needs, for example, if they feel unfit

at ordinary school because they did not facilitate children's creativity, facilitate them with the community outside the school, with several conditions, such as still going to school and do no trouble (Type II Underachievement). Also, give them the awareness of the importance of school for their future to make them think about their performances and its impact on their future.

- c. Always monitor children's homework and give constructive feedback, also always ask about children's opinions. It is helpful to make children aware that their parents appreciate what they do at school.
- d. Use specific praise. For example, "Wow, you are great because you have done your work and reached the target!"
- e. Take note of every treatment given and every change from the children as an evaluation.
- f. Do it consistently.

The strategy above, other than could make the relationship between parents and children warmer, and improve communication and parenting, also could increase children's self-esteem, especially in the academic area. With this method, it is expected that gifted underachiever children could feel that they are worthy, have the capability, and are confident so it could be applied to their study behavior and incline with their needs to make the gifted underachiever's academic potential be optimized.

4 CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this research is to investigate the needs of each type of gifted underachiever (Betts & Neihart, 2010) and to find appropriate strategies to meet their needs through parenting, and improve the academic performance of gifted underachievers. It is aimed at optimizing the chances of learning and showing good results in school for gifted underachievers. The purpose of this research is to investigate the needs of each type of gifted underachiever (Betts & Neihart, 2010) and to find appropriate strategies to meet their needs through parenting, and improve the academic performance of gifted underachievers. It is aimed at optimizing the chances of learning and showing good results in school. The results of this study indicate the needs of gifted underachievers in each type as follows 1) Type 1 too much depends on themselves for other people's validation; 2) Type 2 is too creative; 3) Type 3 is

confused to choose between developing their potential or blending in with their friends 4) Type 4 has a really bad perception of themselves; and 5) Type 5 could not get a proper intervention because they focused on their other disabilities.

All of them affect their self-esteem. Therefore, it is necessary to improve self-esteem. In improving self-esteem, they should be helped by people in their surroundings. Based on the review, the best type of parenting for improving children's self-esteem is the authoritative parenting type which is full of love and support. Providing openness, constructive feedback, and healthy communication is also expected to improve the relationship between parents with children which decreased during the pandemic. If it could be done consistently, it sure could improve children's self-worth and self-esteem to optimize their potential followed by the improvement of academic achievements at school.

5 RECOMMENDATIONS

After reviewing the literature, it was found that the best parenting style for increasing self-esteem is the authoritative parenting style. For future research, it is hoped to re-check the effectiveness of the above strategies in increasing children's self-esteem, especially gifted underachievers for fulfilling the goals of this research, such as improving family relationships and optimizing the academic potential of gifted underachiever students as seen from ambitions for increased in-depth learning and perfect academic grades.

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