

# Gifted education in Malaysia: Issues, challenges and implications

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this conceptual paper was to examine the issues, challenges and implications of gifted education in Malaysia. Secondary research was conducted to establish a general framework; relevant articles were downloaded via Google Scholar, ResearchGate, ERIC, Science Direct, JSTOR and other websites. A literature review showed that empirical research on the gifted is lacking in Malaysia. Nevertheless, several issues and challenges facing the Malaysian gifted were identified. In light of the secondary findings and implications, some recommendations were made on what measures could be undertaken to promote gifted education more effectively.

**Keywords:** gifted education, issues and challenges, Malaysia.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Gifted education in Malaysia is gradually gaining momentum since 2006 after the Ministry of Education (MoE) highlighted the necessity of establishing special programs for the gifted to help make the nation become more industrialized and knowledge-oriented. It led to the establishment of some gifted programs in 2009 and 2010, including the PERMATA@Pintar and PERMATA Insan that strive to promote creativity and innovativeness via differentiated, higher-order learning and smart partnerships to create a holistic model of gifted education. Additionally, the Malaysia Educational Development Plan 2013-2025, which outlines the nation's educational directions, has formulated a national strategy for gifted education; it aims to implement gifted programs in schools under three phases by identifying areas for improvement, piloting gifted programs and evaluating program effectiveness. Shakir and Ali (2021) maintained that the gifted in Malaysia are often regarded as those at the extreme high end of the special-need spectrum. While identification and moulding of the gifted is critical, it is currently a system without a science-based and inclusive formula. Therefore, in terms of gifted education, Malaysia urgently needs to improve its policies, curricula, instructional methods and evaluation to expand the pool of individuals who are capable of creating innovations in all areas of human endeavour (Baker, 2017).

## II. SECONDARY FINDINGS

### A. Relatively new area in Malaysia

Sandhu (2001) postulated that gifted education is a relatively new field in Malaysia; hence, there is a lack in special education for the gifted who appear to be extremely neglected. Often left unidentified and unrecognized, they may become underachievers and dropouts who misuse their abilities by engaging in socially undesirable activities. To initiate a nation-wide attempt to identify the gifted, teachers and counsellors can be adequately trained to identify the gifted; currently, most teachers tend to focus on high achieving students with excellent grades, but they may feel threatened by

those with specific learning or behavioural problems. Moreover, some also discourage the gifted from asking questions in class that ultimately breeds frustration and withdrawal among them. Lastly, the creatively gifted, who are usually non-conformist, are the most neglected and unpopular group at Malaysian schools.

### **B. Perfectionistic tendencies and coping mechanisms**

Ishak and Bakar (2010, 2017) asserted that perfectionism is one of the most common problems among the Malaysian gifted, followed by competitiveness, low self-esteem, anxiety, poor identity formation and extreme self-consciousness. Although the gifted can perform well academically, they may still feel imperfect, obsessing that they can improve further with greater effort. Their unrealistic need to attain more often creates a gap between their sense of personal achievement and what they have achieved over time. Since Malaysian schools generally regard success in terms of academic excellence, usually students with perfect scores are rewarded and praised. Unrealistically high expectations not only aggravate perfectionistic behaviours, but also foster needless competition among the gifted. Those who slightly lag behind may become insecure and feel inadequate, resulting in low self-esteem and helplessness.

Additionally, the Malaysian gifted prefer active indirect and inactive indirect strategies to confront problems; their most preferred active indirect strategy is getting themselves immersed in academic work, followed by praying and ignoring the problems. Moreover, many of them prefer to resolve their issues autonomously rather than discussing them with significant others (e.g. teachers, parents or school counsellors). They are often reluctant to see a counsellor because the latter often use general approaches, which seem to be irrelevant to the gifted. Besides, many counsellors are rarely exposed to any “gifted” issues because their training are rarely based on formal, standardized and empirically practices for guiding the gifted. Lastly, the gifted who seek counselling tend to focus more on career and academic advice, rather than personal issues (interpersonal relation, self-growth, family issues). They may be reluctant to discuss personal issues for fear of being perceived as problematic or even behaviourally disordered (Ishak & Bakar, 2010, 2017).

Majid and Alias (2010) conceptualized several risk factors that hinder the development of Malaysian gifted ones, including learning disabilities, intellectual capabilities, emotional problems and undesirable environmental factors. First, learning disabilities will limit their learning unless early identification is conducted to ensure that they will apply their available abilities to compensate for the disabilities. Second, the gifted are often vulnerable to socioemotional disturbances related to perfectionism, hypersensitivity, social isolation and sensory overexcitabilities. Enhancement of their abilities can be aligned with their socioemotional development to prevent the occurrence of distorted self-awareness and other negative attributes. Third, interaction between environmental and socioemotional factors can adversely affect the gifted with dysfunctional families. Lastly, the community may value certain kinds of giftedness, while disregarding artistic traits that cannot be monetized.

### **C. Difficulties in mastering the English Language**

Yunus et al. (2013) found that many of the Malaysian gifted tend to encounter difficulties when mastering the English Language as non-native users. Although they possess the metacognitive strategies to acquire English proficiency, they often experience difficulties in terms of applying the correct grammatical rules in discourse and writing; their common errors include the misapplication of verb tense and inappropriate word choice and prepositions. Further, many display low spoken English proficiency because they usually use their mother tongue to communicate at home and with their peers. Linguistic differences, particularly in terms of morphology and syntax, between their mother tongue and English, is the prime factor affecting their English literacy. Furthermore, among the four language skills (writing, reading, listening and speaking), many of the gifted regard oral communication as the hardest to master. Many are also afraid to communicate in English with others because they are shy about making grammatical mistakes. Additionally, they lack confidence in utilizing English because they fear that others might sneer at them for speaking “broken” English. Lastly, unfamiliarity with the English vocabulary often leads them to code switch or use their mother tongue to properly convey their meanings, intentions or thoughts.

### **D. Lack of age-appropriate socioemotional development**

According to Ch'ng (2014), many of the Malaysian gifted experience socioemotional issues due to the asynchrony between their cognitive and socioemotional development. Further, their unique personality profiles and overexcitabilities tend to make them feel and think differently from their regular peers, which in turn, makes it difficult for them to cultivate

friendships at school. As they enter adolescence, the gifted often encounter more dilemmas that could obstruct their self-development; for example, they not only find themselves being pressured to fit within the norms to be socially acceptable, but also have to cope with negative self-esteem, perfectionism, ostracism and multipotentiality. An affective curriculum is needed to capitalize on the socioemotional dimensions of the gifted, which not only can help them efficaciously confront socioemotional problems, but also to augment their intellectual and interpersonal relationships.

Aziz et al. (2021) summarized some of the issues and challenges faced by the gifted in Malaysia. Despite their advanced cognitive abilities, they often lack age-appropriate socioemotional development. Highly perceptive and logical, they may treat others who act emotionally with disdain. Many also experience psychological problems that are even more intense than others owing to the mismatches among their cognitive, mental and physical development. Further, the lack of understanding of parents, educators and health professionals, together with adverse circumstances, often lead to interpersonal problems and subsequent mislabelling. It is estimated that the rate of socioemotional difficulties experienced by the profoundly gifted is twice the rate found among the nongifted.

Profound levels of giftedness often lead to isolation and ostracism as the gifted may attempt to conceal their exceptional abilities in the hopes of becoming more popular. Although they may display superior metacognitive skills that enable them to learn faster, recall the tiniest details and address complex problems, many of the gifted often experience intense pressure and inner conflicts that hinder their socioemotional development, which in turn, affects their psychological wellbeing and socioemotional stability. In brief, the gifted may often encounter intrapersonal and interpersonal conflicts that make them self-ostracize and become intolerant, besides demonstrating high anxiety, amotivation and vulnerability to criticism and masked depression. Lastly, many counsellors are unable to respond to the concerns of the gifted as they are not adequately trained to help this unique group (Aziz et al., 2021).

#### **E. Stress, depression and anxiety**

Bakar and Ishak (2010, 2014) reiterated that stress is one of the principal psychological issues faced by the Malaysian gifted, ensued by anxiety and depression. They tend to suffer various kinds of stress, mainly caused by the unrealistic expectations of some parents, teachers and the community. First, some parents may place high hopes after they are identified, expecting them to achieve various goals. This scenario, left unchecked, will lead to psychological problems among the gifted, such as depression, stress and anxiety. Second, some teachers may set very high expectations on the gifted; this inevitably pressures the gifted with regard to their own academic performance. Third, some of the gifted also have difficulty in expressing and sharing their thoughts and problems with others. For example, some often encounter interpersonal problems with peers. Their social relationships often become strained since their average peers tend to distance themselves for being unable to share or understand their perspectives. Consequently, the gifted feel marginalized by the broader community, which makes them feel even more ostracized.

#### **F. Lack of effective identification techniques**

Ishak and Bakar (2017) reiterated that the process of identifying the Malaysian gifted is akin to locating a needle in a haystack. Despite the common existence of the gifted, the science of identifying them is oft-debated because there are no precise techniques to measure the multiple dimensions of giftedness. Effective identification requires ongoing assessment, multiple diagnostic criteria and inclusion of contextual factors. It can be based on solid theoretical principles with clear objectives and stakeholder support. Moreover, Malaysia is at a critical juncture when it comes to identification of the gifted who have been neglected for the past 40 years. Left unattended, some of the gifted might become social misfits due to the lack of knowledge and awareness among the community. Some people may contend that any effort to identify the gifted from early age will have meagre impact on society due to the small ratio of the gifted to general population. Nevertheless, as invaluable future assets, the gifted possess the fundamental right to receive quality education to reach their fullest potential.

#### **G. Lack of self and national identity development in regular schools**

Yusof et al. (2017) found that some of the gifted at a Malaysian university environment and culture tend to demonstrate high self-identity, with strong values, beliefs, character, culture and patriotic spirit. Their high self-identity is reflected in terms of spirituality, national identity, emotion, critical thinking and leadership identity. In contrast, students at mainstream secondary schools tend to demonstrate an average level of self-identity. Some of the gifted who are attending

regular schools may lack exposure to self and national identity development since it may not be included in a regular curriculum. Moreover, some regular schools may usually adhere to fixed syllabi that may focus on lower thinking skills and compulsory government examinations, rather than the development of a holistic personality that includes physical, emotional, spiritual, intellectual, leadership and citizenship elements.

#### **H. Unique personalities and multiple career choices**

Additionally, some of the Malaysian gifted ones often suffer because of their unique personalities and multiple career choices (Aziz et al., 2021). First, compared to their peers, some of the gifted are more capable of furnishing thoughtful ideas while debating critical issues because they may possess a more advanced level of morality and sensitivity to idealism. They may appear perfect in the eyes of others; nevertheless, it may actually bring pain and disillusion that ultimately make them feel helpless, frustrated and depressed. Moreover, their unique socioemotional attributes often motivate them to conceal their problems and internal conflicts because they have difficulty soliciting help from others in problematic situations. They tend to struggle autonomously in overcoming problems or conflicts, which may lead to misconceptions and alienation. Second, in terms of career development, the gifted may experience problems related to vocational direction due to their multipotentials, information scarcity and poor guidance. Despite excelling in various fields, they may have difficulties in making relevant career choices, procrastinate or often change their choices without any serious consideration.

#### **I. Lack of trained counsellors and teachers**

Bakar and Ishak (2010), who identified the counselling issues related to the Malaysian gifted ones, found that the female gifted tend to face more issues compared to their male peers; thus, implying that the former gender may be more prone to psychological problems. Although the socioemotional issues among the gifted are evident, there is little emphasis on providing psychosocial support for them. Since counselling for the gifted is still relatively new in Malaysia, more research can be conducted on this area to ensure that all parties really understand and are aware of the psychosocial needs of the gifted.

According to Aziz et al. (2021), there is a lack of trained counsellors and teachers in Malaysia to meet the diverse needs of the gifted. First, the gifted need appropriate guidance and counselling services to improve their decision-making skills to effectively manage their socioemotional states. Many of the gifted find it hard to express their thoughts and feelings, while counsellors who lack awareness of their strengths and challenges, are unable to offer guidance and services that differ from those applied with regular students. They need to adopt a creative approach in helping the gifted by factoring in their creativity, imagination, fantasy and sensitivity. Second, many teachers hold stereotypical views of the gifted. Compared to their same-age peers, the gifted tend to learn effortlessly, engage in abstract thinking more often, demonstrate deeper interest in a variety of topics and are more capable of focusing on multiple activities simultaneously. However, they may face learning and socioemotional problems in the regular classroom because some teachers may perceive them as arrogant, critical or even behaviourally disordered. Such stigmatic perceptions of teachers inevitably prevent the gifted to excel and unleash their potential.

#### **J. Conventional curriculum constraints**

Jeevita (2024) quoted Rorlinda Yusof, an associate professor from a Malaysian university, who asserted that many of the academically gifted do not achieve their full potential because they go through the educational system undiagnosed. While some teachers are able to detect them, they are unable to enhance their diverse strengths due to various conventional curriculum constraints and traditional pedagogical methods. It is also challenging for regular classroom teachers to recognize and identify the gifted since some may still practise chalk-and-board methods, administer tests and final examinations, while encouraging students to engage in rote memorization and homework completion. Moreover, many also perceive the gifted as super-achievers who will succeed at school without any special attention or extra stimulation, which subsequently leads to boredom and withdrawal among the gifted. The higher their giftedness, the larger the asynchronous gap will be, leading to more serious psychological issues.

Rorlinda Yusof added that the gifted with mild autism may also experience unique challenges, such as social communication disorders. However, there is a lack of trained educators and counsellors who are knowledgeable about the unique characteristics, challenges and learning styles among the gifted. Therefore, educators can focus not only on their

academic performance, but also address the individual needs of the gifted. Moreover, they can be attuned to the feelings of each student, while acknowledging that each may have diverse personal issues and learning curves. To facilitate their continual improvement, a holistic approach is needed to ensure that the gifted receive comprehensive support for both their academic and personal wellbeing (Jeevita, 2024).

Lastly, Rorlinda Yusof highlighted that there are many gifted students scattered across mainstream schools in Malaysia. The absence of a specific location for the gifted hinders the implementation of a comprehensive zoning program. Gifted ones require specialized education beyond the standard curriculum. Further, there is a lack of experts who are capable of identifying the characteristics of the gifted in mainstream schools. Gifted education can start from preschool; however, many preschool teachers often fail to identify the gifted, causing many to fall through the cracks of the current education system (Jeevita, 2024).

#### **K. Lack of appropriate educational assistance in mainstream schools**

Jeevita (2024) quoted Inderbir Sandhu, advisor of the National Association for Gifted and Talented Children Malaysia, who postulated that the gifted require higher levels of complexity, depth, knowledge and acceleration in their learning. Since their advanced problem-solving abilities enable them to process and understand information more rapidly and deeply, mainstream education is not appropriate for them. Moreover, their intellectual potential resembles a rubber band that can be stretched to varying degrees, depending on their nature and nurture, or the challenges they encounter. The band underscores the diversity in cognitive abilities among the gifted. The more they are challenged, the more their intelligence will be stretched. Without adequate stimulation, their vast potential may remain untapped; hence, many of the gifted may not receive the necessary intellectual stimulation in mainstream schools where they often feel bored, underchallenged and unstimulated. Left unattended, they may develop emotional and behavioural problems and end up as underachievers and troublemakers. Lastly, those who are misdiagnosed as learning disabled, hyperactive, or even autistic may drop out or compelled to receive home-schooling.

#### **L. Lack of appropriate and inclusive gifted education**

According to Chuah (2024), cofounder of Inclusive Gifted Education and Mentoring Support (GEMS), the lack of appropriate and inclusive gifted education and psychology awareness has negatively impacted many Malaysian children and families in more ways than one. Due to their advanced cognitive abilities, the gifted often think and behave in more complex and intense ways compared to their same-age peers. Further, some of the gifted are unable to fully utilize their cognition and abilities, which might lead to internal disharmony that leads to behavioural and mental conflicts. Moreover, they do not receive the needed support to deal with their asynchronous development and intensities, and worse, some even experience severe distress by merely trying to be themselves; as out-of-the-box thinkers, they are often misunderstood or penalized for not following instructions, when in fact, they may offer more innovative solutions. In general, many Malaysians are still unable to appreciate the role of gifted education due to various factors, but advocates can continue to promote it, regardless of the obstacles and barriers. In short, the Malaysian society needs to experience a paradigm shift to understand the value of gifted education and mentoring support to fulfil the vision of school inclusivity (Chuah, 2024).

#### **M. Financial constraints**

Jeevita (2024) quoted Inderbir Sandhu, who maintained that the gifted from economically disadvantaged families in Malaysia often face financial barriers or limited access to quality education, thus affecting their tertiary aspirations. A multi-pronged approach is essential for providing equitable access to early education for the gifted from underserved communities. Greater awareness can help generate more proactive outreach programs to identify such hidden gems who possess an advanced ability or potential in one or more specific areas. Moreover, the gifted often display above-average abilities, which can be developed further. They may manifest incredible aptitude in various areas, ranging from sports, arts and music to science and mathematics. One aspect which sets them apart from their peers is their ability to make connections that others often fail to see. Generally, people tend to associate the gifted with excellent grades. However, those who understand giftedness and work with the gifted know that they can be talented for other reasons.

Inderbir Sandhu highlighted that identifying the Malaysian gifted is a challenging process since it is difficult to know if they are gifted, or if they are twice-exceptional (2e), or possess both exceptional abilities and disabilities. Children who are twice-exceptional tend to possess outstanding intellectual gifts, while also displaying areas of relative weakness due to



their socioemotional needs. Therefore, they are often trapped in between two worlds; one in which they have the internal motivation and self-efficacy, and another where they lack confidence in certain areas. Additionally, the gifted not only can comprehend materials several grade levels higher than their same-age peers, but they also tend to be much more sensitive and intense at a younger age; for instance, they tend to be more curious and enthusiastic about topics that their peers, or even adults, usually dismiss. Their curiosity enables them to absorb information with little or no need for repetition at all, which poses a problem in most mainstream schools since teachers are unable to cater to the unique needs of every child (Jeevita, 2024).

### III. IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the issues and challenges faced by the Malaysian gifted, several recommendations are made to help them cope with daily situations more efficaciously.

#### A. Depression and other socioemotional problems

To cope with socioemotional problems, the gifted can adopt some of the techniques suggested by Mind Organization, United Kingdom (Mind, 2024). They can talk to someone they trust, get peer support, practise better self-care and mind their physical health. First, while it might feel hard to discuss their feelings, the gifted might find that sharing their experiences can help them feel better; having someone listen and show they care is beneficial in itself. Those who are unable to open up, can call a helpline to speak to someone confidentially. Second, peer support can bring together individuals with shared experiences to scaffold each other; it encourages them to share ideas about staying well and connecting with others to reduce self-isolation. They can contact a gifted organization or school to get details of support groups, forums and helplines. Third, the gifted can take certain measures to practise better self-care; allocating time to look after themselves can promote a sense of wellbeing. This can be achieved by having healthy foods, basic hygiene, sufficient rest and fresh air every day. Further, they can try to perform some physical activity; even lower intensity activities, such as brisk walking, gentle stretches, chair-based exercises and spending time at a park to help boost their mood.

Other techniques that can help the gifted alleviate various socioemotional problems are attempting something new, setting realistic expectations, doing creative things, keeping a mood diary and journaling (Mind, 2024). First, the gifted can try something novel to help boost their mood and break negative ways of thinking or behaving; for example, they can start a new hobby, acquire a new skill or try new recipes. They can do so by joining a group, community project, sports team or hobby group. They can also do volunteer work that can help improve their self-esteem and interpersonal relationships. Second, the gifted can try to be realistic about what is possible and avoid exerting too much pressure on themselves; for instance, to feel motivated, they can look for an activity they enjoy or something that they have always wanted to try. Third, they can do something creative, such as, painting, drawing, making a collage, taking photos, singing, composing music, and creative writing. Fourth, they can keep a mood diary that can help them keep track of mood changes or determine if there are activities, places or people that are mood-lifting. Fifth, writing a paper or digital journal can help the gifted process their thoughts and express their feelings in private. They can keep an unfiltered journal in which they can write whatever appears in their mind freely. They can narrate what has happened during the day, how they have been feeling and what sort of thoughts they have been having, which help them see whether their feelings are linked to any of their actions. Lastly, at the end of each day, they can take note of things that went well or that they are grateful for on that particular day.

#### B. Perfectionism

It is vital for individuals who have perfectionistic tendencies to adopt strategies to overcome them, thus encouraging them to become less perfectionistic (Scott, 2024). The gifted can make a cost-benefit analysis, become aware of their tendencies, focus on the positive and alter their self-talk to alleviate their perfectionism. First, they can take a closer look at their perfectionistic traits and the negative consequences. Making a list of all the cons of perfectionism increase their motivation to eliminate the tendencies. Second, by becoming more aware of their thought or behavioural patterns, the gifted are in a better position to modify them. They can record their perfectionistic tendencies as they occur or note the times when they felt like a failure, or were not good enough, and write down their reaction at the time. This step enables them to become more aware of their perfectionistic thoughts as they occur in the future. Third, by focusing on the positive, the gifted can reduce their tendency to obsess over the negative by making a conscious effort to acknowledge their work

in a positive manner. If they notice something they dislike about themselves or their work, for example, they can list some positive qualities to soften their critical focus. Fourth, the gifted can use positive self-talk to displace negative self-talk to become more appreciative, while gaining an increased respect for themselves and their achievements.

To reduce perfectionism, individuals can set realistic goals, enjoy the process and learn to handle criticism (Scott, 2024). Some gifted ones tend to expect unreasonable excellence with no learning curve; they become over-demanding, while leaving little room for error. Nevertheless, they can ameliorate a lot of stress by modifying their goals without sacrificing the final output; for instance, they can set smaller goals and subsequently reward themselves after attaining them. Second, they need to enjoy the process rather than focusing on results, and blaming themselves if their results are less than perfect. Additionally, they can enjoy the process of reaching a goal by journaling their feelings, thoughts and knowledge that they have acquired along the way. Lastly, they can reflect back and see all that have gained in just working toward a worthy goal, assessing and appreciating the gains that they have made in the process. Lastly, the gifted need to use constructive criticism that can give them important clues on how to improve their performance, turning their less-than-perfect attainments into useful stepping stones that lead to excellence. In case of pointed or harsh criticisms, they can remind themselves that mistakes are a great way to learn.

### C. Anxiety

There are several strategies that individuals can use to help reduce their anxiety (Hirschlag, 2023). The gifted can question their thought patterns, practise focused, deep breathing, use aromatherapy and exercise to alleviate sporadic anxiety that affects their focus or undertakings. First, by questioning their thought patterns, the gifted can prevent intruding thoughts from rooting in their mind and distort the severity of the situation. They can challenge fears, ask if they are true, and see where they can regain control. Second, measured breathing practices can help the gifted eliminate immediate feelings of anxiety. They can try breathing in for four counts, and breathing out for another four counts, which will decrease their heart rate and calm them down. Third, they can use aromatherapy, such as essential oils, incense, candles, lavender, chamomile and sandalwood to help reduce feelings of anxiety. Fourth, the gifted can practise low impact exercises, such as, walking, yoga, and tai-chi to help reduce stress and manage anxiety symptoms.

Hirschlag (2023) added that anxiety can be also ameliorated by using grounding techniques, identifying and learning to manage triggers and performing a daily or routine meditation. First, grounding techniques such as journaling and the 333 rule (naming three things) can often help calm immediate feelings of anxiety. The gifted can write down the anxiety inducing things to eliminate them from their mind and make them seem less daunting. Reading their thoughts and feelings enables them to take stock of their emotions in the current moment, while helping them better understand the situations and events that cause anxiety. Lastly, the 333 rule encourages them to name three things that they see, three sounds that they hear, and interact with three things they touch.

### D. Rejection

Many individuals feel rejected when they are not included, accepted, or approved of; they feel that they have lost something they had or desired. Martin (2021) suggested four strategies that the gifted can adopt to cope with rejection. First, the gifted can acknowledge the pain and grieve, rather than feeling ashamed or embarrassed. Further, grieving involves acknowledging their feelings rather than denying, suppressing or numbing them. Journaling, exercising and taking nature strolls can help them process their feelings more effectively. Second, the gifted can avoid blaming themselves by considering alternative hypotheses or other reasons for rejection; they can be aware that there are many possible reasons for rejection and even the most attractive, smartest, accomplished and likable individuals get rejected. Additionally, they can examine their own behaviour and how they present themselves; hence, it is unfair to blame themselves or take responsibility for occurrences that were beyond their control or to assume that they did something unacceptable. Third, the gifted can strengthen their resiliency, which is a quality that they can learn. To become more resilient, they can try to have an open mind, avoid all-or-nothing thinking, focus on solutions and what they can learn from the experience, seek support, maintain a sense of humour, value their strengths, and regard mistakes as a stepping stone to success. Fourth, the gifted can continue to face the real world, by showing perseverance and persistence in spite of constant rejection; they can accept that rejection is a fundamental process to gain success in the real life.

### E. Early identification of the gifted

Early identification of the gifted is a crucial step in ensuring that their unique needs are adequately met and their talents nurtured. The gifted often display exceptional abilities that distinguish them from their regular peers; recognizing these traits early is advantageous in terms of fostering their intellectual and socioemotional development. Early identification ensures the provision of tailored educational opportunities, socioemotional scaffolding, optimized talent development, individualized learning and parental support and advocacy (Nair, 2024). First, early identification allows educators to tailor educational experiences to match the abilities and interests of the gifted who often thrive when presented with challenging learning activities that they find engaging and motivating. By identifying their needs early, educators can create specialized programs and curriculum modifications to support accelerated learning among the gifted. Second, the gifted often grapple with unique socioemotional challenges, such as feelings of isolation, perfectionism and heightened sensitivity; early identification allows educators and parents to provide targeted socioemotional support, such as counselling and interpersonal skills development, thus helping the gifted circumvent challenges more effectively. Third, many of the gifted excel in specific areas, such as music, sports, mathematics or the arts; early identification enables parents and coaches to recognize and nurture such talents by offering specialized training and guidance that can lead to exceptional accomplishments in their selected domains.

Nair (2024) added that early identification of the gifted can promote academic achievement, individualized learning, parental advocacy, healthy self-esteem and career preparation. First, academic achievement among the gifted can be enhanced through early identification; with appropriate educational challenges, they will become more engaged and achieve greater academic height. Early identification also provides opportunities for advanced learning among the gifted, which can ultimately lead to higher performance levels throughout their academic journey. Second, it paves the way for individualized learning that considers the individual strengths and weaknesses of the gifted; this personalized approach ensures that their educational experience is not only enriching, but also holistic. Third, parents of the gifted can become strong advocates for their special needs once they become aware of their giftedness; they can collaborate with educators and school administrators to ensure that appropriate resources and opportunities are provided. Fourth, being identified early as gifted can boost a child's self-esteem and confidence, knowing that their unique abilities are recognized and valued can have a profound impact on their self-efficacy and overall wellbeing. Fifth, it allows for long-term planning and career development among the gifted who often exhibit a strong sense of purpose and ambition; early recognition helps them channel their talents toward their desired career paths, whether in the hard sciences, humanities, fine arts, leadership or other areas.

### F. Financial assistance

Financial assistance is critical to ensure that the gifted from disadvantaged backgrounds can bridge the gap between their potential and tangible achievement (David Institute, 2024). It paves the way for enriched academic experiences, specialized training and meaningful relationships with like-minded peers, thus empowering the gifted to thrive in the classroom and beyond. First, federal grants for the gifted can be made available to enhance educational opportunities for these individuals and act as program investments; they can be distributed to state education agencies, non-profit organizations or directly to individuals through competitions. Second, states can have specific programs or funds allocated for the gifted, while local districts can be allocated certain funds, or participate in state-funded programs that support the gifted. Third, private organizations and foundations can offer grants that open doors for the gifted, for instance, by funding innovative programs, providing scholarships and supporting research and development in this field. Lastly, academic grants and scholarships can be offered to the gifted based on their academic achievements, talents or potential to help cover tuition fees, books and other educational expenses; the gifted can explore opportunities through their school's financial aid office, online sources or outside organizations. An example of financial support for the disadvantaged gifted in Malaysia is the Experian/Heriot-Watt program (Heriot-Watt University, 2023), which supports the gifted from underserved communities and empower them to pursue quality education in the United Kingdom. Committed to equipping the gifted with the required means to embark on a transformative educational journey, it strives to level the educational playing field, while fostering an inclusive environment where merit and untapped potential determine the destiny of the gifted from the Bottom 40 percent (B40) of Malaysian households.



### G. English proficiency

Kabelka (2024) suggested several techniques that can be used to raise English proficiency. The gifted can watch movies, listen to English language news and compile a vocabulary list. First, watching movies help them understand the language better, acquaint with its colloquial, conversational forms, while getting a feel for the language. They can select words that are informal and search their more formal forms. Being exposed to English movies can encourage them to start thinking and reflecting in English. Second, the gifted can read English language newspapers, including broadsheets and tabloids, which allow them to access current affairs, while expanding their vocabulary and learning how words are spelled and the contexts in which they are used. Third, whenever they hear or see an unfamiliar word, the gifted can jot it down and search for its synonyms and phrases in which it is used.

Kabelka (2024) added that English proficiency can be enhanced by holding conversations in English, practising constantly, showing curiosity and enjoying the process. The gifted can use English interactively and practise their own speaking skills. They can befriend native speakers (if possible) or classmates in the English class. Further, they can talk to themselves in the mirror or record their speech. Listening to their own voice enables them to discern mistakes of which they were previously unaware. The gifted can also constantly practise using English, for example, by trying to locate a word of the day and subsequently using it for conversational English. They can ask questions rather than just reading phrases; for instance, they can ask why certain phrases are used in a particular way and whether other constructions are possible. Instead of accepting the first answer that appears on Google, they will find it more rewarding by having a sense of curiosity. Lastly, they gifted can stay motivated and enjoy the experience of learning English; for example, they can find ways to bring entertainment into their studies, such as playing word games that will boost their critical thinking skills.

### H. An appropriate new curriculum and policy

Jeevita (2024) quoted Zuhairah Ali, president of the National Association for Gifted and Talented Children Malaysia (NAGCM), who asserted that a new school curriculum can include a special education module for the gifted to enhance their cognitive, mental and psychomotor development. In other words, holistic support and education can be tailored to their needs to help them realize their untapped potential and become transformative members of society. Moreover, the new curriculum can help the gifted develop resilience, psychosocial skills and emotional intelligence so that they can lead more fulfilling lives. Jeevita (2024) also quoted Rorlinda Yusof, a member of the World Council for Gifted and Talented, who posited that a refined educational policy is necessary to reign all dimensions of gifted education, including teacher training, administrative and management staff development and the provision of infrastructure and information systems. The new policy can also encompass learning assistance, psychological guidance, academic and career guidance for parents, teachers, schools and the community. Lastly, it can help eliminate psychological issues among the gifted, such as loss of direction in life, suicide, delirium related to failure to manage life pressures, perfectionism, anxiety and self-isolation that often hinder the development among the gifted.

### I. Differentiated and specialized counselling

Bakar and Zakaria (2018) reiterated that the gifted in Malaysia require specialized counselling service due to their unique personality and issues associated with them. Counselling services available in the local education scenario mostly focus on the general student population without accounting for diversity; hence, the best practices in the counselling service for the gifted can be regarded as a new paradigm in the educational system that can account for the perceptions of the gifted, issues faced by the gifted and concerns of school counsellors. Overall, since gifted tend to experience problems in terms of career, academic performance and socioemotional development, their counselling can focus more on these aspects.

### J. Inclusive education for twice exceptional (2e) individuals

Kaur (2024) highlighted that twice exceptional (2e) individuals represent a unique and often under-recognized group with significant potential and unique challenges. Therefore, educators, parents and educational professionals need to provide tailored support to enhance their strengths, while accommodating their challenges. First, holistic and comprehensive evaluations can include both cognitive abilities and potential disabilities among the 2e to ensure that both their giftedness and disabilities are recognized and addressed. Second, individualized education plans can be developed to cater to their unique needs, by adopting strategies that capitalize on their strengths, while accommodating their disabilities. Third, differentiated instruction can be provided by using flexible teaching methods that cater to their diverse learning styles and

needs, for example, by mixing accelerated learning and supportive interventions. Fourth, socioemotional support can be extended to the 2e by providing counselling and social skills training to help them navigate their social environments and manage emotional challenges more effectively. Fifth, parental involvement and education are crucial to increase awareness on the unique needs of the 2e; involving parents in the educational process can augment support systems at home and school. Lastly, professional development among teachers is critical to provide a more inclusive and effective educational environment for the 2e.

#### K. Inclusive learning environment

Chuah (2024) postulated that an inclusive learning environment is needed to help gifted to capitalize on their strengths and overcome their challenges. Educators and parents can emphasize the value of introspection, quiet zones and corners with special arrangements and learning without walls to accommodate the learning styles of the gifted. First, teachers and staff need to look beyond the hustle and bustle and allow for space and privacy so that the gifted can have a safe interior space to think, ponder, reflect, imagine and dream. Second, many of the gifted prefer some quiet space to take their breaks, for example, a quiet garden (separate from play area), where they can read, sit and relax or chat softly with friends or just be by themselves. Third, quiet corners can be made available in classrooms, equipped with books, laptops, drawing equipment and other sensory and calming tools. Additionally, the seating arrangement can be modified to a round table style to encourage sharing and discussion. Fourth, outdoor lessons can be arranged to encourage the gifted to take time to smell the flowers and apply their observational skills. They enable them to capitalize on their five senses (as well as intuition) by exploring texture and surfacing activities to enhance their creativity and problem-solving skills.

Finally, Chuah (2024) also maintained that a small student to teacher ratio, social distancing and staggered recess are highly beneficial to the gifted. First, keeping student numbers small in each classroom enables teachers to devote more attention per student and promote a higher chance of participation by all. Second, the pandemic may no longer warrant social distancing; however, libraries can provide ample space and separators to accommodate the need for privacy and distancing among the gifted. Lastly, staggered recess allows different groups or levels to avoid being overwhelmed by overcrowding, noise and other distractions.

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